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Reverse perspective: Bernard Smith's worldview and the cosmopolitan imagination

Ian McLean

Modern industry has established the world market, for which the discovery of America paved the way ... The bourgeoisie has through its exploitation of the world market given a cosmopolitan character to production and consumption in every country ... In place of the old local and national seclusion and self-sufficiency, we have intercourse in every direction, universal inter-dependence of nations ... National one-sidedness and narrow-mindedness become more and more impossible, and from the numerous national and local literatures, there arises a world literature.

(Karl Marx and Fredrick Engels, Manifesto of the Communist Party, 1848)

Introduction

Living and working in Australia, and being the first Australian-born professional art historian to work in the academy, is probably enough of an explanation for why Bernard Smith developed a global perspective on European art and an acute awareness of its relationship to imperialism. Smith's Marxist leanings reinforced such thinking, as did his 'big picture' approach. His worldview was not just global in a spatial sense it also took in the centuries indeed millennia of human culture. No wonder he found Hegel's ideas compelling. It also means that the significance of Smith's historiography can only be judged within an historical understanding of how globalization has impacted on the arts.

This essay, comprising three parts, argues that Smith's conception of globalization is grounded in an earlier era that has little relevance to the matrixes of power today. The first section, 'A short history of globalization and the Western artworld', outlines what is meant by globalization. It proposes that globalization is not simply a synchronous (spatial) relationship of power but also a diachronic one — by which I mean that it is a developing formation with which critical methodology, including art historiography, must continually adjust. The first stage of globalization, I argue, came on the horizon around 1500 but took several hundred years to leave behind previous ideological frameworks and give shape to the world. I am calling this shape the classic idea of Europe, by which I mean the cultural identity forged during the Enlightenment that gave European nations a moral purpose, a sense of destiny and the impression of being a civilization that was primarily defined in terms of modernity. In this I follow closely Gerard Delanty's writing on what he calls 'the idea of Europe', drawing extensively on his book *Inventing Europe* (1995).

The classic idea of Europe was irreparably broken in the carnage of the 1914-18 war but it took until the end of the Cold War for the dust to settle. Only then did

a second stage of globalization begin to be felt at an ideological level and in everyday lives. The first section focuses on describing the formation of the classic idea of Europe and its unraveling in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. This sets the stage for the main argument concerning Smith's historiography.

The discourse of art history is an expression of the classic idea of Europe. Certainly art historians invested in the idea of Europe from the beginning i.e. from the time of Johann Winckelmann, and it is from here that Smith somewhat anachronistically takes his bearings. It is anachronistic as Smith's career was more or less co-terminus with the Cold War—his *The Antipodean manifesto* (1959) has been called a Cold War document—a time when the classic idea of Europe was significantly repackaged as 'the idea of West' (as I will call it).

While Smith was intent on writing for his time, he was never comfortable in his time. Indeed, the older he got the more uncomfortable he became. Thus he never saw himself as an apologist for his time. His perspective was critical, and drew on the classic idea of Europe and the world-view or cosmopolitanism of its classic art historiography to make his point. The purpose of this first section, then, is to establish an historical framework in which to position my argument regarding the anachronism of Bernard Smith's art historiography. I should add that by anachronism I do not mean that he was reactionary or even conservative. Smith radicalism was well deserved.¹

The second section, 'Bernard Smith, the Western artworld and globalization', examines Smith's art historiography in the light of the Cold War paradigm of Western art. *The Antipodean manifesto* is used as a focus for this discussion, before a closer investigation is made of the world-consciousness or cosmopolitanism of Smith's historiography, which I characterize as 'reverse perspective'.

The third section, which also serves as a conclusion, 'Smith, Winckelmann and the idea of Europe', takes a closer look at why Winckelmann's historiography appealed to Smith and why it ultimately failed him.

1. A short history of globalization and the Western artworld

In the last few decades the term 'globalization' has become the buzzword to describe the deterritorializing effects of new communication and information technologies. These effects, which intensified considerably in the last two decades, are penetrating all levels of society from the economic to the political, legal and cultural. In particular, they are challenging the institutions and ideals of the nation-state that have ordered, administered and conceptualized the world for the previous few hundred years. A new cosmopolitanism—another buzzword—is emerging that seemingly spells the end of such national formations and identities, including national art histories. Even art historians are having to confront the challenge of

¹ Smith's anachronism is evident in the ambivalence towards his writing, ranging from those who feel his conservatism to those who acknowledge his radicalism. For the former see: Ian Burn, Lendon, Nigel, Merewether, Charles, and Stephen, Ann, *The Necessity of Australian Art: An Essay About Interpretation* (Sydney: Power Publications, 1988). For the latter, see Peter Beilharz, *Imagining the Antipodes: Culture, Theory, and the Visual in the Work of Bernard Smith*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997.

globalization with new more cosmopolitan historiographies. This, anyway, is where we seem to be at this moment, a decade into the twenty-first century.

While globalization and cosmopolitanism are closely associated in current discourse, they describe quite different things. As Delanty points out, cosmopolitanism is much older than globalization.² Cosmopolitan ideas are evident in tribal cosmologies, they form the ethical basis of world religions, and in the European philosophical tradition they derive from Biblical and classical Greek texts. Cosmopolitanism is also, argues Delanty, 'one of the key dynamics of modernity' and also nationalism even if today it largely takes postmodern and post-national forms.³ In other words, cosmopolitanism is a ubiquitous tendency evident to some extent in all cultures. Delanty conceives it as a universal 'orientation' that 'takes different forms and can be found in many different cultural contexts'⁴—a sort of hard-wired sensibility whose particular expression reflects the environment or worldview in which it is shaped.

Globalization, on the other hand, refers to various technologies and ideologies that have enabled interconnections to develop on a global scale. A globalized worldview, or world-consciousness, first emerged in the aftermath of Columbus's momentous voyage of 1492. While globalization is largely driven by technological innovation, it is managed by ideological systems with their own agendas. Three phases can be identified: imperialism or the Age of Europe, the Cold War or the Age of the West, and the phase of intensified globalization we now inhabit. Art historiography emerged in the first phase as a discourse that legitimized imperialism, it was forced to change track during the Cold War, and in recent decades is undergoing an even more fundamental revision.

Imperialism or the Age of Europe

According to Delanty, 1492 marks a threshold between the hegemony of Christendom and that of Europe. Christendom, which we now call the medieval period, was a product of isolation. The isolation began when the Roman Empire abandoned its Latin-speaking western provinces and shifted its capital east to Constantinople, where it evolved into the Byzantine Christian Empire. The isolation of the Latins increased following the collapse of the Western Empire and doctrinal splits with the Greek-speaking Byzantine church. This was further exasperated by the slow disintegration of the Byzantine Empire before the rising tide of Islam, and then the failure of the Latin crusaders to take the Holy Land from Islam, which was the spiritual centre of Christendom. Latin Christendom was boxed into a corner without a centre, isolated from its spiritual homeland and also most of the world.

Rather incongruously—given dominant Western theories of modernity—Delanty believes that the final surrender of the Byzantine Empire to Islam in 1453 'was one of the really decisive events in the formation of European modernity',⁵ because it also marked the beginning of the end for Christendom as an ideological

² Gerard Delanty, *The Cosmopolitan Imagination: The Renewal of Critical Social Theory*, Leiden: Cambridge University Press, 2009, 8, ch. 1.

³ Delanty, *The Cosmopolitan Imagination*, 9, 16.

⁴ Delanty, *The Cosmopolitan Imagination*, 9.

⁵ Gerard Delanty, *Inventing Europe: idea, identity, reality*, New York: St. Martin's Press, 1995, 36

force. It also made Columbus's opening of the western frontier game changing. By outflanking Islam in the east it created the possibility of a whole new paradigm for the beleaguered Latins. This new paradigm eventually became the classic idea of Europe. During the sixteenth century, Delanty writes, 'the idea of Europe began to replace Christendom as a cultural frame of reference.'⁶

Columbus's voyage discovered more than America and the world. As well it discovered Europe as a continent, an identity and civilization.⁷ Arguably, the idea of Europe was more clearly seen by European colonists than those who stayed at home. The classic idea of Europe first took shape from a distance: it is an idea of (or perspective on) the world that takes its bearings from Europe. In Delanty's words: 'Colonialism and conquest ... unified Europe'⁸ and gave it its identity.

However, the idea of Europe did not spring into view from the decks of the *Santa Maria* (Columbus's flagship) as it passed over the horizon in 1492. Delanty argues that the idea of Europe could not take shape until it found a way of dealing with the legacy of Christendom. It was a volatile mix. The whole politics of power was shaken from top to bottom in religious, political, economic and cultural upheavals from which eventually emerged the classic idea of Europe, embodied in the modern European nation states, their world empires and practices of modernity. Here globalization was administered by a few powerful nation states, in whose capitals were centred the discourses of modernity.

Thus while Enrique Dussel has a point when, in a similar vein to Delanty, he claims that 'modernity was born in 1492' (Dussel 1996: 20), it is important to acknowledge the delay between the ending of Christendom and the emergence of modernity and its primary ideological formation, the nation state in the nineteenth century. Only then did the classic idea of Europe assume its hegemony. The classic idea of Europe, then, is a symptom of modernity fully formed. 'A collective European identity existed (at least as part of elite culture) in some form since the sixteenth century', but 'European identity as part of personal identities did not exist until the late nineteenth century though it had gradually evolved since the Enlightenment.'⁹

This first phase of globalization, which culminated in the late-nineteenth century, was the golden age of Europe—appropriately named the Belle Époque. In essence, it was an imperialist age in which the idea of Europe was the justification. To this day, Delanty says: 'Much of what is being called "European" is ... thinly disguised, nineteenth century imperialist ideas'.¹⁰ However, 'the idea of [European] civilization did not survive into the twentieth century'. Its critique was, says Delanty, 'one of the great themes in *fin-de-siècle* [avant-garde] thinking',¹¹ which was cosmopolitan and anti-nationalist in character. The 1914-18 war delivered the fatal blow to the classic idea of Europe. From this point, 'the centre of gravity shifted across the Atlantic', and a new paradigm 'was constructed around opposition to

⁶ Delanty, *Inventing Europe*, 37.

⁷ Delanty, *Inventing Europe*, 44.

⁸ Delanty, *Inventing Europe*, 7.

⁹ Delanty, *Inventing Europe*, 6.

¹⁰ Delanty, *Inventing Europe*, 6.

¹¹ Delanty, *Inventing Europe*, 109.

Soviet communism'.¹² What briefly sustained the beleaguered and indeed mortally wounded idea of Europe was, in Delanty's apt phrase, 'the communist bogey'¹³ from the east, as if Islam had returned in a new guise. It was the twilight of the classic idea of Europe, for in this final desperate unraveling of the first stage of globalization, the idea of Europe was substituted for the idea of the West.

The World Wars of the twentieth century and especially the atom bomb that ended the Second and effectively inaugurated the Cold War completely changed the imperialist dynamic of globalization. The imminence of world destruction defined world-consciousness in the decades after 1945, simultaneously uniting the world in despair and splitting it (as well as Europe) into two mutually opposed autonomous but mirror-like spheres. Simply called East and West, they were dominated by the economic and cultural hegemonies of the Soviet Union and the United States respectively, each of which had its own global network of power.

In contrast to the classic idea of Europe, whose values had been fashioned by the complex tensions of European national rivalry, the West was a united entity, with Western Europe subordinate to the United States. Thus 'the nation-state was no longer the reference point'; rather 'the idea of the West was the new reference point for Europe which had effectively become America's eastern frontier.'¹⁴

Despite this profoundly different post-European and post-colonial scenario, the West found its moral legitimization in the defense of so-called Occidental civilization. Its governing myth was the continuity of the European idea, just as the European idea had, in many ways, constructed itself as the 'secular surrogate' of Christendom.¹⁵ Each age, it seems, imagines itself with the remnants of the previous one: as if from the ashes of tragedy is rescued farce (apologies to Marx). In the idea of the West the classical idea of Europe is a symbol of cultural value. Instead of warring national states, Europe became a romantic place of old world cities and extraordinary museums that American tourists could visit for their edification. The classic idea of Europe was thus reduced to an 'aesthetic category'.¹⁶ This was starkly evident in the institutionalization of the avant-garde after the 1914-18 war, which thus became avant-garde in name only. But like any brand it had wide appeal. Falling into line with the new paradigm, the artworld becoming a highly integrated and greatly expanded trans-Atlantic discourse centred in New York. In much the same fashion that the ancient Romans had appropriated ancient Greek art, the Western artworld made over old Europe into its own image, and in the process invented a whole new teleology, seamless in appearance, in which all roads now led to New York. This, in essence, is the narrative of post-war art historiography that Bernard Smith resisted.

¹² Delanty, *Inventing Europe*, 107.

¹³ Delanty, *Inventing Europe*, 101.

¹⁴ Delanty, *Inventing Europe*, 129.

¹⁵ Delanty, *Inventing Europe*, 68.

¹⁶ Delanty, *Inventing Europe*, 116.

The second stage of globalization

From about 1968 the powerful cultural politburos of both East and West began to lose legitimacy as dissidents increasingly eroded their ideological logic. So too did new technological developments. As Marshall McLuhan declared in the early 1960s, the world was rapidly becoming a global village. While the Cold War did not officially end until December 1989, when it did the world rapidly changed as if it had been waiting for this moment. In just two decades we have seen an increasingly independent and expanded 'post-Western' Europe,¹⁷ a resurgent China, a ham-fisted United States struggling to find its place, and a host of other developments. Yet, despite being an artifact of the Cold War, the Western artworld has largely maintained its cultural hegemony, though not without disquiet.

Symptomatic of both this continuing Cold War hegemony is the massive book, *Art since 1900*, written by Hal Foster, Rosalind Krauss, Yve Alain Bois and Benjamin H. D. Buchloh. While written some 15 years after the official end of the Cold War, it articulates the vision of an *ancien régime*. However, there is also disquiet. With some poignancy, the book's last page concludes on a note of defeat and loss. This is because every new future brings with it a new past. Now, after the end of the Cold War, the achievements of Western art that they had just memorialized seemed over. All Foster could see was the 'posthistorical default of contemporary art' in which there is a 'flat indifference, a stagnant incommensurability, a consumerist-touristic culture of art sampling'. He identified a fundamental change in the experience of art past and present, lamenting that now 'we wander through museum spaces as if after the end of time.' In short, *Art since 1900* chronicled a world—or an order—that no longer exists.

Art since 1900 is literally structured as a chronicle. Now a chronicle, says Walter Benjamin, is a teleological discourse that describes a model of the world as if it is a divine plan. It calls not for historical explanation but hermeneutic interpretation of the way events 'are embedded in the great inscrutable course of the world.'¹⁸ But this course had suddenly changed, as if God had taken leave of the world. Even the twentieth century, through which Foster had recently wandered with such assurance as if it was his neighbourhood, now seems a foreign country. The 'primary models we've used', says Foster, 'have become dysfunctional', and 'none of us [New York critics] is in a position to comment on what projects might be emerging in other parts of the globe'. With an air of desperation, he admitted his inability to answer 'the question of the narrativity of art in a global context'.¹⁹

At issue now is not simply the content of art history but its very structure and purpose. In short, the conventional methodologies no longer work. At a purely formal level, the recent intensification of globalization spells the end to linear conceptions of history and the reification of style, both key concepts that had galvanized European art and art historiography since its formation in the nineteenth

¹⁷ Delanty, *The Cosmopolitan Imagination*, 241.

¹⁸ Walter Benjamin, 'The Storyteller', in Hannah Arendt (ed.), *Illuminations*, Bungay, Suffolk: Fontana, 1982, 96.

¹⁹ Hal Foster in Hal Foster, Rosalind Krauss, Yve-Alain Bois and Benjamin Buchloh, 'Roundtable: The Predicament of Contemporary Art', in Hal Foster, Rosalind Krauss, Yve-Alain Bois and Benjamin Buchloh (ed.), *Art since 1900: Modernism, Antimodernism, Postmodernism*, London: Thames & Hudson, 2004, 679.

century and were eagerly adopted by Cold War era art historians.²⁰ Instead of a teleology in which the present races towards some pre-ordained end—in this case the hegemony of the West—now the past continuously cycles through the present disrupting all teleological narratives. Space, previously tied to the formal constraints of the picture plane, also gained an ever-increasing mobility that reached out to the world; and style, once the principal signifier of an artist's identity and the art's meaning, now is simply an empty avatar, a vehicle for fluid subject positions in an open field.

The temporal, spatial and stylistic legacies of European modernism no longer drive contemporary art.²¹ The production and consumption of contemporary art in the twenty-first century is not, as in the previous century, the God-given birthright of Europeans or Westerners. Instead it is a set of autonomous styles disconnected from any historicist project (such as modernism or the avant-garde) and contemporaneously available to anyone anywhere in the world. Existing in the perpetual now, style, like the past or the future, can be downloaded at will. Now anybody anywhere anytime can make European, Aboriginal or any other type of art, as it is all just contemporary art.

Equally, the intensification of globalization is destabilizing conventional art historiography that, in the main, was inherited from the nineteenth-century German professors who founded the discipline. Thus today revisionism is rife. The old Eurocentric hierarchies get more tenuous everyday and even the notion of period style—which Bernard Smith described as 'the central concept of art history'²² and the justification of its claim as an autonomous discipline—seems shaky, not least because it no longer has any teleological or even genealogical guarantee i.e. has a place in the course of time.

Once the means by which art historians delineated the historicity of art, now period style is simply a brand with which the modern art museum trades in its spectacles of the post-historical. This loss of orientation is not just a problem for art historiography but the symptom of a larger failure of critical discourse in general to produce what Delanty called a 'significant philosophical or methodological framework'²³ capable of dealing with the impact of globalization today. The failure of art historiography to 'provide the basis for a truly global and intercultural art history'—as David Summers put it—surely calls, as John Onians did, for 'a whole new approach to the subject.'²⁴ This, however, is where Bernard Smith, who has always thought in terms of a world-consciousness, disagrees.

²⁰ For an early recognition of this radical shift (1995), see Hans Belting, *Art History after Modernism*, trans. Mitch Cohen and Kenneth Northcott Caroline Saltzweid, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2003.

²¹ This is hardly an original observation. The writings of Arthur Danto, Hans Belting, Terry Smith and others in the previous fifteen or so years have made such observations a cliché of contemporary art criticism.

²² Bernard Smith, *The Formalesque: A Guide to Modern Art and Its History*, Melbourne: Macmillan, 2007, 44.

²³ Delanty, *The Cosmopolitan Imagination*, 1.

²⁴ This point, and the quotes, is taken from Ulrich Pfisterer, 'Origins and Principles of World Art History: 1900 (and 2000)', in Kitty Zijlmans and Wilfried Van Damme (eds.), *World Art Studies: Exploring Concepts and Approaches*, Amsterdam: Valiz, 2008, 69.

2. Bernard Smith, the Western artworld and globalization

The Cold War was long enough to consume most of Bernard Smith's professional life. However, like Don Quixote, Smith brushed against the grain of his times by holding to an earlier chivalry. Smith combined a propensity to theorize with an eye for the big picture, for the clash of civilizations and the workings of what Hegel called the Spirit, all of which he orchestrated into a critique of the Western worldview that dominated this period. While few art histories written in the Cold War period can, like Smith's *European Vision and the South Pacific* (1960), claim a world-consciousness, as the title suggests, it was a consciousness formed in a previous time when the classic idea of Europe was finally becoming hegemonic—the period that is the subject of the book.

Even admitting the achievement of *European Vision*, Smith's credentials as an historian of globalization would seem farfetched. In that obscure part of the world where he is best known, he is known as an historian of national not world art. However Smith's first book, *Place, taste and tradition*—published on 6 August 1945, the day that the atom bomb was dropped in Hiroshima—is a history of Australian art grounded in the necessary relationship between the global and the local, which he construed as the antidote to the shrill nationalism of certain Australian art critics at the time.²⁵ In particular, it proposed an alternative worldview to a new *Mitteleuropa* conception of the European idea that had developed in the early twentieth century as a reaction to the crisis of the idea of Europe, most famously in Nazi ideology.²⁶

Despite the cosmopolitanism of Smith's national art history, the very idea of national art did not sit easily with the post-war marginalization of nationalism or with the 'basic intuition' of today's globalization 'that the nation-state no longer provides ... the natural space of social scientific articulation.'²⁷ Combined with Smith's well-known antipathy towards abstract art²⁸—which was internationalist—then it is little wonder that his views seemed somewhat anachronistic and out of step with contemporary art. This is most apparent in the 1959 *Antipodean manifesto*, which Smith wrote with a group of emerging Australian artists from his generation. The manifesto attacked the new international abstraction emanating from New York and called for a figurative art that attended to the social myths that are the mainstay of national culture.²⁹

The Antipodean manifesto

Despite Smith's professional interest in national art, he did share both the earlier European avant-garde and post-war Western avant-garde antipathy towards nationalism. This is why the manifesto insisted, somewhat against the grain of its

²⁵ See Bernard Smith, *Place, Taste and Tradition: A Study of Australian Art since 1788*, Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1979, 176-80.

²⁶ See Delanty, *Inventing Europe*, ch. 7.

²⁷ Robert Fine and Vivienne Boon, 'Introduction: Cosmopolitanism: Between Past and Future', *European Journal of Social Theory*, 10: 1, 2007, 6

²⁸ See Bernard Smith, 'Notes on Abstract Art', in *The Death of the Artist as Hero: Essays in History and Culture*, Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1988, 181-93.

²⁹ Bernard Smith, 'The Antipodean Manifesto', in *The Death of the Artist as Hero*, 1988, 197.

own thought, that 'we are not, of course, seeking to create a national style.'³⁰ Yet, to many, it seemed that his denial only masked his intentions to do just this, particularly as he was resisting the new so-called 'internationalism' of Cold War Western art.³¹

Smith later took every opportunity to reiterate that 'nationalism was never a real issue'.³² Further, as if to distract from what had quickly become its embarrassing reputation as anachronistic, Smith argued that the manifesto's attack on abstraction should be placed 'in its international context', which he said was the emerging avant-garde reaction against abstraction evident in Pop art.³³ However, this was either wishful thinking or an ignorance of Pop art — especially since against the neo-Dada grain of Pop he had declared in the *Antipodean manifesto* that 'Dada is as dead as the dodo'.³⁴ However the manifesto did have an international context, which was not Pop art but the Cold War. Smith agreed with Terry Smith that it was 'a Cold War document'.³⁵

Smith's retrospective explanation of the international context in which he wrote the manifesto is revealing. 'I must have been', Smith wrote, 'one of the first Australians to witness the new American dogma' as it emerged around 1950, and in it 'I found myself confronted with a mirror image of the dogmas of socialist realism.'³⁶ Smith was seeking a third way, a non-aligned art that ascribed to neither the East nor West: thus his criticism of both US abstraction and Socialist Realism. In this respect the *Antipodean manifesto* is a typical Smith document. Smith was writing at a time when the horizon of social identity had been skewed by the new binary world order of the Cold War. Then, when the Western artworld spoke of the avant-garde's internationalism, its horizon was the new integrated trans-Atlantic world of Western Europe and New York, not the globe. Smith's reputation as an historian of national art is deserved, but if his histories are written against the grain of Western avant-gardism they are written within the context of a global rather than Western worldview and one that identifies with the classic idea of Europe and an earlier European avant-garde culture.

Smith's worldview

While Smith stands against the Western artworld's narrowing worldview, his world-consciousness is grounded in pre-Cold War patterns of thinking. Smith was no Marshall McLuhan. His notion of globalization derives from the classic idea of Europe and its critique by the early-twentieth century avant-garde. Its ideas provided the basis of his critique of the Western idea. However, if wrong footed his critique remains timely, as art historiography and critical thinking more generally has failed 'to respond to globalization and move beyond a preoccupation with an

³⁰ Bernard Smith, 'The Antipodean Manifesto', 195.

³¹ Smith was defended from an unlikely quarter, the internationalist Robert Hughes, who observed that Smith was not, 'as some critics at the time mistakenly thought, trying to promote Australiana'. (Robert Hughes, *The Art of Australia*, Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1970, 246.)

³² Smith, 'Notes on Abstract Art', 193.

³³ Smith, 'Notes on Abstract Art', 193.

³⁴ Smith, 'The Antipodean Manifesto', 195.

³⁵ Bernard Smith, 'The Truth About the Antipodeans', *The Death of the Artist as Hero*, 202.

³⁶ Smith, 'Notes on Abstract Art', 186.

exclusively Western range of issues'.³⁷ Smith's historiography reminds us that the discipline originally had a larger worldview. Indeed, he finds it curious that globalization is proving so momentous for the discipline when the world is hardly a new discovery and the Enlightenment, of which the discipline of art history is a product, is distinguished by its cosmopolitanism—as he showed in *European vision*. This, in part, explains why he turns away from the current revisionism, defending the old German professors to the end.

Smith was attracted to art history in his formative years because of its worldview. From Australia even the most Eurocentric art history has a world-dimension, and thus was an antidote to the nationalist ideology that had increasingly alarmed the young Smith. To him its posturing was an evil wind. This is why Spengler's and Toynbee's world histories appealed to him, not just intellectually, but at a deep emotional even spiritual level. Their worldview, while conscious that the idea of Europe was at its end, was nevertheless fashioned from its precepts. It pre-disposed Smith to the founding fathers of art historiography, whom he considered to be Winckelmann and Hegel.³⁸

Spengler was one of Winckelmann's many German admirers, and his *Decline of the West* had a huge impact on Smith in his early twenties. Spengler argued that the modern age owes its spirit and character to the de-centred Copernican universe and its extension to the earth following Europe's discoveries of the New World. From that point, wrote Spengler, 'West-Europe became a province in a gigantic whole. Thenceforward the history of the Western Culture has a *planetary* character.'³⁹

If Spengler's world-picture orientated the young Smith, his main guide to delineating the forces and tendencies of globalization was Marx. Marx understood capitalism as a force of globalization, and one whose relations penetrated every aspects of social life. Imperialism, which was capitalism in action at its inevitable global scale, was not simply an economic and political force but also a cultural one. This is the basic thesis of Smith's *Place, taste and tradition*, which he claimed is the first Marxist history of a national art. Smith even recognized the relationship between Imperialism and Winckelmann's investigations,⁴⁰ as if imperialism was a hegemonic ideology that penetrated the most arcane places of academia, including art historiography.

However, as Smith argued in *Modernism's history*, if imperialism was hegemonic it was neither homogenous nor the be-all of globalization.⁴¹ The principal agents of imperialism may have been a cabal centered in Europe's capitals, but imperialism also produced counter currents. Marxism was particularly interested in these counter currents, especially as they played out in nationalist anti-colonial movements across the world after the 1914-18 war. In this respect Smith pre-empted Dussel's argument that the critical side of modernity had its origins in Europe's colonies, not Europe, and that 'a great part of the achievements of modernity were

³⁷ Delanty, *The Cosmopolitan Imagination*, 2.

³⁸ See Smith, *The Formalesque*, 44.

³⁹ Spengler, Oswald, *The decline of the West*, London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1934, 334.

⁴⁰ Smith, *Place, Taste and Tradition*, 25.

⁴¹ See especially Bernard Smith, *Modernism's History: A Study of Twentieth-Century Art and Ideas*, Sydney: UNSW Press, 1998, 305-42.

not exclusively European but rose from a continuous dialectic of impact and counter-impact, effect and counter-effect, between modern Europe and its periphery.⁴² This dialectical model of resistance and adaptation at a cultural level structured Smith's historiography, and has proved its most lasting and influential aspect.⁴³

One way of picturing the historiography of Smith's worldview is through the optics of perspective. Spengler argued that Renaissance perspective was a Copernican technology for delineating infinite space, which is why it has often been considered a metaphor of imperialism and even a paradigm for the idea of Europe. As if pre-figuring the Kantian subject, perspectival space gave priority 'to the observer, who in choosing his distance asserts his dominion' (Spengler)⁴⁴ and so imposes his vision upon the world. In this scheme Smith's art historiography is a reverse perspective that, like Cubism, makes the world and not the viewer's eye the vanishing point.

After the 1939-45 war, as the resistance to European imperialism intensified in wars of national liberation, Europe became increasingly conscious of the world's gaze upon it. This is when *European vision* was written. Well in advance of any other art history it embodies this new reverse-perspective of the postcolonial period. It might have been more accurately titled *The South Pacific in European Vision*, as its thesis, to quote Smith, is that: 'with the expansion of European culture over the globe it is the exotic frontier cultures which have to a large extent determined taste and much of the movement of style'.⁴⁵ However, *European vision* remains a quasi-postcolonial document because for Smith the Empire speaks back in the frame of the Empire—i.e. within the discursive parameters of the classic idea of Europe.

With this in mind, we can better appreciate Smith's unique geographical take on the German professors. His distant vision penetrated their local motives, reconfiguring their art historiography for his time and place. As previously mentioned, the perspective of Europeans in Australia is invariably global because they feel what Geoffrey Blainey called 'the tyranny of distance'.⁴⁶ The anxiety and alienation of isolation is the recurring cliché of European-Australian art historiography and also the European-Australian psyche. In 1974 Terry Smith called it the 'provincialism problem'.⁴⁷ No wonder that Robert Hughes, reiterating the opening sentence of *Place, taste and tradition* in his book on Australian art, concluded: 'the chief interest which Australian painting holds for historians' is 'the vexed relationship between Australian and overseas art'.⁴⁸

Bernard Smith had three original things to say about Australia's so-called isolation. Firstly, it is greatly exaggerated; secondly, it has the stupefying or

⁴² Enrique Dussel, *The Underside of Modernity: Apel, Ricouer, Rorty, Taylor, and the Philosophy of Liberation*, trans. Eduardo Mendiesa, Atlantic Highlands, New Jersey: Humanities Press International, 1996, 132.

⁴³ In particular it preempted postcolonial histories, such as those by Nicholas Thomas, who was very influenced by *European vision*.

⁴⁴ Spengler, *The Decline of the West*, 311.

⁴⁵ Bernard Smith, 'The Myth of Isolation', *The Death of the Artist as Hero*, 1988, 229

⁴⁶ Geoffrey Blainey, *The Tyranny of Distance*, South Melbourne: Sun Books, 1974.

⁴⁷ Terry Smith, 'The Provincialism Problem', *Art Forum*, 13:1, September 1974, 54–59.

⁴⁸ Hughes, *The Art of Australia*, 23.

hypnotic effect of myth; and thirdly, it reflected a Eurocentric mindset that espoused what he considered to be the preposterous belief that Australia is home to 'an exotic art ... standing outside the Renaissance tradition'.⁴⁹ Smith was referring to European art in Australia, not Indigenous art—which then was invisible to Australian art historiography.

Smith also noted that the myth of isolation has two opposed perspectives: the imperialist perspective of cultural cringe and a reverse-perspective in which the exotic determines taste and style, a vital primitivism that lent the exotic an uncanny power. Art historiography, he argued in a most original way, was founded on this latter perspective. This is why he insisted that Winckelmann's historiography, and indeed a general stirring at the time across Europe for ancient Greece, was 'Europe's first "Primitivism"'.⁵⁰

Smith recognized in Winckelmann's historiography something of his own situation as an Australian art historian. Commenting on Winckelmann's attraction to a far off place and time (i.e. ancient Greece), Smith wrote: 'Distance is not a tyranny to serious historians; it is a challenge. It restrains him or her from being advocates of their own place and time.'⁵¹ In other words, he recognizes the cosmopolitan impulse that founded art historiography, namely seeking an encounter with the other in order to make strange one's own position. If Smith was also making a wry aside at the age of 90 on his own practice, his real purpose was to insist on the planetary perspective of the discipline in order to counter, in his words: 'A common criticism made of art history, advanced by revisionist and contemporary critics ... that it is Eurocentric.'⁵² Citing Gottfried Semper, Alois Riegl, Aby Warburg and even the Nazi supporter Josef Strzygowski—i.e. a century-long period from the mid-nineteenth to the mid-twentieth centuries that Michael Podro dubbed the 'central tradition'⁵³—Smith argued that from its beginning the discipline was intensely interested in the world and not just Europe.⁵⁴ To him, it seemed, the problem was not with the discipline but with the amnesia of new-generation practitioners and more generally the Eurocentric tendencies of post-war art historiography. No wonder Smith was particularly pleased by Gombrich's last book, *The preference for the primitive* (2002). Not only did its scope conform to his sense of what art history is but it also mentioned his own work.⁵⁵

If Smith's reverse-perspective seemingly offers a new way of doing art historiography, Smith insisted on its radical return to origins. His motive was to legitimize his own practice within a discipline that, as he often complained, had become obsessively Eurocentric. However, while Smith found comfort in Winckelmann's cosmopolitanism, to what extent could Winckelmann's eighteenth-century concerns—which might be considered a manifesto of the classic idea of Europe—be of use to Smith let alone the twenty-first century?

⁴⁹ Smith, 'The Myth of Isolation', 229.

⁵⁰ Smith, *The Formalesque*, 45.

⁵¹ Smith, *The Formalesque*, 40.

⁵² Smith, *The Formalesque*, 44.

⁵³ Michael Podro, *The Critical Historians of Art*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986, xv.

⁵⁴ See Smith, *The Formalesque*, 44-49.

⁵⁵ See E. H. Gombrich, *The Preference for the Primitive: Episodes in the History of Western Art and Taste* (London: Phaidon, 2002), 177, 94, 218.

3. Smith, Winckelmann and the idea of Europe

Writing in the mid-eighteenth century, Winckelmann developed an art historiography that articulated the classic idea of Europe. Like many Enlightenment thinkers, he envisaged it as an alternative to Christendom and the *ancien régime* from which a new world was struggling to be born. He looked to the Ottoman east, but to an earlier time before Christendom and the Islamic empire, when the Mediterranean was the hub of the known world, just as Europe now was the hub of global empires. Importantly, in terms of the argument being developed here, Winckelmann employed a cosmopolitan imagination and one that follows the precepts of that self-declared 'citizen of the world'⁵⁶ and renowned classical Greek philosopher, Diogenes. Like him, Winckelmann sought to cut through conventions to the nature of things. Thus, it was obvious to Winckelmann that notions of beauty invariably involved the projection of conventions, in this case ethnic values. To counter such prejudice, he looked beyond his local *habitus* to ancient Greece, which he treated as a sort of utopia. Since the sixteenth century the utopian trope had been a feature of thinkers seeking to develop a new idea of Europe. Not only did the ancient world not exist, as is often pointed out, 'Greece as we know it today did not exist' in Winckelmann's time. Hence it 'was perfectly suited to represent a utopian ... artistic ideal.'⁵⁷ Smith is more precise in recognizing Winckelmann's primitivism, noting that then 'Greece was under the control of the Ottoman Empire.'⁵⁸ Like a true primitivist and indeed cosmopolitan, Winckelmann identified with the other, in this case the pagan other of Christendom.⁵⁹ The idea of ancient Greece was then a form of self-estrangement, a way of thinking about an alternative Europe.

In particular, Winckelmann's cosmopolitan interest in ancient Greece was an expression of his estrangement from Europe's *ancien régimes*, which drew their authority from Rome, and his desire for a new type of European. He lent his utopian vision substance by grounding it in ethnocentric terms, albeit ethnocentric terms intended to make strange the old world values of Christendom. He drew direct analogies between the universal qualities of 'good taste' and the character of ancient Greeks as a people. His claim, in the preface to *The history of ancient art*, that he sought 'to execute this design in regard to the art of each nation individually, but specially with reference to that of the Greeks',⁶⁰ seems innocent enough but hardly prepares the reader for the extraordinary degree to which he locates the origins of beauty and the superiority of Greek art in Greek ethnicity, in which he claims that the beauty of the ancient Greek body is the direct model of the statutes that he so

⁵⁶ Laërtius, *Lives of the Eminent Philosophers* at Book 6, 63.

⁵⁷ Hans Belting, *The Germans and Their Past: A Troublesome Relationship*, trans. Scott Kleager, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998, 17.

⁵⁸ Smith, *The Formalesque*, 45

⁵⁹ Robert Fine and Vivienne Boon define the cosmopolitan project as framed by universal notions of humanism in which: 'It is through the act of looking through the eye of the Other, through a flourishing of Otherness, that we are able to see the nature of humanity.' (Fine, 'Introduction: Cosmopolitanism: Between Past and Future', 6)

⁶⁰ Johann Joachim Winckelmann, *The History of Ancient Art*, trans. G. Henry Lodge, Volume 1, Boston: James R. Osgood and Company, 1880, 107.

admired. Thus Winckelmann's ethno-political-aesthetic tendencies combine into an historiography that, said Donald Preziosi, is written as a narrative of 'an entire national artistic tradition ... [art] was made to bear the burden of being an emblem of the *totality* of a people's culture: its quintessential expression. To understand a people's art was to understand that people in the deepest possible way.'⁶¹ Ironic as it may now seem, Winckelmann's cosmopolitan aesthetic-ethnology presages the metaphors of national identity that would soon galvanize the classic idea of Europe and its discourse of modernity.

This particular matrix of cosmopolitanism, nationalism and ethnocentrism reverberates through the age of imperialism and modernity, and also throughout Smith's historiography. Its origins are in the Enlightenment's contestation of the universal claims made by Christendom i.e. the Roman Catholic Church. By Winckelmann's time these claims had been contested for over 200 years by the Protestant rebellions; and in this respect Winckelmann's ethno-paganism can be considered a type of Protestantism. More to the point, he was writing 100 years after the Treaty of Westphalia that settled these religious divisions across Europe, and which effectively set the agenda for the development of the nation-state in Europe. Over the next 100 years, this agenda would be played out with particular intensity in Germany.

This wider context of the European idea, which came to fruition in the nineteenth century, framed art historiography from its beginning, as if it was a discourse designed to invent myths of nationhood. Here ethnicity is an ideal that, in Winckelmann's historiography, does the work of the universal to which particular expressions must gesture if not conform. Paradoxically, Winckelmann's initial use of the East to critique Europe—which was a common strategy of European intellectuals at the time—articulated the classic idea of Europe that has dominated cultural history since, namely that Europe is heir to ancient Greece and ancient Greece is proto-European⁶²—as if Christendom and Europe's then isolation from the East and the world had never happened. In Dussel's somewhat cynical words, this 'ideological invention ... kidnapped Greek culture as exclusively western and European and then posited both the Greek and Roman cultures as the centre of world history.'⁶³ Smith recognized this trajectory as myth, but took Winckelmann's foregrounding of ancient Greece as an example of art historiography's cosmopolitanism rather than its Eurocentric tendencies—when arguably it is an example of both. Smith also took Winckelmann's aesthetic-ethnology for granted.⁶⁴

Winckelmann's aesthetic-ethnology is more than academic. His motive was explicitly nationalist. Winckelmann looked to the exotic culture of ancient Greece

⁶¹ Donald Preziosi, 'Art as History: Introduction', in Donald Preziosi (ed.), *The Art of Art History: A Critical Anthology*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998, 26.

⁶² See Enrique Dussel, 'Europe, Modernity, and Eurocentrism', *Nepantla: views from south*, 1: 3, 2000, 465-78.

⁶³ Dussel, 'Europe, Modernity, and Eurocentrism', 468.

⁶⁴ Because 'modernity is the harbinger of identity', Tomlinson observed, it has become 'a common assumption that identity-formation' takes the ethnocentric and nationalist 'forms of identity construction as we currently understand it in the global-modern West'. (John Tomlinson, 'Globalization and Cultural Identity', in David Held and Anthony G. McGrew (eds.), *The Global Transformations Reader: An Introduction to the Globalization Debate*, 2nd edn., Cambridge: Polity Press, 2003, 271.)

not as a disinterested scholar but as a model for the taste and style of his time and place. His primitivism was a displaced nationalism that, at this time of Rome's dominance, opened a space for German art.⁶⁵ Winckelmann was based in Dresden, then the centre of German art. While he proffered the challenge of Athens, he never actually went there. Firstly, ancient Athens was in his imagination not in Athens, and secondly, as Belting observed, 'much of ancient Athens was in Dresden' and Winckelmann even compared Dresden to an Athenian 'colony'.⁶⁶ 'To seek these sources once meant to go to Athens; but from now on,' he declared, 'Dresden will be the Athens of artists.'⁶⁷

Arguably, the discipline of art history took such strong roots in Germany as an antidote to its cultural cringe. Listen to one of Winckelmann's most ardent German admirers, Johann Wolfgang Goethe, in an ironic rebuke of Winckelmann, complaining about the lack of appreciation of Gothic architecture barely five years after Winckelmann's death. Goethe was referring to Strasbourg cathedral, then the tallest building in the world:

And now I should not be angry ... when the German art scholar, upon the hearsay of jealous neighbours, does not appreciate his superiority, belittles his work with the misunderstood word "Gothic", when he should thank God to be able to proclaim aloud that there is German Architecture, our architecture, when the Italian can boast of none of his own, much less the Frenchman.⁶⁸

Goethe's paean to local indigenous 'primitive' art—albeit a hymn to Christendom—also praised, in a deliberate parallel move, Oceanic art recently brought back from Cook's voyages. Here he also followed Winckelmann, who was ecstatic 'at the swift Indian, as he hunts the stag on foot'.⁶⁹ Primitivism, nationalism and cosmopolitanism's world-consciousness were the coordinates by which the first histories of art were written. Indeed, for all his youthful patriotism, Goethe would soon become a leading cosmopolitan of his age, further illustrating that the line between nationalism and cosmopolitanism is a fine and necessary one in the era of Imperialism.⁷⁰ This necessary tension was evident in the discipline of art history as it came of age at the turn of the twentieth century. The next several decades were the heyday of nationalist and world art histories of various persuasions. Germany was a

⁶⁵ See Moshe Barasch, *Modern Theories of Art: From Winckelmann to Baudelaire*, Volume 1, New York: New York University Press, 1990, 103.

⁶⁶ Belting, *The Germans and Their Past*, 19.

⁶⁷ Johann Winckelmann, 'Thoughts on the Imitation of Greek Art in Painting and Sculpture', in Elizabeth Gilmore Holt (ed.), *A Documentary History of Art*, Volume 2, Garden City, New York: Doubleday Anchor Books, 1958, 337.

⁶⁸ Johann Wolfgang Von Goethe, 'Of German Architecture', in Holt, 366.

⁶⁹ He admired 'how easily the blood courses through his veins; how supple and swift will be his nerves and muscles, how lithe his whole body!' (Johann Winckelmann, 'Thoughts on the Imitation of Greek Art in Painting and Sculpture', 338)

⁷⁰ As Marxist theorist Frederic Jameson explained: 'National allegory should be understood as a formal attempt to bridge the increasing gap between the existential data of everyday life within a given nation state and the structural tendency of monopoly capital to develop on a worldwide, essentially transnational scale.' (Frederic Jameson, *Fables of Aggression: Wyndham Lewis, the Modernist as Fascist*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979, 94.)

battleground between cosmopolitans and patriotic appeals to German art that cast aspersions on foreign avant-gardism.⁷¹

In this respect a clear and unbroken genealogy can be traced from Smith's writing, begun during the 1939-45 war, to this German tradition. Smith also inherited the teleological narrative of Winckelmann's historiography, namely its linear movement of birth, maturity and decline. It was a common Enlightenment concept, already evident in Vasari's *Lives* (1550) and echoed later in Hegel's and also Spengler's historiography. It was also an inheritance from Christendom. In the translation from Christendom to the idea of Europe, argues Delanty, the ideology of Christendom was sublimated rather than foreclosed. In this way Europe's secular forms—the nation state, modernity, modernist culture—assumed the character of a master narrative i.e. a narrative of modernity projected into the teleological structure of Christian theology. Delanty dubbed it the 'Eurocentric fallacy'.⁷² As a thinly disguised theology, it became a moral concept with which to legitimize the actions of European states and then the Western world, just as Christendom had legitimized the actions of medieval monarchs. While several turn-of-the-twentieth-century art historians such as Riegl and Wölfflin were critical of such teleology, Smith remained wedded to it.⁷³

Art historiography is a child of the Enlightenment and the classic idea of Europe. However, after the 1914-18 war the verities of Enlightenment lost their moral legitimacy and anti-colonial nationalist movements of liberation began to challenge the hegemony of the classic idea of Europe. Within this ferment emerged the radical surrealist excursions of the 1920s and 30s, which vividly imagined what Smith called 'the ruins of Europe's grand imperial project'.⁷⁴ Their fragmented vision contested the teleology of art historiography and indeed the classic idea of Europe. In exhibitions, artworks and texts, the surrealists juxtaposed images and objects that disrupted the accepted order of things and privileged the repressed and outmoded. While the surrealist worldview drew on utopian and primitivist ideas, their critique was cast in explicit anti-colonial terms that reverberated with the crisis of authority in which Europe's nations now found themselves.⁷⁵ This was the time that Smith came of age and shaped his worldview.

After the 1939-45 war a new landscape of identity emerged, namely the 'highly integrated' trans-Atlantic NATO culture. For Smith it was a betrayal of his youthful ideals. In 1998 he dubbed it 'Eurasian',⁷⁶ which he noted 'conspicuously ignored the rest of the world'.⁷⁷ This new worldview, said Hans Belting, found

⁷¹ For a discussion of the latter, see Marlite Halbertsma, 'The Many Beginnings and the One End of World Art History in Germany, 1900-1933', and, Pfisterer, 'Origins and Principles of World Art History', in Zijlmans, and Damme.

⁷² Delanty, *Inventing Europe: Idea, Identity, Reality*, 13.

⁷³ 'The study of Australian art', he wrote in 1962, 'is the study of an art in its beginnings. A national tradition always matures slowly and in the arts very slowly indeed. So in this book we see the seed-time, the harvest still being beyond knowledge.' (Bernard Smith with Terry Smith, *Australian Painting 1788-1990*, Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1991, vi.

⁷⁴ Smith, *Modernism's History*, 271.

⁷⁵ See James Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth-Century Ethnography, Literature, and Art*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988.

⁷⁶ Smith, *Modernism's History*, 254.

⁷⁷ Smith, *Modernism's History*, 271.

consolation in the mythic idea of 'a shared Occidental heritage' or trans-European culture that appealed to Europe's medieval heritage and a Europe that supposedly existed before its debasement in the Romantic and nationalist movements of modern times.⁷⁸ This idea can be traced to the mid-nineteenth-century politics of *Mitteleuropa*, which after the 1914-18 war developed into the idea of Greater Germany.⁷⁹ Indeed, as Belting suggests, echoes of Nazi ideology, in which the new enemy from the east was communism, are not difficult to discern in conservative post-war art historiography of the West. Thus the 'collective amnesia'⁸⁰ of post-war Western art historiography, which said Belting 'avoided those topics that had dominated the discipline before 1945' —namely national and world art histories. This is why Bernard Smith's historiography is anachronistic: it was out of place even out of time because he saw in the classic idea of the Europe greater potential for world art history than in the new idea of the West.

The discipline that Smith discovered as he came of age was blown away on that fateful day that *Place, taste and tradition* was published. Yet he still clung tenaciously to the old German professors. When Smith wrote in 1962 that 'Australian artists have constantly returned to refresh themselves from the deep fountains of European culture and civilization,'⁸¹ he not only re-invoked the classic idea of Europe, he was also writing about himself and indeed others like him on the edges of the old empire. However Smith remained too close to old paradigms of art historiography. His reverse perspective was not enough. It might recognize that 'a complex dialectic is involved' in 'cultural imperialism', but it remained inside its game: 'a case of attraction and repulsion operating from the centre of empire in response to surges of desire and aversion from its colonies'.⁸² In clinging to the German professors Smith rejected the discipline's Cold War retreat into the Occident but he also missed the opportunity to develop a historiography adequate to the post-imperial world.

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⁷⁸ See Belting, *The Germans and Their Past*, 80-89. The quote, which references a lecture by the German art historian Herbert von Einem, is on p. 86.

⁷⁹ Delanty, *Inventing Europe*, ch. 7.

⁸⁰ Belting, *The Germans and Their Past*, 82

⁸¹ Smith, *Australian Painting 1788-1990*, vi.

⁸² Smith, *Modernism's History*, 306.

