

# Theory reception: Panofsky, Kant, and disciplinary cosmopolitanism

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Erwin Panofsky's debt to Kant is one of the most profound exchanges between philosophy and art history. Many of the connections between these thinkers are well known. In his early work, Panofsky explicitly adopted Kant's stable, judging subject and held that this subject apprehends its world through internal 'symbolic forms' – Ernst Cassirer's term – such as one-point perspective, because, as Kant held, we have no access to the thing in itself. For Panofsky, we perceive according to a priori, universal Kantian categories such as space and time and then apply proper epistemological procedures to our mental constructs of the world through Kantian critique. Stephen Melville has underscored that Panofsky's Kant is largely epistemological in tenor, providing art history a formal security in its analyses instead of adopting the more radical, historicizing reinterpretation of Kant offered by Heidegger, or by the Hegelian tradition.<sup>1</sup> Without defending Panofsky or his philosophical muse from Melville's charges, however, it is important to see that Panofsky also alluded to a more political and historical side of Kant's thinking, his views on humanism and cosmopolitanism. This perspective on Panofsky's Kant is as least as significant as the better known epistemological influence. It can even be seen to augment Panofsky's ongoing relevance to the field of art history.

For Kant, reason becomes cosmopolitan by labouring in history and thus maintaining the subject's freedom, its autonomy, and ultimately projecting the possibility of a republican state. Critique becomes historical for Kant as does art history for Panofsky. In a late essay, he wrote of his life-long concern with the nature of art history and specifically its relationships with 'theory' and philosophy: 'The art theorist ... whether he approaches the subject from the standpoint of Kant's *Critique*, of neo-scholastic epistemology, or of *Gestaltpsychologie*, cannot build up a system of generic concepts without reference to works of art which have come into being under specific historical conditions; but in doing this he will, consciously or unconsciously, contribute to the development of art theory. . . .'<sup>2</sup> I argued in *Kant, Art, and Art History* (2001) that we need to pursue this little recognized aspect of Panofsky's Kantianism, the art historian's invocation of the promise of a humanistic cosmopolitanism. I proposed this task for two reasons. First, although Melville is surely right to criticize Panofsky's reliance on Kant's epistemology as conservative

<sup>1</sup> Stephen Melville, 'The Temptation of New Perspectives,' *October* 52, Spring 1990, 3-15.

<sup>2</sup> Erwin Panofsky, 'The History of Art as a Humanistic Discipline' (1939). *Meaning in the Visual Arts: Papers in and on Art History*. New York: Anchor Books, 1955, 1-25, 21-22.

in the sense that it led to a certain structural formalism in iconography, there is another Kant and indeed another Panofsky, both of whom are more inclined to historical analysis. Secondly, given the ongoing redefinition of art history's objects and approaches, it seems pertinent to ask if the ancient discourse of cosmopolitanism, renewed by Kant, by Panofsky, and again at the turn of the twenty-first century, might supply untapped resources for our understanding of disciplinary models and disputes. Whatever answers we supply, we will in this line of thinking return to a central, if neglected, facet of the relationship between Kant and Panofsky and indeed to the reception of theory in the discipline of art history. To place this aspect of Panofsky's reception of Kantian theory before us for assessment is my first task.

Panofsky begins 'The History of Art as a Humanistic Discipline' of 1940 with an anecdote about the dying Immanuel Kant. Receiving his physician during his final days, Kant was feeble but maintained the strength of his convictions about social decorum as a sign of properly cultivated humanity. He had risen from his chair to acknowledge his visitor but would not allow himself to be reseated until the doctor had taken his own place. Panofsky is moved by Kant's courageous performance of his beliefs: more, he sees this gesture of politeness and hospitality as exemplary because it was, for Kant and for Panofsky, more than a mere formality. As Kant himself is reported to have said, it was a sign of a profound humanism, a philosophy of life that connects the personal with the universal. Panofsky deftly employs this portrait of Kant to initiate a brief history of the connection between the ideal of humanity and the principles of Renaissance Humanism, which he then defines as an attitude that acknowledges 'the dignity of man, based on both the insistence on human values (rationality and freedom) and the acceptance of human limitations (fallibility and frailty)'. 'From this two postulates result,' Panofsky claimed: 'responsibility and tolerance'.<sup>3</sup> These priorities are critical in the renewed and cosmopolitan art history that he embodied in the United States.

Even though Kant's philosophy is only mentioned once in the essay, and though other humanists, including Erasmus, are duly noted, it is Kant who presides. We could even say that structurally and thematically, philosophy, embodied by Kant, is 'grandfathered' by Panofsky into the body of the younger discipline of art history. Philosophy is present symbolically and, I would argue, doctrinally, because Panofsky's proclaimed affinity with Kant's humanism allows the art historian to promote cognate values of reason, freedom, and tolerance in his own discipline. In 'Three Decades of Art History in the United States: Impressions of a Transplanted European', the essay that concludes *Meaning in the Visual Arts*, he calls himself an 'immigrant humanist'; it is immigration that keys us to Kant's theories of the cosmopolitan, which is humanism in motion.<sup>4</sup> But forced migration, not Kantian

<sup>3</sup> 'Humanistic Discipline', 2

<sup>4</sup> Panofsky, 'Three Decades of Art History in the United States: Impressions of a Transplanted European'. *Meaning in the Visual Arts: Papers in and on Art History*. New York: Anchor Books, 1955, 321-46, 344

free choice, caused Panofsky and many others to proclaim the humanist creed abroad. Their perceived Jewish identity - however much humanism promoted the assimilation of individuals to a common European high culture and art history as a discipline to a model of autonomous and edifying progress (as Karen Michels and Catherine Soussloff have examined)<sup>5</sup> - required that they be cosmopolitan. We should remember, too, that the epithet 'cosmopolitan' was often cast disparagingly at Jewish intellectuals, a reference to their supposedly unpatriotic statelessness and perceived universality.<sup>6</sup> It is important to see that the initial context in which Panofsky sets the values of freedom, rationality, and tolerance is broadly speaking political. The authoritarian regimes from which he and others fled is subtly contrasted here with Kant's example. Extremes of nationalism are set against the putatively undistorted perspectives of the United States. Neither Panofsky nor I infer that the American context was static or parochial; nonetheless, border crossing travel is fundamental to the cosmopolitan ideal that Kant - a notorious homebody - promoted. As Panofsky writes in 'Three Decades of Art History in the United States', 'where the European art historians were conditioned to think in terms of national and regional boundaries, no such limitations existed for the Americans'. National and ethnic hegemonies in Europe, we can conclude, tampered unjustly with Panofsky's prime neo-Kantian symbolic form: perspective. Using this metaphor to combine the art historical with the political, he claims that 'American art historians were able to see the past in a perspective picture undistorted by national and regional bias'.<sup>7</sup>

Panofsky's humanist postulates of responsibility and tolerance do not sound like aesthetic categories. It is more accurate to say that their existence *allows* for the aesthetic and for art history in this time and place, both for their production and historical investigation. Thus the structure of 'The History of Art as a Humanistic Discipline' mirrors that of his current political reality. Panofsky's emigration is the link between disciplinary concerns and world politics; these realms can be distinguished but they are not separate. While I don't want to aestheticize the political horrors that Panofsky escaped in fleeing Nazi Germany, it would be an omission here not to politicize the aesthetic that he developed in the United States. Thinking again of the vignette of Kant that opens this essay, it is in this case the philosopher's example as a social and political thinker, rather than his epistemology - which was certainly more relevant to the younger Panofsky - that defines the

<sup>5</sup> Karen Michels, 'Art History, German Jewish Identity, and the Emigration of Iconology,' in Catherine M. Soussloff, ed., *Jewish Identity in Modern Art History*. Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1999, 167-179. See also Soussloff's excellent introduction to this volume.

<sup>6</sup> For the Jewish context, see Sharon Marcus, 'Anne Frank and Hannah Arendt, Universalism and Pathos'. In Vinay Dharwadker, ed., *Cosmopolitan Geographies: New Locations in Literature and Culture*. London: Routledge, 2001, 89-132. It does not diminish the specific tragedies of this context to note, as Margaret C. Jacob does, that cosmopolites have born a long history of suspicion and repression. *Strangers nowhere in the world : the rise of cosmopolitanism in early modern Europe*. Pennsylvania: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006, 13 ff.

<sup>7</sup> 'Three Decades', 328.

relationship among theory, philosophy, and art history at issue here. Kant is exemplary in two ways: the gesture of politeness in the story Panofsky relates stands for the man in general, and the man who holds these views represents philosophy. Panofsky makes sure that we understand Kant's gesture towards his visitor as more than conventional: it embodies instead what he calls 'man's proud and tragic consciousness of self-approved and self-imposed principles'.<sup>8</sup> These of course are the principles discovered and legislated universally in Kant by reason, defined simply as 'the power to judge autonomously'.<sup>9</sup> They apply to all aspects of our existence, from the epistemological to the aesthetic to the political, and in his later work, these dimensions are brought into increasingly close and harmonious relationships.

Two of Kant's late texts, the 1795 *Perpetual Peace: A Philosophical Sketch* and the essays collected in 1798 under the title *The Conflict of the Faculties*, bear on the question of the interaction of philosophy and other disciplines. Based again on responsibility to the tenets of reason and tolerance, cosmopolitanism as defined in the 1795 essay is dynamic humanism. Enclosed in the seemingly formal, now perhaps seemingly superficial term 'hospitality', 'cosmopolitan right' [*Weltbürgerrecht*] claims 'the right of a stranger not to be treated with hostility when he arrives on someone else's territory'.<sup>10</sup> This prerogative is anything but trivial. It is extended on the basis of supposedly universal human reason and thus freedom; it builds upon analogous rights within one's own state, human rights whose abolition made Panofsky into a practising cosmopolitan. Whether Panofsky was familiar with this part of Kant's philosophy I don't know, but given the comity between individuals and ideas that he embodied and then required of his discipline, it is integral to the humanist vision of art history. There is at the very least a remarkable parallel between Kant's and Panofsky's thinking around the structure or form of ideal cosmopolitan rights on the one hand and of disciplinary interactions on the other. In an appeal to a nationalist image untainted by recent political events, Panofsky implies that Germans and Germany can be cosmopolitan. As Keith Moxey has shown, Panofsky demonstrated with his book on Dürer that they could also be Renaissance men, and that this status in turn shows that 'Panofsky's cultural values are an intimate and essential aspect of his theoretical ideas'.<sup>11</sup> In keeping with Panofsky's vision of the broad cultural implications of iconology, the Kant fable takes us far beyond personal and local habit to a potentially international principle of behaviour. In *The Conflict of the Faculties*, peace among disciplines can be guaranteed because philosophy, as the technology of reason, is sanctioned to judge and legislate for other fields of inquiry through the processes of transcendental

<sup>8</sup> 'Humanistic Discipline', 1.

<sup>9</sup> Kant, Immanuel. *The Conflict of the Faculties*. 1798. Trans. Mary J. Gregor. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1992, 43.

<sup>10</sup> Kant, *Perpetual Peace: A Philosophical Sketch*. 1795. In Hans Reiss, ed. *Kant: Political Writings*, trans. H.B. Nisbet, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1991, 93-130,105.

<sup>11</sup> Keith Moxey, *The Practice of Theory: Poststructuralism, Cultural Politics, an Art History*. Ithaca and London: Cornell UP, 1994, 66.

critique, just as reason demands the rights of cosmopolitanism in the movement of peoples across state borders. The cosmopolitan ideal allows Panofsky to move freely *and* to define the terms of a properly humanist art history. Can we legitimately say that in a partial but significant sense, Kant's political philosophy in Panofsky's hands makes possible and directs the priorities of art history? If so, it is time to reassess and even redress the view that 'separated from Panofsky's particular social experience, many scholars have rejected the set of values that underpins his enterprise'.<sup>12</sup>

It is important to register the caveat that Panofsky's cosmopolitan, humanist art history could not resist the other side of his Kantianism, its transcendental formalism. While the cosmopolitan ideal is initially political in its jurisdiction, when Panofsky brings it into the discipline of art history, it is applied less and less to matters beyond those that attend the making and interpretation of autonomous works of art. He claims that the humanist scholar of art he envisions is 'fundamentally an historian,' but in the same breath adds that 'human records do not age'.<sup>13</sup> How can this be? Panofsky seems to mean that in selecting historical facts, interpreting them as we necessarily do, and reconstructing events with an artist's intention in view, we don't forget the past but instead constantly reanimate it. In this sense of living on in a hermeneutic context, then, human records do not age. While his iconological project is historical in individual studies and cases, however, it becomes transcendental as a pattern of judgment. For example, Panofsky prefaces his first sustained discussion of art history in the 1940 essay with the Kantian rider that 'Every historical concept is obviously based on the categories of space and time'.<sup>14</sup> He domesticates these fundamental axes of understanding by explaining that we must always know where and when a given work was produced. Nonetheless, it appears that we always assess the past in the same way, from the same perspective.

Iconology crossed national and disciplinary borders at this time because some of these boundaries were permeable, not only because of the rapid development of art history in the United States but also thanks to the cosmopolitan ideals of world government so widely broached in the wake of WW II.<sup>15</sup> What I call 'theory reception,' however much Panofsky himself may have downplayed the theoretical aspects of his work in the United States, was in part determined, as it often is, by political factors. But can the cosmopolitanism that allowed his ideas to flourish still be found today as we look at the sort of art history he proposed? What would it mean for art history to be cosmopolitan *now*? To approach these questions, we need to move away temporarily from both art history and philosophy and

<sup>12</sup> Michael Hatt, Charlotte Klonk. *Art History: A critical introduction to its methods*. Manchester: Manchester UP, 2006, 117.

<sup>13</sup> 'Humanistic Discipline,' 5, 6.

<sup>14</sup> 'Humanistic Discipline,' 7.

<sup>15</sup> By way of contrast, on the vagaries of 'cosmopolitan art history' and anti-Semitism in Vienna at the turn of the twentieth century, see Margaret Olin, 'Nationalism, the Jews, and Art History', *Judaism*, 45, 4, Fall 1996, 472 ff.

summarize the currency of the term 'cosmopolitan' in other contemporary discourses.

Defined as 'Belonging to all parts of the world; not restricted to any one country or its inhabitants,' and 'Having the characteristics which arise from, or are suited to, a range over many different countries; free from national limitations or attachments' (*OED*), the idea of the cosmopolitan is currently contested with vigour in political theory, cultural studies, postcolonial literary fields, and critical anthropology.<sup>16</sup> Cosmopolitanism has a 2500 year history, beginning, as far as we know, with the Buddha's resistance to the caste hierarchies of Hindu society and the Stoics' substitution of equality based on a common substrate of humanity for the exclusionary practices of the Greek polis.<sup>17</sup> As Jürgen Habermas demonstrates in an article on Kant's *Perpetual Peace* published in 1996, Kant's Enlightenment revival of cosmopolitan right remains relevant to today's politics but is also in need of far-ranging revision.<sup>18</sup> While Kant foresaw neither the virulence of European nationalism in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries nor understood the implications of colonialism when he proposed his cosmopolitan order as part of a formula for peace, his theory of cosmopolitanism still finds adherents. Seyla Benhabib, for example, deploys his notion of hospitality to grapple with the rights of non-recognized peoples within states and of relationships between states.<sup>19</sup> Steven Vertovec and Robin Cohen assert that 'cosmopolitanism seems to offer a mode of managing cultural and political multiplicities'.<sup>20</sup> In 'Given Culture: Rethinking cosmopolitan freedom in transnationalism,' Pheng Cheah both elaborates on the failings of Kant's vision of a 'rational-universalist grounding' for cosmopolitan exchange and attempts to salvage aspects of the idea through a critique of Homi Bhabha's widely influential notion of hybridity and James Clifford's nuanced vision of 'discrepant cosmopolitanism'.<sup>21</sup> Cheah cautions against the temptation to idealize a cosmopolitan freedom of movement over the purported restrictions of the nation-state. Because that state and its attendant 'postcolonial nationalism' is all that many people have, it is possible to see cosmopolitanism as elitist. Hybridity theory, he claims, tends to a cosmopolitanism that overemphasizes 'transnational mobility', underplaying the fact that there are, and always have been,

<sup>16</sup> In addition to the numerous references that I draw on below, I would add the following titles as representative of this ongoing discussion: Kwame Anthony Appiah, *Cosmopolitanism: Ethics in a World of Strangers* (Norton, 2006), Seyla Benhabib, et. al., *Another Cosmopolitanism*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2008), and Steven Vertovec, Robin Cohen, eds, *Conceiving Cosmopolitanism: Theory, Context, and Practice*. New York: Oxford UP, 2002.

<sup>17</sup> Dharwadker, 200, 6-7.

<sup>18</sup> "Kant's Idea of Perpetual Peace, with the Benefit of Two Hundred Years' Hindsight." In *Perpetual Peace: Essays on Kant's Cosmopolitan Ideal*. Ed. James Bohman and Matthias Lutz-Bachmann. Cambridge: MIT, 1997, 113-53.

<sup>19</sup> Seyla Benhabib, *Another Cosmopolitanism*. New York: Oxford UP, 2006, 22 ff.

<sup>20</sup> Steven Vertovic, Robin Cohen, "Conceiving Cosmopolitanism," in Vertovic, Robins, eds, 1-22, 4.

<sup>21</sup> Pheng Cheah, "Given Culture: Rethinking cosmopolitical freedom in transnationalism." *Boundary 2*, Vol. 24, No. 2, Summer, 1997, 157-197. James Clifford. *Routes: Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century*. Cambridge Mass. : Harvard UP, 1997.

many people who cannot move. Clifford, on the other hand, has recently explored the very expansive limits of the notion of travel, noting that 'travellers' are not only those who relocate by choice, not only tourists, but also for example indentured workers, or the servants who accompany heroic travellers in the European mould, and of course those, like Panofsky, who flee political crises. Others have insisted on the additional differences made by gender. As Andrew Linklater puts it in an article on 'Cosmopolitan Citizenship,' having equal rights does not mean one has an equal capacity to act on those rights.<sup>22</sup> All these travellers' divergent experiences make up 'discrepant cosmopolitanisms'. Today, whatever the specifics of the negotiation, any right of cosmopolitan movement across state or disciplinary boundaries can no longer be based on Kant's universalist assumptions.<sup>23</sup> We cannot properly ignore the wide range of perspectival initiatives that in art history and other disciplines is covered by the term 'identity politics'.

James Clifford describes his emphasis on travel in the cosmopolitan mode as a 'translation term,' which he defines as '

a word of apparently general application used for comparison in a strategic and contingent way. . . It offers a good reminder that all translation terms used in global comparisons - terms like "culture," "art," "society," "peasant," "mode of production", "man", "woman", "modernity", "ethnography"- get us some distance *and* fall apart.<sup>24</sup>

'Cosmopolitan' is another translation term in this sense. Its now ironic (because eclipsed) personification in Kant allows us to compare, provisionally, Panofsky's ideals for art history half a century ago, his political circumstances, his typical recourse to philosophy in a Kantian guise, and what we might want to say about the receptivity and (inter)nationalism of the field today. The essays that bookend *Meaning in the Visual Arts* can also be thought of as what Clifford titles 'travel encounters' in the register of the cosmopolitan. Panofsky's humanist prescriptions for the discipline import Kant's philosophical and political ideals of free movement, our responsibility to this aspect of our human essence expressed as hospitable tolerance for others and their ideas. I have suggested that the humanist maxims prescribed are themselves ahistorical as a consequence of their purported timelessness. Here I perceive a problem with the way Kant's ideas are received by Panofsky and transmuted into art history. I have suggested that Kant's anachronistic cosmopolitanism is grandfathered into the discipline, accepted as belonging without full examination, in fact without Kantian critique. Kant is used

<sup>22</sup> Andrew Linklater, "Cosmopolitan Citizenship." In *Cosmopolitan Citizenship*, ed. Kimberly Hutchings and Ronald Dannreuther. New York : St. Martin's Press, 1999, 35-59, 46.

<sup>23</sup> See Bruce Robbins, "The Village and the Liberal Managerial Class." In Vinay Dharwadker, ed., *Cosmopolitan Geographies*, 15-32.

<sup>24</sup> Clifford, 39.

ahistorically, though for historically specific reasons having to do with Panofsky's need to move and to have his ideas move with him. In employing Clifford's very different version of cosmopolitanism, I am of course making an alternative disciplinary move, one that doesn't turn to philosophy.

Like the apparently passing reference to Kant's life that opens 'The History of Art as a Humanistic Discipline,' Panofsky's autobiographical comments in the essay are informal and quickly subordinated to more serious ends. Though he acknowledges why he is in the United States, he never wants to give credence to the present.<sup>25</sup> This becomes a methodological principle by the essay's conclusion: 'To grasp reality we have to detach ourselves from the present,' he asserts.<sup>26</sup> Panofsky nonetheless unavoidably attends to the future of art history by stipulating the tenor of its engagement with the past. The humanities, he writes,

instead of dealing with temporal phenomena, and causing time to stop, . . . penetrate into a region where time has stopped of its own accord . . . Gazing as they do at those frozen, stationary records . . . the humanities endeavor to capture the processes in the course of which those records were produced and became what they are.<sup>27</sup>

'Became what they are': in other words, they don't change but wait for us to reveal them. We might say that as travellers in time, art objects enjoy the unique cosmopolitan right of crossing temporal borders untouched. But can we agree that art objects, any more than people, travel in this hermetic way?

I would argue that art's movement in time always takes place in a present tense, and in specific and varying circumstances. That 'present' may be past from our vantage point, but it was present once and it is the spatio-temporal dimension in which we stipulate what counts as history. The present may also be tinged by the ideals and practices it posits for the future. Most significantly, the present happens in many different places. Panofsky seems to acknowledge this diversity, but in fact the art history he proposes is inadequately equipped to contend with disciplinary change today. In a telling cross-cultural example, he compares calling an Italian Renaissance picture 'plastic' and describing 'a figure in a Chinese painting' as 'having volume but no mass'. The common ground that enables comparison is the supposition that both works are 'different solutions of a problem'.<sup>28</sup> The Chinese work can only enter the comparison according to Kant's universalist cosmopolitanism, which erases or radically diminishes cultural, geographical, and

<sup>25</sup> Michels notes that Panofsky and many other Jews who fled National Socialism were later concerned about the rise of intolerance in the USA (See Michels). Panofsky makes this clear in correspondence but not in his official recollections of and prescriptions for Art History. As I have noted, Panofsky wrote instead that 'American art historians were able to see the past in a perspective picture undistorted by national and regional bias' ('Three Decades', 328).

<sup>26</sup> 'Humanistic Discipline', 24.

<sup>27</sup> 'Humanistic Discipline', 24

<sup>28</sup> 'Humanistic Discipline', 21.



temporal difference by positing a perdurant, fundamental humanity in Reason. Is it the case, then, that cultural differences and identity issues within codified Western art historical categories render obsolete, or at least unworkable, the ideals of personal and ideological cosmopolitan movement vaunted by Kant and Panofsky?

One way to assess the potential remaining in Panofsky's notion of cosmopolitan art history is to test it in the arena of 'contemporary' art and its institutions, a network made complex by the need to include a wide spectrum of art practices, cultural norms, and international comparison. How are art works, artists, curators, and artwriters placed conceptually and culturally today, and how might we make the indispensable but overly general categories that describe them more specific? One way is to challenge one of these placeholders, the assumption that we are all cosmopolitan, that one can simply take on a 'cosmo' identity. Discourses as different as those of diaspora and international art fairs share preoccupations with crossing borders. Those of us interested in contemporary art can be lulled into complacency by reports of the effortless global movement and exchange of individual works, artists, ideas, and curators, what has come to be called "Biennial culture." Commenting on the geographical extension of Documenta 11 in the catalogue to Platform 5 of the 2002 exhibition, for example, co-curator Ute Meta Bauer wrote that any 'insistence that the entire discourse must be held at one's own front door is more than a little surprising, given that the art world is especially proud of being cosmopolitan'.<sup>29</sup> Perhaps it is a symptom of this unwitting acceptance that the term is not often used in artwriting. Instead, cosmopolitanism's priorities and controversies lie concealed behind the more common notions of 'multiculturalism,' 'globalism,' and 'internationalism'. The ideal of being a 'citizen of the world,' as the Cynic philosopher Diogenes of Sinope put it as early as the fourth century BCE, can today be engulfed and perverted by the vocabularies of the multi-national and global. Fungibility is the highest value in an art world in which some national or ethnic identities are more equal than others. Cosmopolitanism supposedly stands *against* nationalism and regionalism, against the particular and possibly parochial interests touted by identity. Once we descend from this ideal plane, however, is the largely unexamined adoption of a cosmopolitan stance in the art world today a symptom of inanition rather than the application or residue of lofty beliefs? Are we cosmopolitan in meaningful ways? To triangulate cosmopolitanism as part of the tendency to generalize in the context of contemporary art – to understand why the concept is at once almost a given, largely ignored, and of critical importance – we can attend first to one, seemingly trivial, indication of an assumed cosmopolitanism, the notational and cultural tick that places artists with the '-based' formula. The hyphen is crucial in the semaphore of contemporary identity politics. For one thing, it brokers the constituencies of multiculturalism. On the other hand, we might say that cosmopolitans are in danger of abjuring the hyphen in favour of cultural universals or at least generalities.

<sup>29</sup> "The Space of Documenta 11: Documenta 11 as a Zone of Activity" in *Documenta 11*, Platform 5, vol. II, 103-07, 104.

These days, it's difficult to just *be* a visual artist. Cultural producers need a short form pedigree that locates them quickly, in the blink of an eye scanning a biography. The modifier '-based' is widely used to establish coordinates and qualifications. I am not isolating those denotations of a production medium or art world inclination ('photo-based', 'text-based'), which are expedient if not always simple. More freighted with implication is the seemingly required identification of the artist's place of domicile and work. Today, even those from the accredited centres of the art world are habitually referred to as 'city X -based'. Thus we can read that 'Francesco Clemente is a New York-based artist, who exhibits at the Gagosian Gallery'.<sup>30</sup> Such labelling also accompanies curators and artwriters. Why does place figure? When asked where he was from, Diogenes countered that what should matter was that he was a citizen of the world. He did *not* say 'I'm a Sinope-based thinker'. While we cannot effectively learn or communicate without generalizations,<sup>31</sup> the hyphenated tags that pretend to lend specificity to an artist are not innocent.<sup>32</sup> Asking why we use them and what they mean is a step towards what Kobena Mercer calls a critical cosmopolitanism,<sup>33</sup> a version more meaningful in today's art world than the generalizations usually deployed under this banner.

To note that artist X is 'London-based' or 'New York-based' cuts two ways. Locale must be important to be recorded. At the same time, the immediate context is suspended or rejected by the hyphen and its trailer, 'based'. To claim that one is 'X-based' suggests that the artist works here, that this place is a point of reference, but also that s/he could as easily move. The implied narrative is: 'I'm living here at the moment, but I'm really a larger world artist'. Certainly some artists instead convey a genuine rootedness in their self-descriptions, claiming with purpose that they are from, or work in, a certain place. Or you might object that the modifier '-based' is not universal. But another common descriptive rubric underlines my reading of '-based' as a significant marker of impermanence, even shiftiness. The Canadian Art Database, maintained on line by the Centre for Contemporary Canadian Art

<sup>30</sup> <http://www.lacan.com/bios2.htm>. October 22, 2008.

<sup>31</sup> The neurobiologist Semir Zeki describes the "first step" in the human "acquisition of knowledge" as "abstraction, by which [he means] the emphasis on the general at the expense of the particular.... This process is undertaken continually by the brain." "The Art of Gerard Caris and the Brain's Search for Knowledge" in *Gerard Caris: Pentagonismus/Pentagonism*. Exh. Cat. Karlsruhe: ZKM, 2007, 74-83, 76.

<sup>32</sup> The compulsion to place oneself is part of a large pattern discussed by David Simpson in *Situatedness, or, Why We Keep Saying Where We're Coming From*. (Durham, NC, USA: Duke University Press, 2002). 'The academic version,' he writes, 'takes the form of *let me situate my argument*; the more casual and widespread locution is *let me tell you where I'm coming from*. The invitation to *situate your argument* can sometimes earn the response *I hear where you're coming from*. We often find ourselves giving a role to situatedness, to a location and embeddedness that can be described and specified. My first thoughts about this habit were irritable ones, in the manner of a poor man's analytical philosopher: I found these declarations to be either without meaning or pointedly ambiguous, making knowledge claims that could not be cashed in' (4). Simpson does not discuss cosmopolitanism or the '-based' formulation of situatedness.

<sup>33</sup> Kobena Mercer, "Introduction," in *Cosmopolitan Modernisms*, ed. Kobena Mercer. Cambridge, Mass: MIT/inIVA, 2005, 9.

(CCCA), uses variations of the tag X 'currently lives and works in' city Y for all of its over 500 contemporary artists.<sup>34</sup> If we think about the anodyne term 'currently', it is clear that potential relocation is key because contemporary art typically sees itself as a cosmopolitan discourse and because artists therefore often feel they *should* be on the move. Who in the art world does not wish to be a cosmopolite? One result is perpetual *anachorism*, being out of place, the spatial correlate of anachronism. Intended as a helpful, descriptive modifier, then, the '-based' formula as often as not leads to a sense of displacement or even alienation. To put the point polemically, if provisional is a good thing, one is never anywhere. One is general.

In applying pressure to the '-based' modifier, I assume some degree of purpose in artists' self descriptions. No doubt these sketches are in part only shortcuts even mandated by a gallery or publication. We all use templates unthinkingly. To speculate on what these habitual patterns of place identification and modification say about art and artists in the present, we need to know more of the history of the '-based' formula, both how long and where it has been deployed. A quick survey suggests that the convention is widespread; it's used in *Art in America*, for example. It is an unspoken paradigm in contemporary art, which leads me to suggest that many contemporary artists are nervous about place as an element of identity – even while they tentatively name their place - nervous about too much specificity. But here lies another contradiction, given that most of today's prestige, permanent international art exhibitions are identified by city, yet organized by national pavilion and national participation: the Venice Biennale, the São Paulo Biennale, the Sydney Biennale and many others follow this pattern. Even 'Documenta' is properly called the Kassel Documenta to acknowledge its home town. A spurious suspension of nationality is built into the city-based formula. In fact, the specification of national affiliation is a faux pas in the contemporary art world, both informally and institutionally. Being city based is nonetheless as much a dismissal of the local-as-parochial as it is a recognition of the importance of place to identity and artistic production. The '-based' label can dis-place its wearer. Again, it is too specific, not sufficiently cosmopolitan.

Finally, there is the practical matter that artists seek grant support from federal, regional, and municipal agencies founded explicitly and exclusively on national, regional, and municipal affiliations. If these artists gain recognition, they can return to (or aspire to) being placeless or multi-spatial. They can be 'Glasgow-based,' that is, cosmopolitan, for consumption in the international market. Just as the assertion of locale can be economically advantageous, so too can wearing the mantle of the cosmopolitan. But though it may be assumed that artists are or want to be cosmopolitan, as we have seen, the notion has been hotly contested for the past fifteen years or so, though not especially in the art world. The economic basis of 'cosmo' ideals finds a trenchant critic in Timothy Brennan. 'What cosmopolitanism unconsciously strives for is a stasis in which the unique expression of the non-Western is Western reflexively and automatically – the local self exported *as* the

<sup>34</sup> <http://ccca.ca/>

world,' he writes, building on the critiques Georg Simmel and Antonio Gramsci.<sup>35</sup> Brennan also points out the core ambivalences of the notion of the cosmopolitan, notably, that it is 'local while denying its local character. This denial is an intrinsic feature of cosmopolitanism and inherent to its appeal'.<sup>36</sup> Are artists truly citizens of the world in more than the generalized terms remaindered by the economic imperatives of globalization? Antonio Gramsci wrote in *The Prison Notebooks* that 'The starting-point of critical elaboration is the consciousness of what one really is, and it is "knowing thyself" as a product of the historical process to date which has deposited in you an infinity of traces, without leaving an inventory. Such an inventory must therefore be made at the outset'.<sup>37</sup> By examining the vicissitudes of self consciousness in the connection between locale and cosmopolitanism, I have also intended to offer a critique of Panofsky's principled refusal of the view from the present in his late, humanistic art history. In conclusion, I will look more carefully at the notion of the contemporary that Panofsky studiously avoided.

To be at once properly placed and appropriately mobile and hospitable is the difficult dance of the contemporary artworld cosmopolitan. Contemporary artists, art historians, and curators may by default see themselves as cosmopolites while implicitly acknowledging the range of specific places that inhere in what Clifford calls discrepant cosmopolitanism. Because of these potentially conflicting demands, in art and art history, 'the contemporary' as a category no longer relies easily on the nation as a template. As Terry Smith argues persuasively, the contemporary is not exclusively or even primarily a temporal category and much art produced today is not truly contemporary: 'contemporary art, as a movement, has become the new modern or, what amounts to the same thing, the old modern in new clothes. In its most institutionalized forms—from the triumphalist overreach of the Guggenheim Museum's global franchising through the Old Master elegance of the installations at Dia:Beacon to the confused gesturing in the contemporary galleries when the Museum of Modern Art, New York, reopened in 2004—it is the latest phase in the century-and-a-half long story of modern art in Europe and its cultural colonies, a continuation of the modernist lineage, warily selected not least in an attempt to preserve this cultural balance of power. Official contemporary art resonates with the vivid confidence and the comforting occlusion that comes with it, taking itself to be the high cultural style of its time'.<sup>38</sup> Thus for Smith, what 'constitutes truly contemporary art [is] that which emerges from within the conditions of contemporaneity, including the remnants of the cultures of modernity and postmodernity, but which projects itself through and around these, as an art of that which actually *is* in the world, of what it is to *be* in the world, and of that which is to

<sup>35</sup> Timothy Brennan, "Cosmo-Theory." *The South Atlantic Quarterly* 100.3 (2001), 659-91, 675. See also Brennan, *At Home in the World: Cosmopolitanism Now*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard UP, 1997.

<sup>36</sup> Brennan, 660.

<sup>37</sup> [http://www.marxists.org/archive/gramsci/prison\\_notebooks/reader/q11-12.htm](http://www.marxists.org/archive/gramsci/prison_notebooks/reader/q11-12.htm)

<sup>38</sup> Terry Smith, 'Contemporary Art and Contemporaneity', *Critical Inquiry* 32:4, Summer 2006, 681-707, 683.

come. Its impulses are specific yet worldly, even multitudinous, inclusive yet oppositional and anti-institutional, concrete but also various, mobile, and open-ended'.<sup>39</sup> Smith emphasizes that the fully two pages of qualifying contemporary artists he mentions, 'and the thousands more of whom they are representatives, focus their wide-ranging concerns on questions of time, place, mediation, and mood'.<sup>40</sup> If we are truly interested in time and place in their specificities, however, we cannot with consistency also say that these are universally translatable categories. When and where one works has to be at minimum potentially important to an understanding of the contemporary. What Smith inadvertently and ironically supplies in his lists of artists – and what I think most of our students receive in courses in contemporary art and in many of the MOCAs around the world – is akin to the international editions of newspapers, that is, cosmopolitan news that abjures the overtly local.

Cosmopolitanism is an ideal that helps one to negotiate the contest among individual proclivities, the parameters of nation, and the pull of place. I began this section with the notion that artists who describe themselves as “-based” are implicitly on the move, we might say in translation internationally, but also attached (however cynically) to the specifics of an identity that is typically urban. This largely unexamined pattern of hyphenated existence reveals a lazy cosmopolitanism, one that wants the privileges without the work. This is not the stance that Elizabeth Harney lauds when she refers to 'artists [who] innovatively process and contribute to a cosmopolitan aesthetics that selectively filters the global through the local'.<sup>41</sup> It is possible to be to be a genuine, contemporary cosmopolitan, but not by adopting the strictures of Kantian Reason.

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<sup>39</sup> Smith, 692.

<sup>40</sup> Smith, 700.

<sup>41</sup> Elizabeth Harney, *In Senghor's Shadow: Art, Politics, and the Avant-garde in Senegal, 1960-1995*, Durham N.C.: Duke UP, 2004, 5.