

Nobrow

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Less than an attempt to philosophically define anything, the following text should be read as a theoretical sketch to portray an artistic margin, which has not yet been much discussed, although it has been loosely touched upon as a side product of many other theoretical aspirations. Its name, 'nobrow', is borrowed from a use somewhat different from mine, but is accurate in pointing out that there is a dynamic position works of art can acquire when they use both high and low for their own purposes, still not really belonging to either field of culture. I will begin by sketching the outlines of this phenomenon, and then try to shed some light on it through by means of some examples, and conclude by claiming, that it lives on our cultural situation, where high and low, even if they are not as rigid compartments of culture as they used to be, continue to exist and to affect us.

Highbrow, Middlebrow, Lowbrow, Nobrow

According to a commonly shared view the history of modernity has already met its end, if not drastically, than at least through a slow decrease of the centrality of modern values, classifications and cultural hierarchies. It may still be too early to think that the ways of interpreting and seeing cultural objects e.g. as (high) art, and the key cultural concepts and dichotomies which have reigned the past centuries would not continue to have importance and effect on our lives.

One dualism, which has been heavily attacked by postmodernists, which they have sometimes even claimed to have achieved victory of, is the dichotomy of 'highbrow' and 'lowbrow'. The former concept brings together the fine arts, higher education, and a cluster of socio-economical powers and their cultural manifestations. The latter refers roughly speaking to the media, 'trash' and popular culture. The dualism has from time to time been accompanied with 'middlebrow', a concept applied to pseudo-art – petty bourgeois art imitating elitist culture. This concept marks all pretentious aspirations to gain cultural value and power through performing and imitating elitist / high cultured behaviour, but it has already become somewhat old fashioned, and it is nowadays hardly used.

In later years the aforementioned hierarchies and compartments of culture have gained a new side-kick, 'nobrow'. The catchy word has not (at least yet) attracted extensive attention, but its name is suggestive, and it could be of service – at least if the current use of it is modified.

The concept of nobrow has been used to point out that there exists a margin in western culture which has emancipated itself from modern hierarchies and classifications, i.e. its makers and its audience are already in a post-relation to them, and 'couldn't care less' about it. This claim is based upon a view, that we are already in an aftermath relation to the crisis of the modern compartmentalizations of culture, and not anymore in a dynamic demarcation state. We are claimed to experience the modern dichotomies, hierarchies, and classifications as heavily problematic or just as alien to ourselves, but I doubt if we would really like the society to totally change its habits in this respect: I believe that most people fighting against the 'brows' would wake up and turn to be 'traditionalists' if e.g. the state museums would start buying tourist kitsch and porn. In the end, we want to evaluate some phenomena higher than some other, and we definitely enjoy having boundaries in culture – and I think the discussion should be more about what to elevate in the hierarchy, which is the real problem, as e.g. comics, even artistically sophisticated ones like Hugo Pratt's *Corto Maltese* or Will Eisner's comic novels, are in many cases doomed to be distributed and treated as entertainment just because our idea of comic art is still too one-sidedly rooted outside art.

As early as 1964 – which was, by the way, the same year when Arthur C. Danto walked into the Manhattan based Stable Gallery where Andy Warhol was presenting his *Brillo Box* – Umberto Eco analyzed the demarcation state of western culture and its cultural hierarchies in his *Apocalittici e integrati: Comunicazioni di massa e teorie della cultura di massa*,¹ the first book in philosophical aesthetics written on the popular arts. One of Eco's key questions was what could possibly follow *alto*, *medio* and *basso*. Questions concerning the state, validity, or fruitfulness of these compartmentalizations have since then been central for cultural philosophy, cultural studies and art research. In 2004 we could have celebrated 40 years of discussion of what we will get after high and low!

One inspiring question evoked by another influential Italian thinker, Gianni Vattimo, who in fact, despite his seemingly contradictory methodological orientation, belongs to the same tradition of aesthetics which is oriented towards seeking the boundaries for interpretation (the Torino school), concerns our relation to this 'weakened' tradition of high and low. Eco has in different ways been striving to remind poststructuralists and postmodernists about the existence of objects and their effects on the inter-

1 Umberto Eco, *Apocalittici e integrati: Comunicazioni di massa e teorie della cultura di massa* (Milano: Bompiani, 1964). See especially the 1997 edition which contains the author's preface where he became interested in entered popular culture studies.

preters, but Vattimo has, especially in his *La società trasparente* (1991), questioned our possibilities to get rid of the existentially deep framework modernity has provided us with.²

Countless books could be recalled here, but the important thing to note is that no considerable steps have been taken towards new classifications, and no signs of a concrete possibility of getting rid of the old ones have emerged. Following this our consciously interpretational relation to modern classifications seems to have become central for our ways of seeing arts and culture, even for theorizing our own era. You don't have to open many books which discuss contemporary culture and its theory nor art exhibition catalogues to see that breaking with high and low, or discussing the fact that this way of polarizing culture has come to some kind of end, is as common as an ideology for cultural philosophy and cultural studies as anti-racism or anti-capitalism is. And postmodernity is considered in a variety of ways to be an era essentially ruled by media and popular culture, and one which has been seen to be deeply affected by a weakening or even the destruction of the dichotomy of high and low. Still, when high and low are 'mixed' (which is seen to be a sign of postmodernity), at the same time one could point out that they have to be well separated, so that we could experience them to be mixed.

The concept of 'nobrow' has been put into use by a theoretically lousy American bestseller from the year 2000, John Seabrook's *Nobrow: The Culture of Marketing the Marketing of Culture*.³ The book is based on Seabrook's autobiographical essays. He describes extensively his work as a reporter for (what he considers to be) traditionally highbrowed *The New Yorker* – which was, in fact, accused already by Clement Greenberg to be more or less a representative of kitsch. A variety of important cultural figures are portrayed in the book, including the New York crew of MTV and Star Wars director George Lucas. To put it in simple terms, nobrow means for Seabrook that we lose our conscious ways of appreciating art and highbrow culture. He discusses this by describing for instance ecstatic or 'I don't care' type of experiences of popular culture (disco dancing), but he also follows (without knowing it or caring about referring to him) Fredric Jameson, by claiming that by using materials and media which we are used to see mostly in popular culture contemporary (video) artists are breaking with the tradition of high and low. He (nor the celebrated Jameson) does not even consider the possibility, that new media and materials could, as lower objects of depiction in the era of impressionism did, just start to be more legitimate in high

2 Gianni Vattimo, *La società trasparente* (Milano: Garzanti, 1989). See also Arto Haapala's "Alemmat ja ylemmät." in Olli Immonen & Jouko Mykkänen (eds), *Mäkihypyn muoto-oppi ja muita kirjoituksia populaaritaitteista* (Lahti: Kansainvälinen soveltavan esteetiikan instituutti), 1997), pp. 155–165. Haapala's question, though not that broadly touched upon, is quite the same as Vattimo's but he stresses more the fact that we do in the end desire to keep up with a lot of the classifications and hierarchies we (or the postmodernists) detest.

3 John Seabrook, *Nobrow: The Culture of marketing the marketing of culture* (London: Methuen, 2000).

culture, or that their high culture use would in a way or another (formally, or by ironical statements) differ from lowbrow use.⁴

The concept itself, nobrow, is still inspiring, and it has gained some use in artist circles, and even attention in the popular press. Without reinforcing the claims associated with it, my own intuition is that the word is a 'hit' in itself, and it is perfect for discussing some features in the contemporary artworld, and more importantly, on its boundaries. It could be here to stay, but if it does, I doubt as one of the terms which expresses the postmodernist utopia which surrounds us.

The fresh side of the concept Seabrook plays with is that it connotes that there is no reason anymore to work against high and low, because we have arrived at a situation, where it is obvious that some of our modern classifications may even be something the youngest in the artworld have to learn by studying in order to really understand them. As already indicated above, I do not share Seabrook's enthusiasm for the end of hierarchies. I am neither interested in reinforcing views on aesthetization, nor in discussing art's growth outside of the 'white cube' (often sadly followed by white cube discourse outside the gallery). Not against these perspectives, but to point out that there are also other games on the scene, I will here use the concept nobrow to explore a liminal space in the margins of the artworld – which is also situated in the margins of popular culture. It is not a distinguishable compartment of culture or a classification, but a force-field where artists are using compartmentalizations and classifications for their own purposes, an energetic liminal space, which is situated as close to Louvre as to Hollywood, borrowing from – in the need of both, as well as in the need of keeping distance to both of them.

Andy Warhol managed for a long time to stay as non-art, or a popular culture challenger in the artworld, at the same time as he already had become too hard to understand for the advertisement world. In music Frank Zappa with his virtuoso filled bands managed to work as an artistically highly valued composer and musician at the same time as his tours were commercially successful rock'n roll circuses, and well selling entertainment. The careers of both Warhol and Zappa are hard to classify, and we are here discussing phenomena which have been grounded on the sensibilities and ways of appreciating found in both the world of high art and popular culture, phenomena which couldn't have made it without art *and* popular culture.

Nobrow, here, stresses the tendency to keep distance to both

4 For these points and some other less clearly articulated essayistic reasoning made in quite the same fashion, see Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, Or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (London: Verso, 1991), and John Seabrook, *Nobrow*, especially the essay "Sunday in Soho", pp. 161–175.

the artworld and (at least mainstream) popular culture. As institutions and ways of thinking, also seeing, interpreting and experiencing, and frames, sensibilities and stable contexts stay important, there will always be conscious use of them. Working against or between compartments is a game in itself – sometimes producing something of its own, which as we have seen (following Warhol and Zappa has changed something also in mainstream culture.

Nobrow is always in danger of being considered simply entertainment or art, or to be caged institutionally in one of these two. At the same time its force is grounded on both, a possibility and ability of the creator to keep his/her work in an institutionally unsafe, homeless position.

From Punk to Lowbrow Art and Tokyo Pop

John Lydon and Public Image Limited and their performance on the 3rd of May 1980 in the *American Bandstand* program is a striking example of avantgardist spirit of the 'best' of punk, as the group, especially Lydon with his catatonic moves makes the whole stereotypical structure of the program with its soapy spirit, car salesman type of hosts, and a wannabe audience nearly literally licking the guests, to seem just like a fittingly banal background, giving no response to the breaking power of the performance – but at the same time, giving it its flavour of difference. Punk at its best managed to escape and to criticize the commercial and professionalist scene of the 1970s music industry, which had in this respect made a proud difference to the earlier, more amateurish and experimental decades. At the same time punk was a movement, which succeeded in staying quite well outside the artworld, even if it was highly appreciated in artistic and intellectualist circles.

Lydon's performance in the *American Bandstand*, a gig in a long series of more or less chaotic acts, made a late appearance in the world of art, even if it was never institutionalized as art. The television show was presented as a part of *Let's Entertain*, an exhibition curated by Philippe Vergne for the Minneapolis Walker Art Center, which was for some parts reappropriated and re-named *Au-delà Spectacle* for a Parisian audience, as the exhibition hit Centre Pompidou in Paris in late 2000 and early 2001. The show is to this day the most extensive portrayal of the way popular culture and the artworld have merged during the last decades – at least on the European map, which, as we know, comes

a decade after California and Japan in its taste for pop. There the video was clearly a cut-and-paste from another world, even if situated among Dana Birkbaum's videos, Paul McCarthy's nightmarish Tivoli machine installations, Jeff Koons' statue of Michael Jackson and Charles Ray's carousel.

P.I.L. was never anything that would have had a possibility to enter the sacred side of the artworld, and its work shows anyway something differing from the safe positions Paul McCarthy and Jeff Koons have on the scene. Even if nobody could claim their art to be non-safe, it is totally on the side of the threshold called art with the capital A, and P.I.L. seems still to be out of context, in a way which makes its music and performances a special kind of a thrill.

In nobrow there is a lot of self-conscious work against the way the artworld absorbs new artistically valued material into its own meaning creating force fields. Art's status is not for everybody a wanted value. At the same time as many comic designers and jazz musicians want to get the brand of art on their work by presenting original sketches of strips in galleries and performing jazz in an academic spirit, the status and force field of high art are not wanted by everybody to be the brand and context of their work. Some artists might use art as a field for distribution, or as a help to get a living in countries where art is well financed by the state. But at the same time some of them stay outside of the artworld as much as possible.

We also want to think that works should have just one position in the field of culture and art and there are still discussions even in theoretically advanced circles whether a work is art *or* popular culture, even in cases where the object has gained both an artistically valued and entertaining status. Why not have a role as art *and* popular culture? It is not even just a question of use and strategies of interpretation how artistic objects can reward us, but they can be historically rooted in different traditions, and this reinforces the possibilities of different audiences enjoying them in different ways.⁵

One example, which can in a way be conceived as something which has already left the field of nobrow, is, or was, the already mentioned art of Andy Warhol, a pioneer in nobrow. The identity of Warhol's work has at least in Anglo-American philosophy been corrupted because of Arthur C. Danto's writings, which have made them pure art of the artworld. As Richard Shusterman has pointed out, Warhol could have been taken to state that "the only living art of today is not in the museum but in the products,

⁵ I have in an earlier publication of *NET* tried to show how works of contemporary art, Jeff Koons' Made in Heaven glass artworks, while being already classics in contemporary art are at the same time works of glass art with a differing position and meaning, and that they, in fact, also feature another artist as their author – Pino Signoretto, who made the physical objects for Koons. See Max Ryyänen, "The Double Life of Jeff Koons' Made in Heaven Glass Artworks", *Nordisk estetisk tidskrift* 29–30 (2004).

designs, and entertainments of everyday living”.⁶ Even more interesting for nobrow, Warhol was a suspect phenomenon in art and at the same time something too hard to understand and definitely weird for advertising and mainstream consumer culture – a point which we don’t easily remember, as his pictures have been canonized as art for a long time ago. The Factory, a whole lifestyle, was a sensitive and challenging way of life and aestheticism, which lived on both the ephemeral and surface nature of popular culture, and the institution, as well as the commercial system of art – the latter referring to e.g. the fact that works of high art may rise in economical value to heights not imaginable for copies nor originals of popular culture. In many ways Warhol is now already so absorbed into the realm of art, even to be seen as the core agent of a ‘school’ of art named pop *art*, that we may be talking about the loss of a sensitive project, not a loss of a synthesis, but a kind of an oscillation of meaning, values, and force fields, maybe even aesthetic/artistic worlds – which Warhol succeeded in maintaining for a long time.

We have come to a point in this description of nobrow when it should be stressed that nobrow is not the same thing as a crossover. The concept of crossover stresses that traditions are mixed/blurred. We have a crossover when e.g. Kiri te Kanawa sings pop songs or Andrew Lloyd Webber creates ‘disco’ versions of classical masterpieces of music. The notion of nobrow in this article serves to make clear that there is a whole way of working with art by using existing cultural compartmentalizations and their force fields without becoming their prisoner.

Some time ago I saw a television documentary where graffiti painters were asked if their paintings were art. The painters sat in the studio with their devices, and denied it. They pronounced proudly that the ‘street credibility’ of the phenomenon is an important issue for them. According to these painters graffiti should not become a part of the ‘artworld’. For them graffiti was not something meant to be art. They did not want to challenge art, nor did they think art would give the right kind of value to their work, when they started making it. At the same time graffiti culture is, even if it has come to our margins of American cultural impact via commercial movies, quite non-commercial as a street phenomenon, and, of course, also a criminal activity.

What is going to happen with graffiti? It has yet not even hit the borders of any realms of art with the capital A, if not in singular, more or less freak versions of it, like in Keith Haring’s work. The only place where I have seen graffiti portrayed on the side

6 Richard Shusterman, *Surface and Depth. Dialectics of Criticism and Culture* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2002), p. 186

of Jeff Koons and Paul McCarthy is the Californian *Juxtapoz* magazine, but the same mag shows the best of car painting, as well as comics and CD covers, as long as they suit the popish, still visually classy DNA of the mag, which is run by people who have made careers in these more popular spheres of arts, connected to the west coast lowbrow-art movement (Robert Williams, Charles Krafft), where galleries and other art forums are used to celebrate the 'hottest' and most spectacular visual culture outside of the institutions of art.

Both Warhol's Factory (in memoriam) and the half criminal, less artistically ambitious groups of graffiti painters are social joints with a lot of attitude, which work and worked hard to maintain their position in the non-stable and institutionally homeless fields of culture. The ideology of these groups is not that much related to modern conceptions of starving artists, nor is there any negative attitude towards technology or mass culture typical for modernist art. They have more to do ideologically with radical avant-garde. A smaller group of people creates a collective atmosphere, lives in it, creates and interprets art via it, although we find no aspiration to revolutionize the art world.

In these groups there is often a tendency to control-freak the meaning of the products, so that they might stay in the margins considered to be productive. There is endless work against too much institutionalizing and commercializing and their aesthetic side effects.

Mario Perniola said in an interview for *Flash Art* in the beginning of the 1990s that we may well be going into a new kind of elitism, where the artists would work holistically to acquire perfection.⁷

Perfection could be seen in the control-freaky way many artists work: well aware of the death of the author they often work to continue to control the work's life after it has left their hands, to be "authors" as regards curating, distribution and framing, relentlessly creating an autonomous force field, reinforced by lifestyle, writings, and collective spirit – the artist as a 'producer' is one of their works' potentials. The creation of a perfect object coincides here with the sensitive way artists may take care of their works' life in a variety of contexts, interpretations and other meaningful factors determining the identities, meanings, interpretations and experiences connected to the work.

The example which Perniola mentions in the interview is early symptomatic of the 1990s, Jeff Koons, who had just bodybuilt himself with Arnold Schwarzenegger to beautify his porn poses

7 The interview, run by Gabriele Ferreta, has been published in Giancarlo Politi (ed.), *Art and Philosophy* (Milano: Flash Art Books, 1991).

with Cicciolina. He had sold art, made art, copied art, talked intelligently about it, and made himself a brand which would give even more meaning to his works than in the case of the normal 'big guys' on the art scene. At that time Koons also consulted the best artisans in the world, like the glass masters of Murano, to create his masterpieces, and took ready-made art in this way to new heights, controlling even the production of his own ready-mades. With his own factory attitude – Koons has a whole army of artisans working to create physical manifestations for his day-dreams – he placed himself between contemporary art and popular culture, and has seemed to survive well in that manner, more on the art side of culture but always seducing a lot of non arts people to enjoy his work too.

Perniola talks about elitism, and it is important here to point out, that in these times it would be hard to believe in a kind of an elitism, where another practice weighs its meaning against other practices and creates a hierarchy, which it starts imperialistically, and successfully expanding to the whole society – which was just what modernist art did. In most cases we could still talk about internal elitism. For example, elitist techno ravers did not, during the heights of the flourishing of their art form, try to expand their ideology to other spheres of music, they did not challenge the status of traditional art music, but used music to lighten up their own world, even building a stronghold with their own marginal culture, to keep their work separate from other spheres of music. Nor is Koons attacking anybody. Still attacks against phenomena which are hard to compartmentalize still continue, at least from the side of art.

One of the most important followers of the Factory spirit is found in the Japanese Takashi Murakami and the Hiropon Factory (the factory part of the name is of course not coincidental) he leads. Murakami's work consists of glass fibre manga statues in real human size, t-shirts, and advert-like posters, where we find Mr. Dob, a Mickey Mouse type of a psychedelic character, which connotes also many features (e.g. big eyes) typical for Japanese manga, and recalls in some ways our childhood memories of a face drawn on a balloon. Murakami with his group has sold art with a neatly capitalist spirit – many works are even meant to be so cheap that middle class art enthusiasts and even teenagers can buy them – and concentrated a lot on industrialized production as a form of art expression, i.e. there is an ongoing fight to keep it even between art and design. Murakami has gained a noticeable status in the artworld. At the same time his pictures may be

found in mags for advertising and design people, as parts of commercial spaces, and in magazines playing between the institutional structures, like in *Juxtapoz*. All this has not been achieved without some problems. In Murakami's and Hiropon Factory's show at Galerie Emmanuel Perrotin, in Paris, during the winter 2000–2001 somebody messed up the windows of the gallery, and condemned Murakami's work to be non-art and commercial crap. The group and Murakami as their head has created their own brand, and worked, also by explaining textually what they are doing, to create their own meaningfully marginal position, but Warholian projects seem still to be as radical in the artworld as they were in the 1960s, when Warhol and his factory were criticized on the same grounds.⁸

In music we find an illuminating difference between John Zorn's jazz and the already mentioned Frank Zappa's experimental music. Both artist's products have a lot of artistic value in the world of classical/modern art music, but Zorn's music stays a step more closed inside the artworld, on the avantgarded side of jazz, as Zappa's band, in turn, made it as one of the most celebrated entertainment acts in America, a rock'n roll circus side by side with the virtuoso-like players and the musical genius of the now dead master. Zappa managed to stay on the border of institutionalized art and commercial popular culture. A good example of his strange elitist, but not highbrow position is found in a well-known story about his composition for a symphony orchestra. Zappa was used to have the best players, so he composed virtuosos in mind, and did not understand that classical players are mostly not on the level of his own band (Zappa's orchestra was filled with virtuoso musicians like guitarist Steve Vai and drummer Terry Bozio, not players who would have been used to back up soloists).

Zappa made it all the time using both fields, got credibility as artist, but stayed as entertainment, and that is where his music is still found. Without a strong brand and control of his work he couldn't have kept his work in this dynamic state between institutional structures, and it still continues, as he organized his Family Trust to take care of the control-freaking of his work after his death: As Ensemble Ambrosius wanted to record some of Zappa's music in a baroque instrumental fashion (*The Zappa Album*, 2000), and placed a photo of a rabbit on the cover of the CD, Zappa's widow who represented the Zappa Family Trust which approved the project and co-operated with the group, demanded that the rabbit on the cover should utter one of Zappa's own key

8 Also Jeff Koons has on many occasions been criticized in the same modernist, anti-poppish spirit. To take a Nordic example, ROR (Revolutions on Request) has had the same problem.

expressions, “Arf!”. The band “was more than happy to oblige.”⁹ If the Dadaists would have been as clever as Zappa, their work wouldn’t have as easily been musealized and interpreted to be a part of the modernists’ heritage after the death of their movement!

Zorn has stayed on the art side of jazz, potentially producing music good also for entertainment, as some of his work together with e.g. Napalm Death (Naked City) has proven, but he has not been able to keep that music in a more homeless, or more popular position, maybe partly because of a more postmodernist ideology, where there is an idea of commenting on the popular from the outside, as in pop art, on a wholly other level than in Zappa’s music, which was really a part of the popular. Zorn playing with blues guitarist Icceman Collins (*Spillane*, 1987) is, partly for institutional reasons (Zorn has both of his feet steadily on the ground of art jazz) and partly because Zorn hasn’t paid enough attention to entertain also broader audiences, a postmodern sax player having a dialogue with the blues tradition, no matter how perfectly he made have imitated the scene with his playing and (again, resembling curating) his way of collecting players for projects. Zappa is still years after his death, more unstable as an artistic brand, both in pop and art culture.

The last example which I will mention is Pier Paolo Pasolini, who started his career by making films in the spirit of neorealism in Italy. Pasolini could also be seen as one early pioneer of nobrow, still less out on the fields of mass-mediated popular culture – in his own writings and statements Pasolini was often critical about mass culture echoing the pathos of the late Frankfurt School, but concentrating more on folk culture. As Pasolini acquired status in Italy and also internationally with his early more realistic, neo-realist work and openly, even discursively Marxist movies, and the audience was warmed up to wait for new ‘art films’, he made a popular turn, and directed the *Trilogy of Life*, with *Il Decameron* (1970–1971), *I racconti di Canterbury* (1971–1972) and *Il fiore delle Mille e una notte* (1973–1974), a folksy or pseudo-folksy compound borrowing from old tales, reflecting how modernity had made them impossible, and trying to revive their naivete with a touch resembling the pornographic films of his times, low humour, and slapstick. He wrote about his ideology, not to do what artists were supposed to do. His popular culture turn became an avantgardistic move, which was not understood in those days. The films were criticized by critics and scholars, and seen to be lower products of a former artistically superior and relentlessly

⁹ <http://www.ensembleambrosius.com/zappa.html>.

avantgardist director. The films were also both condemned to be and consumed as pornography (this was also the way the films became a part of the video boom). The interpretations in the art-world and the functionalistic ways of using artistic objects in the sphere of commercial popular culture – objects should entertain, stimulate sexually or e.g. make the consumer laugh – are in this way two different sides of culture, and the big problem, but at the same time the constitutive ground for nobrow art, which, according to my opinion, Pasolini failed to address successfully. (His last film, the frustrated *Saló*, addressed once again successfully the purely institutionalized artistic side of film – as the film was impossible to consume or enjoy in any way.)

The Need of Highbrow and Lowbrow

It is important to understand that with nobrow we do not get a new classification, nor is there any fresh institutional playground on the rise, as the movement already plays with demarcation states between compartmentalizations of culture – and this points to a possibility, that we do not achieve anything new at all, even if nobrow would become more important on the cultural scene. It all coincides with Gianni Vattimo's thoughts that we won't get rid of modernity, but are doomed to go through its veins and corrupt it, our way of being and experiencing modernity dawning slowly with(in) it.

Only if nobrow as a project would really become too central an aspiration for artists, it would destroy itself by destroying the force field it is using. Absurdly, nobrow, as one possibility for a post-avant-garde as well as a more elitist conception of popular culture, really needs to conserve the modern dichotomy of high and low, or what is left of it. As a dynamic margin it, like all margins, needs some kind of a centre, whether that centre can or cannot anymore be articulated as clearly as it once could during the golden years of modernism.