

DOUBLE MODERNITY, PARA-MODERNITY

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A few years ago, Fredric Jameson wrote that the nonmodern “is unavoidably drawn back into a force field in which it tends to connote the ‘pre-modern’ exclusively (and to designate it in our own global present as well).”¹ The non-modern is the residue, then, of modernity that Jameson, following Habermas, portrays as an incomplete project of modernization. Coming at this from a non-Western perspective, and thinking about the production of art today in these terms, I then ask myself under what circumstances non-Western art making can be considered modern. It seems that non-Western art only becomes modern to the degree that it enters the field of Modernism (and its derivative, Postmodernism), to which it has to conform by adopting a set of attendant aesthetic protocols and embracing an ideology of innovation. The term “derivative” may not sit well—it effectively characterizes the postmodern break as internal to modernity—but the rest of this essay will outline a perspective in which this makes a particular kind of sense.

What I particularly appreciate in Jameson’s view of nonmodernity is that he frankly acknowledges modernity’s totalizing thrust, which in artistic production is embodied in Modernism (and its derivatives). In everyday parlance, this thrust is discursively embodied in the “G” words—globalization, globalism, globality, and the global—which serve to keep the non-Western world at a safe conceptual distance, as object rather than cosubject. The ideological power of the “G” words as an interrelated cluster lies in the fact that they rhetorically evoke a two-way process—as modernity extends its reach from the West to the rest of the world, the Rest also moves toward the West. This masks a fundamen-

tal asymmetry, in which the Rest attains subjecthood only to the extent that it becomes part of the West. The Rest—as the nonmodern/premodern—is assigned the false subjecthood of the traditional, which in its diverse forms either evacuates history or makes it finite (because it ends with the arrival of modernity). In these ways the West transforms the Rest into an object of knowledge, desire, and pleasure.

Against this, I want to discuss here two contrasting and unrelated artistic situations: one Chinese and one African, one canonically contemporary and the other outside any contemporary art discourse. Neither of them, in my opinion, can be fully grasped within a conceptual framework that takes for granted the totalization of “our” modernity or of Modernism.² I am presenting them together because in discussions of the West and the Rest, any attempt to challenge the totalizing claims of Western modernity that is made from a single point is immediately neutralized by a binary discourse, whether that be East versus West, the primitive versus the modern, or the one I have just used, the West and the Rest.³ Within these binary frames of reference, challenge inevitably gets characterized as a claim to victimhood. My experiment with triangulation, however awkward, is an attempt to get around this problem.

The assumption here will be that our modernity can be framed in ways other than the diachronic, other than between the pre- and the after; that our modernity—which I shall now start to call Euro-American—is a particular one with an outside that can only be seized geoculturally.⁴ No serious claim for any exteriority of Euro-American modernity could be made on the basis of its mere extension to other parts of the globe; if the notion of alternative modernities ultimately means variations on a Euro-American theme, then there is no escape from Modernism (and its derivatives). So the argument is for a different kind of outside, one that would imply a reconfiguration of our understanding of modernity in general. The basic point, to give it a more systematic formulation, is first that modernity is a larger phenomenon, if that seems possible, than we normally consider it to be; second, that this larger phenomenon should not be confused with its Euro-American formulation; third, that its full description requires the creation of a differentiated typology of modernities to account for its internal complexity; and fourth, that the structure of contemporary modernity lies in the relations among its particular forms and their respective histories (and the relations among these relations).⁵ I am arguing, in other words, for the modernity of certain aspects of the nonmodern and the premodern as these words are currently construed.⁶

THE DOUBLY MODERN

I turn first to China, and contemporary Chinese art, on which I want to offer some very general remarks in a historical perspective. As an art historian who works on much earlier periods, I am especially aware that the sinologist's view of modernity is not necessarily the same as the contemporary art specialist's. The place where this moves from being a disciplinary issue to being a theoretical one is around the concept of the early modern. The most significant historiographic development in recent years with regard to Chinese history from the sixteenth to the nineteenth century has been the debate—still ongoing—over the possibility of characterizing those final four centuries prior to the twentieth century in terms of modernity, on an analogy with the now well accepted early modern period in Europe. I am centrally involved in the debate as a proponent of the “promodern” position, but only on the basis of a narratological argument that relativizes modernity as a diachronic frame of reference (it was one of three available temporal mediations of experience). This relativization is essential if the identification of parallels with Europe is not to turn into a facile transposition of a European frame of reference to the Chinese context.⁷ What is at stake in the debate is the possibility of a modernity that does not ultimately *derive* from Euro-America, though it interacts with it. We need a term to designate this latter possibility—the possibility of incomplete projects of modernization other than our own—so I will speak here of a history of *otherly modernity* in China, from the sixteenth to the nineteenth century.⁸

This is not the place to make the case for a pre-twentieth-century otherly modernity in China—but as a thought experiment one might want to consider how this would alter one's sense of the relation between China and Euro-America.⁹ It would mean that in the seventeenth-century world the encounter between Chinese and Euro-American modernities was an encounter of equals, developmentally speaking.¹⁰ Only in the second half of the eighteenth century did a developmental dysphasia between China and Europe kick in in favor of Europe. Whereas Europe at that point underwent a moment of accelerated social and cultural process that transformed it, China did not. Not that China stopped evolving, as some would have it, but it developed more slowly than Europe, still within the older framework of its otherly modernity. A disjunction between a slow- and a fast-track modernity was then born and made itself felt over the course of the nineteenth century. In the late nineteenth century, an Enlightenment-mediated ideology conditioned by the generalization of industrialization—in other words, modernism in the broadest sense as the ideology of our particular project of modernization—was exported eastward. But the

degree of dysphasia in favor of the Euro-American world rendered China's otherly modernity invisible to Westerners who needed to believe that China-men were mired in an unchanging past. More than a century later, we continue to have difficulty with the idea that a city such as late nineteenth-century Shanghai was born from an encounter not between modernity and tradition, but between two different forms of modern condition and temporality.¹¹ Within China the invisibility of its own otherly modernity was ensured at the beginning of the twentieth century once educated Chinese opted for the Euro-American model of the intellectual over the earlier Chinese model of the *literatus*. The adoption of the subject position of the intellectual together with its accompanying norms of conceptual language imposed the rhetorical assumption that modernity of any kind was a recent arrival from the outside world. In a climate of lost national confidence, Chinese intellectuals took over the prejudices of their Western mentors that consigned anything nonmodernist to the dustbin of tradition. Post-1949 the modernity tradition opposition was taken over by the Communist state.

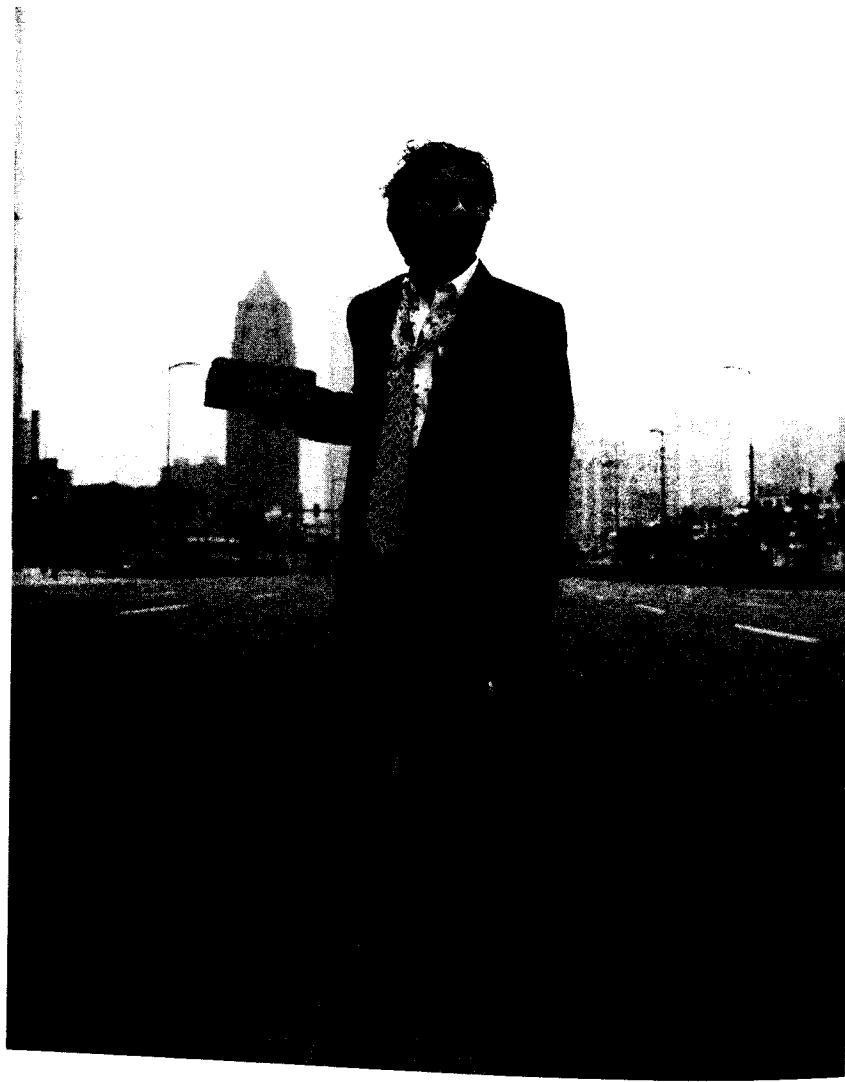
In China today this opposition continues to structure the rhetorical discourse on modernity among transnational artists and critics in China, obscuring what I take to be the reality of the situation. In the historical perspective I have offered, contemporary Chinese art can be said to be *doubly* modern in the sense that it derives from not one but two genealogies or, better, narratives of modernity. It is from this point of view that one needs to assess the contemporaneity that is currently being obsessively pursued in art in the People's Republic of China, as Wu Hung has written, under the name *dangdaixing*, which has more to do with achieving up-to-dateness in relation to the world beyond China than with breaking with the thinking of a previous generation of artists.¹² Dangdaixing recalls the equivalent early twentieth-century obsession with the new, *xin*, and the modern, *xiandai* or *shidai*, which have themselves too hastily been assimilated to a modernist obsession with innovation. As rallying calls, the "new" and the "modern" signified differently in Euro-America and China, and it would be my contention that their effective meaning in Republican-period China came much closer to what is now called contemporaneity, as reflected in the title of a literary journal of the time, *Les contemporains*.¹³ From this point of view, contemporaneity has long been the ideology of a condition of double modernity in China.

These purely theoretical remarks need to be fleshed out more fully than is possible here, but I can at least indicate some aspects of their relevance around the question of the status of nonmodernist features in contemporary Chinese art. Here I want to make a distinction between representation and practice.

Characteristically, on the side of representation all that is not modernist or postmodernist becomes tradition. The easiest way to see this is in works where the artist uses a reference to "tradition" to create the fiction of a ground of nonmodernism from which the artwork emerges in all its up-to-dateness, as in Zhang Dali's graffiti photographs (the pre-twentieth-century building in the background) or Ah Xian's porcelain busts (covered with Ming or Qing dynasty floral designs). Works like these also offer a visual metaphor for current criticism that tends to see every modernist feature of a Chinese artwork as emerging from a ground of nonmodernism that is passive, inert, and malleable. On the side of practice, however, one gets a very different view of the question. Let me give three examples.

First, theatricality, long an important element of contemporary Chinese art, has recently been intensified by the conceptual turn that took place in art in the People's Republic of China in the mid-1990s, as can be seen in the International Center of Photography's exhibition "Between Past and Future," curated by Wu Hung and Christopher Phillips. This ushered in the paradigm of second-order representation, for which photography has provided the most common, though far from the only, technical means.¹⁴ The effect of the layering of representation and performance is very often one of distanciation, and one can certainly view works like Wang Qingsong's *Night Revels of Lao Li* (2000), Zhao Bandi's *Chinese Story* (1999), Ma Liuming's *Fen-Ma Liuming* (1998), or Yang Fudong's *The First Intellectual* (2000) in these terms as a conceptual stylistics, heavy on the attitude. On the other hand, in a longer historical perspective what is striking to me is the very association of theatricality with self-definition, not only because this coupling has a very long history in China, but because, wherever one sees it in pre-twentieth-century Chinese art, it is a response to the instability and unbeliability of available social roles, an index of doubt and independence—and as such, a modern phenomenon.¹⁵ From this point of view, the current landscape of short-circuited subjectivities cannot be accounted for simply in modernist terms.

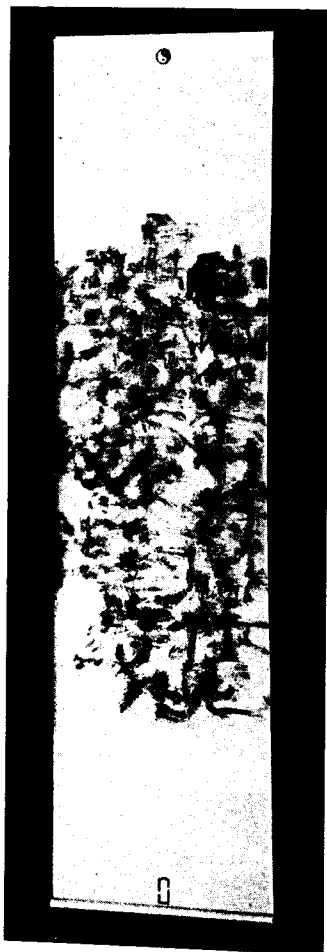
A second aspect of contemporary practice, involving a thematization of the city, may be less familiar, partly because it is not specific to the particular China of the People's Republic. There is a well-known body of work that bears witness to the devastating remaking of Beijing in recent years, but here I have in mind something else, an approach to the city that can be seen here and there among artists in China, Hong Kong, and Taiwan, and among Chinese artists living in other countries. It is particularly to be found in video and photography, where it is often associated with a very slow temporality negating the speed of contemporary urban life. The surface busy-ness of the world is allowed to rush by, as in



Yang Fudong, *The First Intellectual*, 2000. From a triptych of 3 C-prints. Courtesy of the artist.

Ellen Pau's *Recycling Cinema* (2001), featuring a section of a Hong Kong freeway, or is even made to disappear as in Yang Gouang-ming's *City Disqualified* (2001), where one of Taipei's busiest intersections is shown at midday, strangely deserted. The city's accompanying toxic aspects are either eliminated, as in *City Disqualified*, or take on a strange loveliness, as in Li Yongbin's *Face* series of videos, set in Beijing. What is left is the effect of an attenuated and conflicted sense of belonging. And this effect has a clear prehistory in pre-twentieth-century ink painting—not in representations of the city per se but in landscape, which was the genre into which the processing of urban experience was characteristically displaced in China when artists wanted to explore their relationship to their environment. This displacement had much to do with China's otherly modern need to reconcile the shallow time of the city with the deep time of the countryside. What one sees in these contemporary works is, conversely, the reinvention of urban temporality as a new kind of deep time. The city has won but there still exists a memory of something else.

Third, the last few years have seen an exciting return to ink painting and calligraphy by contemporary artists inside and outside China. What they have returned to is rather specific—a tradition of eccentric, iconoclastic self-positioning that is one of the great artistic developments of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. One of the enduring myths about this tradition is that pre-twentieth-century artists of this independent-minded kind were unconcerned with politics except during changes of dynasties, whereas in fact they addressed political issues constantly, albeit obliquely for reasons of self-preservation.¹⁶ So it does not seem surprising to me that painters like the New York-based Yun-fei Ji, commenting on the Three Gorges project in his *The Old One Hundred Names* series (2002), would reference seventeenth-century ink painting, notably the form-generating brush trace of Shitao (1642–1707); or that the stylistic precedents for the political calligraphies of the Yangjiang group of artists lie in this same independent, individualistic tradition.¹⁷ Sha Yeya's 2002 *Powell denied the possibility of war declaration on Iraq, saying that America won't take action without discussion with its allies* is a perfect example, its illegibility recalling the less extreme liberties taken by a group of eighteenth-century painter-calligraphers often termed "Eccentrics." With regard to the Yangjiang calligraphers, I am struck by the fact that they present their work not in the aestheticized terms of calligraphy but as a form of public writing. This position relates their work directly and confrontationally to the exploitation of calligraphy as public writing by Communist Party leaders; however, Mao and the others were themselves following in the footsteps of the Qing dynasty emperors, who in the late seventeenth century were the first to turn calligraphy into public



Sha Yeya, *Powell denied the possibility of war declaration on Iraq, saying that America won't take action without discussion with its allies*, 2002. Hanging scroll, ink on paper, 295 x 78 cm. Courtesy of the artist.

writing to serve as an art of political authority suited to modern circumstances of pseudocontact between political leaders and the people.¹⁸ This history is no less relevant to New York-based Xu Bing's well-known calligraphy project, encapsulated in his nonironic *Art for the People* banner.

I do not have time here to extend the argument to the figure of the artist, other than to point out that the easy assumption of a self-legitimizing role, the reluctance to cede commercial control to others, the instinctive understanding of branding, the sharp calculation of political possibility, and the acceptance that the public responsibility of the artist-intellectual is an issue—all of these practices and attitudes of contemporary Chinese artists were already familiar features of the Chinese art world under the otherly modern conditions of earlier centuries. My last remark would be that if the Chinese world has been doubly modern for at least a century, and if contemporaneity is the ideology of

that condition, then contemporaneity in a relatively strong sense has been part of the modern world for just as long. I take the claim, by the editors of this volume, of a *current* condition of contemporaneity to be a sign that this has finally become everyone's business, and perhaps also, less simply, as a sign that the doubly modern, in the various parts of the world where it exists, may be ready to move beyond its repression of its own history.

THE PARA-MODERN

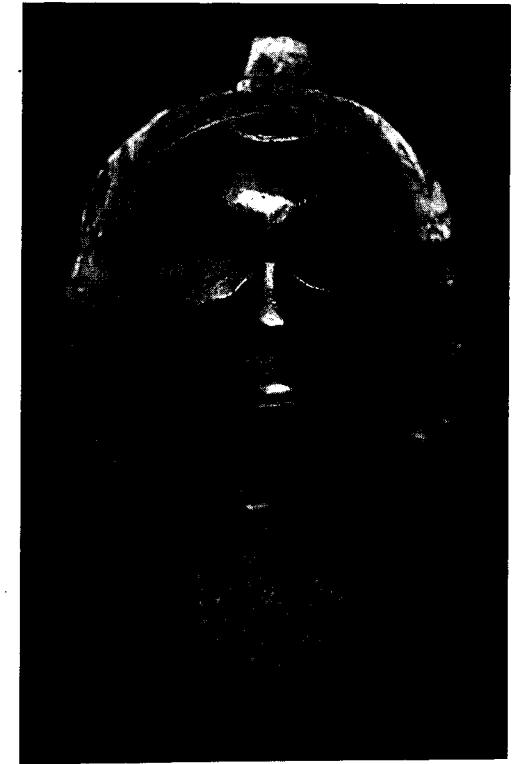
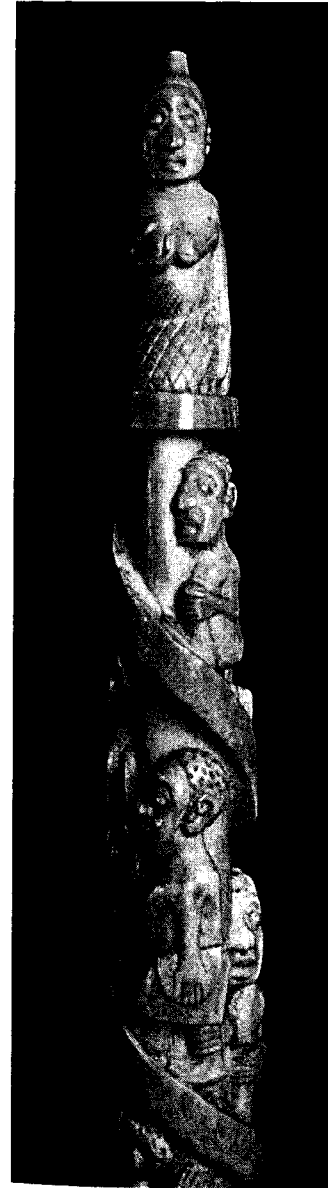
I turn now to Africa. Here I speak from a nonprofessional position, as a collector of modest means. A few years ago, in a hard-hitting article, Zoe Struther challenged the nonmodern characterization of one of the canonical bodies of African masks—the twentieth-century masquerade masks of the Central Pende people of the Democratic Republic of the Congo.¹⁹ She demonstrated that the stripping of authorship from the masks has obscured a century-long history of integration of Pende sculpture into the global market. Conversely, the restoration of authorship to the masks becomes a path to the acknowledgment of the modern condition of their production. The Central Pende sculptors are not an isolated case. Although Struther's careful research has not been widely duplicated, there is enough scattered information available to make it clear that some variant of this argument could potentially be developed for any number of well-known genres of "genuine" African art.²⁰ At the end of her article Struther asks, "Will the 'modern' always look like 'me'?" From my point of view, the question may not go far enough. Simply identifying the shared condition of the global market leads only to a claim for a shared modernity on such a general level that it is hard to see how a specialist of contemporary Euro-American art—or for that matter contemporary African art—might feel directly concerned.

A different way of approaching the problem is suggested by the work of Enid Schildkrout on an artistic genre that was generated by the colonial presence in the northeast of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and which like the Pende facemasks has become part of the Western canon of "genuine" African art. Schildkrout has shown that among the Mangbetu, figural sculpture for both Mangbetu and Western patrons was part of a larger effort of cultural self-definition along ethnic lines—involving an acquisition of fixed or hardened ethnicity—that was specific to the colonial period.²¹ The larger point is that encounter situations force into existence a process of cultural self-distancing or self-consciousness that changes the meaning of practices of representation, because these now become *self*-representation as well. Africanist colleagues stress that this process predates, and continues to happen separately from, the

encounter with Euro-American culture.²² So one must ask: Do the colonial and postcolonial encounter situations significantly change a preexisting intercultural calculus? I believe they do. The entry on to the scene of the juggernaut of capitalism brought with it a potentially unlimited market, with the result that the economic rewards of self-representation increased exponentially. This created the conditions for *acting* on the fact that the disparity of cultural frameworks between Africa and Euro-America created far wider latitude for self-representation. And in the face of the enormous disparity of economic and political power between Africa and Euro-America, the manipulation of Western consumer desire is hardly a politically neutral act.

I will eventually come back to “genuine” African art, but I think the issue is more easily grasped initially through its unspoken other: forgeries. These have a truly abject status in scholarly discussion, routinely being scorned and abused as a kind of aesthetic pornography. To the degree that the successful forgery wreaks havoc with historical understanding this is perhaps an understandable attitude; on the other hand, it also obscures the intrinsic interest of these artifacts. In the remarks that follow I shall consider forgeries to be works whose physical construction embodies a deceitful claim to have been produced for the purposes of ritual or other use within an indigenous context. Obviously, any such forgery involves a self-conscious representation of an aspect of African culture, and it is part of the definition of a forgery at this moment in the history of faking that the object purports to be a nonmodern/premodern artifact, either preceding or escaping the intercultural contact of the colonial period.²³ At this point I suspect that some readers may have a mental image of the low-quality examples offered on the sidewalk outside museums like the Whitney. Let me ask you to slide that image out of your mind.²⁴ In this discussion I am concerned with more ambitious artifacts, some of which might convince an experienced dealer or museum curator, while others, although they might not deceive someone so expert, would take in someone less experienced (like me). Some of these forgeries are copies or even replicas of specific genuine artifacts; many more, however, make reference to an artifact *type*.²⁵

Forged artworks of this kind have been produced in Central and West Africa for over a century, often by artists unrelated to the people whose art they are imitating. Produced for sale to outsiders, these artifacts are sometimes very similar to objects made for indigenous use; in the early days especially they were sometimes identical except for the fact that they showed no evidence of having actually been used. It did not take long for African producers to discover that collectors prized evidence of use as an element of an aura of primitive authenticity; today, signs of wear are a feature of every ambitious forgery. The *aura* of



Kongo peoples, Angola, ivory tusk for the export market, carved with a procession of male figures advancing toward a kneeling female figure, late nineteenth–early twentieth century, height 21.8 cm, height of detail 15 cm. Collection of the author.

Unknown African artist (country unknown), contemporary forgery of a Fang reliquary head. Wood, height 29.7 cm. Collection of the author.

the primitive is the forger's lodestone and goal. The producers' area of creativity is the staging of an illusion of authenticity, a representation of the tribal, that reproduces or exaggerates elements of indigenous art making to meet the expectations of a partially informed outsider audience.²⁶ This does not preclude other kinds of adaptation of forms to outsider taste: the scale, the materials, the surfaces, and the iconography often anticipate a function of bourgeois decoration. However, the most successful forgeries are never reducible to mere decoration because they not only admit of concentrated and sustained attention, but also characteristically demand it. Even their absorption is theatrical.

Because the most ambitious examples can be strikingly beautiful or grotesque, and impressively inventive, they have made their way into collections and museums. Obviously, no collector or curator likes to be duped, but few curators and fewer collectors entirely escape this fate.²⁷ When forgeries go unrecognized, they are admired alongside the genuine article; but as soon as the secret is out, a profound embarrassment on the part of the duped consigns them to oblivion.²⁸ Although the factor of deceit might at first seem to explain the discomfort that the African forgeries cause, a more important malaise is figured in negative whenever the unmasked forgery is recognized to be too self-conscious, or indeed is unmasked *because* it is too self-conscious, because it seeks to please, and seeks to please us here in the West. What is this "too"? We are happy to accept self-consciousness when the modern African artist accepts transnational norms with regard to modes and genres and mediums of art making, and protocols of authorship. But when the medium of art making is an indigenous African one, the Euro-American audience by and large wants that aura of the primitive, and it is the lack of our own kind of self-consciousness that we look for to guarantee this aura. The transnational African artist may justifiably object that she or he does not aim to please a Western audience but to discomfit and confront it. This, however, speaks to a difference in the way self-consciousness is exploited, not to the fact that self-consciousness is shared by forger and transnational artist alike.

What, then, is the frame of reference within which the forgery might make sense and, further, be seen to deserve respect and even admiration? The forgery has a parasitic relation to both indigenous art and Modernism, and I want to understand this relation as a productive one. On the one hand, the forgery embodies a limited and qualified engagement with Modernism, through the productive distance that it takes from its own culture by anticipating modernist needs. On the other, it maintains continuity with an indigenous nonmodern relationship to time through its fidelity to the artistic medium. The forgery represents a triage of the processes and forces arriving from outside. This

phenomenon needs its own name: I shall describe it as *para-modernity*.²⁹ Contrasting with the narrative overdetermination of the doubly modern, para-modernity claims no history, no narrative of its own; it does have a history, of course, but the *claim* to a history is not part of its self-definition.

As long as only forgeries are in play, the question of para-modernity will seem trivial or unimportant. But as the example of Mangbetu figurative sculpture showed, para-modernity can be a feature of indigenous practice as well. In fact, Zoe Struther's argument on Pende sculpture demonstrates, in my terms, not so much the modernity but more narrowly the *para-modern* dimension of large parts of indigenous practice in the twentieth century.³⁰ Part of the usefulness of the forgery for a theoretical argument is that it provides a bridge between this para-modern dimension of "genuine" African art on the one hand, and the vast realm of artistic genres specific to the intercultural interface on the other.³¹ Let us not forget that these latter fully declared genres of intercultural encounter have a history as long as the history of direct contact between Europe, or later Euro-America, with non-Western cultures—in other words, going back to the sixteenth century. It is revealing that the names usually given to this kind of artistic production—tourist art, souvenir art, export art, and so on—define it in terms of the modern consumers of Euro-America and, nowadays, Asia as well. In contrast, a para-modern frame of reference privileges the producer's perspective, by acknowledging both the continuities of technique or style with precolonial practice and the productive distance from African culture that is absorbed from another, more thorough-going form of modernity.

The ideology of the para-modern can be described as a special form of contemporaneity: what one might call a simultaneous claim to contradictory temporalities, or temporal disjunction for short. The anthropologist Johannes Fabian has written that "radical contemporaneity would have as a consequence that we experience the primitive as co-present, hence as co-subjects, not objects, of history."³² The para-modern frame of reference contributes to this goal, I hope, and claims a place for such art on a shared playing field with modernist and doubly modern practices without at the same time denying the fundamental differences.

In conclusion let me return to the initial question of the totalizing thrust of an undifferentiated theory of modernity generalized from the Euro-American case. Along with the tendency to totalization go two implications for artistic form. The first is that modernist and modernist-derived forms do their work of modernity solely across the categories of Modernism and Postmodernism. The second implication—the flip side of the first—is that there are no nonmodernist or nonmodernist-derived mediums of contemporary art, and that the only

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In conclusion let me return to the initial question of the totalizing thrust of an undifferentiated theory of modernity generalized from the Euro-American case. Along with the tendency to totalization go two implications for artistic form. The first is that modernist and modernist-derived forms do their work of modernity solely across the categories of Modernism and Postmodernism. The second implication—the flip side of the first—is that there are no nonmodernist or nonmodernist-derived mediums of contemporary art, and that the only

place for nonmodernist forms is in quotation, as fragments. The satisfyingly bothersome challenge of the doubly modern and the para-modern is that neither one can be integrated into an expanded parsing of Modernism and Postmodernism. The doubly modern resists such integration by its historical depth; even if one pursues the prehistory of Modernism back to the sixteenth century, one never reaches a point where China's otherly modernity can be derived from a Euro-American paradigm. The para-modern, on the other hand, resists integration due to its use of indigenous mediums, which goes far beyond the mere quotation of nonmodernist or nonmodernist-derived forms as fragments.

I have introduced the doubly modern through China and the para-modern through Africa. But I could have reversed this, at least partly. There is also a Chinese history of para-modernity, originally centered on its seaports and on the imperial court, and these days highly visible in the more commercial forms of cinema and contemporary art. (I generally call this "Chinaspace" to distinguish it from the transnational commitment to innovation.)³³ But even within the realm of transnational practice, the important theme of self-representation as Chinese is incomprehensible without taking into account its relation to this para-modern history. I might also mention the hostile discourse within the People's Republic that classes much of contemporary Chinese art as a form of export art.³⁴ I do hesitate, on the other hand, to claim an early African history of otherly modernity leading to a present double modernity in contemporary African art, but only because I am not an Africanist and am not competent to make the case. In pre-twentieth-century circumstances modernity is usually geographically highly localized; I see no reason to rule out its presence in sub-Saharan Africa a priori, and I am particularly curious about the history of Nigeria.

I hope it goes without saying that although I have not mentioned other parts of the world, I am putting these concepts forward as potentially of wider usefulness. As much as I admire the achievement of postcolonial theory, and as much as I am convinced by Dipesh Chakrabarty's attempt to provincialize Europe within Europe's own paradigm, it seems to me that this is still a more limited provincialization than is necessary.³⁵ I cannot myself go along with postcolonial theory's acceptance of Modernism's totalizing claims. And I want to ask speculatively, still within the parameters of the thought experiment I suggested earlier, whether it is possible that postcolonial theory itself has been created as much from a position of double modernity as from the position of Modernism.

Modernism, the doubly modern, and the para-modern: these are simply

lenses that place us differently and through which one can construct different parallaxic representations of contemporary art.³⁶ Moving from one placement to another, transversally, is not likely to leave anything looking quite the same as before, because it will no longer be fixed in one given place.³⁷ And this goes as much for the Euro-American world as for any other part of the globe. Perhaps more?

NOTES

- 1 Jameson, *A Singular Modernity*, 215.
- 2 In my choice of the word "situation" I am thinking of Alain Badiou's implacable philosophical critique of cultural difference as understood in identitarian terms ("Does the Other Exist?"). His argument, which I find persuasive, is that since there are only singular *situations*, the problem is not one of difference but of the Same. Yet Badiou's critique is itself open to the objection that the very singularity of the situation loses its density if alterity is denied. The price of his argument is that a place has to be found for alterity within the order of the Same—an alterity not of identity but of the situation in all its contingency. I doubt that this contingency can be grasped without the kind of differentiation of modernities for which I argue below.
- 3 Despite the great differences between the two artistic situations discussed here, and despite the fact that each represents a very specific case within the modern and contemporary artistic production of China or Africa, nonetheless they share something important in common. If "our" modernity finds its ideology in Modernism, these are both examples of situations in which modernity cannot so easily aspire to ideological formulation, partially so in the Chinese case and wholly so in the African example. For us, Modernism as the ideology of modernity is a problem; but in the perspective that I wish to offer, we are privileged to have it be that problem.
- 4 I am using the idea of an outside in Niklas Luhmann's terms as an observing position, including in it the possibility that the outside can also inhabit the inside. See Luhmann, "Observation of the First and Second Order."
- 5 Nothing in what I have said changes the fact that modernity itself is a problematic concept, but does perhaps justify setting aside its problems temporarily for the problem at hand. To construct a narrative of Euro-American modernity around subjectivity, consciousness, self-consciousness, or reflexivity, for example, may indeed amount to a lapse into ideology, following Jameson's third maxim of modernity. But the refusal to bring these categories to bear on the situations that I will be discussing might be considered equally ideological, albeit in a different way.
- 6 My grateful thanks go to the following colleagues and friends who generously offered criticism of earlier versions of this essay: Francesca dal Lago, Dorothy Ko, Joan Kee, Sarah Brett Smith, and Susan Vogel; as well as to Nancy Condee, Bruno Latour, Terry Smith, and Wu Hung, all of whom offered helpful comments following the conference presentation.
- 7 I should mention three points in order to clarify my position, which is somewhat atypical among proponents of a long-term history of modernity in China. First,

modernity, as I use the term, is not simply a condition but also a form of narrative representation that narrates the past, backward so to speak, from a starting point in an ever shifting present. As a form of narrative representation I distinguish it from two other forms that also have analytic purchase in the Chinese situation: narratives of belatedness, which start from one or other ideal moment in the past, and narratives of dynastic cyclical time, which have a cosmic starting point outside human time. Although one may, for the sake of convenience, speak of an early modern China, this means only that a narrative of modernity has relative precedence over the others from the sixteenth century onward; it in no sense implies that narratives of belatedness or dynastic time stop being relevant at that point in history—indeed, they continue to be relevant today. In other words, modernity belongs to a larger, disjunctive diachronics. Second, a narrative of modernity has usefulness only to the degree that its representation brings to visibility an existing condition of modernity. That condition, from the sixteenth to the early nineteenth century, had both a “hardware” and a “software” dimension. On the hardware side, the elements of a modern condition included, *inter alia*, the replacement (*pace* Anthony Giddens) of space by place as trade and technology (and also, one might add, increased state efficiency) broke down barriers of distance and speed; the autonomization and differentiation of businesses, professions, and spheres of knowledge; the expansion, though along pathways very different from Europe, of a discursive space of independent opinion and societal debate; the emergence of cities as a political force with which the state had to reckon; and what Bruno Latour—in his *Pandora’s Hope*, 195–96—terms the increasingly intricate mesh binding the human and the nonhuman in shared collectives. On the software side, a modern condition implies among other things: the relatively greater importance of a sense of the unarguable difference (for better as well as for worse) of present-day circumstances from those of any other time; an intense awareness of social and psychic disjunction; an aspiration to autonomy in relation to the state, the market, and the community, often qualified by the desire for acceptance and legitimation; an intensified social self-consciousness, or reflexivity; a tolerance for doubt with regard to established social discourses; and the floating free of a psychophysical concept of subjecthood challenging the previously normative hierarchical social networking of the human subject. The third point that needs to be made concerns the use of a Western term, “modernity,” in the Chinese context. The Chinese registered the above described developments discursively through constant recourse to two different but closely related master terms. The first, *jin*, covers a tightly focused semantic field corresponding to our words “today,” “present-day,” “the present.” This was a term that modernity shared with the narrative of belatedness, where it also played an important role. The second term, *qi*, had a contrastingly vast semantic range, covering: the strange, extraordinary, or exceptional; the novel and the exotic; individualism and originality; and difference. The *qi* of the present brings us very close, I believe, to the idea of modernity. For a relevant bibliography on all these issues, see the following note.

8 Publications adopting and adapting the paradigm of the early modern to the Chinese situation in diverse ways include Rowe, *Hankow*; Clunas, *Superfluous Things* and *Pictures and Visuality in Early Modern China*; Hay, “The Diachronics of Early Qing

Visual and Material Culture,” “The Kangxi Emperor’s Brush Traces,” *Shitao*, and “Toward a Disjunctive Diachronics of Chinese Art History”; and Rawski, “The Qing Formation and the Early-Modern Period.” Struve, *The Qing Formation*, includes several dissenting essays.

- 9 It is sometimes startling to see where the absence of a concept of the otherly modern can lead. I have found Niklas Luhmann’s theory of the functional differentiation and autonomization of self-creating social systems to be one of the most effective interpretative lenses through which the otherly modernity of seventeenth-century Chinese painting and society can be recognized as such. But this requires breaking with Luhmann’s own assumption that, historically, modernity was a Euro-American monopoly until the franchise was opened at the end of the nineteenth century. A few years ago, in a footnote that has a Morellian revealingness, Luhmann shared his views on, of all things, Chinese painting: “We are not questioning the high artistic achievements, e.g., of Chinese painting or Indian music. Nor do we intend to look down on these accomplishments from a European perspective. We merely point out that one cannot speak of evolution in these cases, nor of structural changes heading toward an ever-increasing improbability. On the contrary, what impresses us in art forms of this kind is the constancy of the perfection accomplished. To be sure, there are developments in Chinese painting that could be interpreted as evolution—especially the shift from a linear and distinctly ornamental style of contours to a spontaneous style that expresses the unity of the brush stroke and the painterly result. But one can hardly claim that such changes lead to the differentiation of a self-evolving art system. Rather, Chinese painting is an indication of what kind of evolutionary opportunities reside in ornamental art forms” (*Art as a Social System*, 379–80, n. 78). Although Luhmann’s characterization of Chinese painting as a quasi-natural phenomenon, and the portrayal of its artists as hostages to a process divorced from historical time, is, shall we say, idiosyncratic, it does give the measure, I think, of the difficulty of imagining the existence of otherly modern histories.
- 10 In my view, if one were to push their respective narratives of modernity back even further, to, say, the eleventh century—without here going into the arguments over the validity of viewing such early periods in a perspective of modernity—then China rather than Europe would seem the more modern society. By 1600, Europe had done no more than catch up with China.
- 11 Hay, “Painting and the Built Environment in Late Nineteenth-Century Shanghai.”
- 12 Wu, “Between Past and Future,” 26.
- 13 The journal’s Chinese title was *Xiandai*, literally meaning “modern.”
- 14 For a detailed discussion see Wu, “Between Past and Future,” 25–26.
- 15 Hay, “The Conspicuous Consumption of Time.”
- 16 See, for example, Hay, “Culture, Ethnicity and Empire in the Work of Two Eighteenth Century ‘Eccentric Artists.’”
- 17 Yangjiang is a seaside town in Guangdong, which has become a center of contemporary art practice due initially to the efforts of Zheng Guogu, a native of the town and graduate of the Guangzhou Academy of Fine Arts. See the handbook produced for the occasion of the 2002 Shanghai Biennial, *2002 in Shanghai, in Yangjiang, Some Event Occurring*.

- 18 Hay, "The Kangxi Emperor's Brush Traces."
- 19 Struther, "Gambama a Gingungu and the Secret History." Struther demonstrates that the Pende have been producing masks for the Western market continuously since 1905, that this circumstance made possible the emergence of full-time professional Pende sculptors who were anything but anonymous, that the names of the masks' authors were and are systematically stripped from the masks in the course of their transfer to Euro-American collections, that the same sculptors continued to work for Pende customers, and that the sculptors had no trouble innovating within the aesthetic parameters of Pende art—innovations appreciated by foreign and Pende customers alike.
- 20 One example is the genre of naturalistic head crests covered in antelope skin in southeastern Nigeria that replaced earlier overmodeled enemy skulls when colonial rule cut off the supply of skulls; the new genre soon became sought after by Western collectors. See Sidney Kasfir's important article "African Art and Authenticity." Her article, though not principally concerned with forgeries, discusses many issues related to the present essay.
- 21 Schildkrout and Keim, *African Reflections*.
- 22 Susan Vogel and Sarah Brett-Smith made this point in personal communications. I would go further and argue that there is no culture without intercultural encounter.
- 23 Although all sorts of people can be involved in the production and distribution of fakes, including Westerners, my interest here is in forgeries produced by an African sculptor, an African middleman, or a combination of the two.
- 24 Those objects might be described as tourist art, though Susan Vogel suggests the category could also be termed "African home decoration," since this now provides its principal market within Africa itself in the absence of tourists.
- 25 Replicas are a special case, where the issue of a specific original complicates the question of aura.
- 26 It goes without saying that "tribal" is a highly problematic category. I refer to it here in acknowledgment of its ideological role.
- 27 In 1976, *African Arts*, the leading scholarly journal on African art, devoted an entire issue to the question of authenticity in response to the growing number of forgeries on the market, publishing an extensive number of statements on the question by leading scholars, curators, dealers, and others. Introducing these statements, the editor included the following anecdote: "You will be relieved to know the simple fact that virtually no museum in this country owns a fake! Long and costly telephone conversations elicited this Ripley information. The Smithsonian for example has a 1000 battling average in its collection of 20,000 pieces. No fakes occur in Philadelphia, Brooklyn, San Francisco or Boston. The curators all agree that there are large numbers of fakes all around the country but they are in private, not public collections. The owners of these dubious collections are hinted to be of wide public knowledge but of course there could be no names, on the old army adage no doubt, 'no names, no pack drill.' The UCLA museum, prodded into increasing verity by the leverage of proximity and collegiality, admits to 3 or 4 pieces out of the 10,000 acquisitions. These were 'deliberately acquired' or retained 'solely for teaching purposes.' There may well be reasons for these statistics if not for the defensive tone in which they are couched.
- They could be explained by the periodic elimination of duds by a wild bonfire every equinox, or by the fakes being smuggled out in sacks on dark nights and dropped into the Hudson River (where they are no doubt rescued subsequently by all those notorious dealers we are told about, encrusted with the exquisite extra patination of that liquid slime that passes for fetish material in New Jersey). It seems rather that the whole subject is distasteful, like talking of B.O. at a tea party."
- 28 To the best of my knowledge, no scholar of African art has written a full article recognizing their aesthetic interest, though one can find the odd admiring comment here and there. It goes without saying that no "positive" museum exhibition of them has ever been mounted.
- 29 Joan Kee has reminded me of Rey Chow's concept of "para-site." As Chow puts it: "Because 'borders' have so clearly meandered into so many intellectual issues that the more stable and conventional relation between borders and the field no longer holds, intervention cannot simply be thought of in terms of the creation of new fields. Instead, it is necessary to think *primarily* in terms of borders—of borders, that is, as *para-sites* that never take over a field in its entirety but erode it slowly and tactically." From "Leading Questions," 201.
- 30 Struther makes her own connection to forgery when she writes: "In the African art market, it is the buyer who replaces the artist as visionary, who is able (like Marcel Duchamp) to recognize aesthetic value in the unassuming artifact. In this climate, Gabama, Nguedia, and the rest all become 'forgers' charged with the obsessive reproduction of the moment just before the Compagnie du Kasai opened its trading posts in 1903." From the side of nonmodernity, so to speak, one might comment that the conversion of named sculptors into anonymous forgers is only possible because the sculptors bring to their work a tradition of self-consciousness that lends itself to cultural self-representation. But from the side of modernity, the salient point is that the conversion of authored objects into anonymous "forgeries" is possible only because the authored objects, like fakes of the kind I have been discussing, ultimately share a common para-modern frame of reference.
- 31 On this, see Kasfir, "African Art and Authenticity." Some genres, such as Kongo tusks carved with figurative reliefs, obligingly distinguish themselves from the ritual practices of religious and social life every bit as clearly as the forgeries confuse the issue. Some genres (for example, those Mangbetu figurative sculptures for Westerners) have been integrated into the respectable world of the "authentic" tribal artifact. And some genres such as Kamba figurative sculptures occupy a midpoint, mixing the old and the new without any intention to deceive, and in ways that confuse our neat categories. Which in any event are not so neat; the fact that a genre was invented to serve an outside market has never prevented its simultaneous integration into the culture that produced it as a prestige object.
- 32 Fabian, "Culture, Time, and the Object of Anthropology," 198.
- 33 Hay, "Adventures in Chinaspace and Transnationalism."
- 34 As pointed out by Charles Merewether, "The Specter of Being Human," 61.
- 35 Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe*.
- 36 I have expanded on this point in "Toward a Disjunctive Diachronics of Chinese Art History" and "The Diachronics of Early Qing Visual and Material Culture."

- 37 Take, for example, the practice of ink painting in the People's Republic of China after 1949, which was rejuvenated by two generations of modernists who adapted to the change of political circumstances by abandoning oil painting in favor of the Chinese brush. Do we read their ink paintings from within the Euro-American paradigm as a variant of Modernism, although the medium is not a modernist one? Or do we read them from without, so to speak, as an integration of modernist principles into an otherly medium, and therefore as an example of the doubly modern? Or, from the same period, one could take the example of Zao Wou-ki in Paris. Do we read his oil paintings, watercolors, and prints from within Modernism as a modernist integration of Chinese conceptions of the trace? Or do we read them from the other side as a Chinese otherly modern engagement with modernist mediums and so as another example of the doubly modern?