The Nordic Journal of Aesthetics, No. 70 (2025), pp. 201–227

"The Most Unsettling Reality is Our Own": Instability of Form After the Global Turn

Rose-Anne Gush

Abstract: This article takes historical surrealist works to explore what I term "instability of form." Focusing on the poetic works of Suzanne Césaire published in *Tropiques* during the 1940s and the 1953 surrealist film *Statues Also Die* (*Les statues meurent aussi*) by Chris Marker, Alain Resnais, and Ghislain Cloquet, it situates this inquiry within the turn to theories of "global art" and their political aesthetics. The hypothesis is that literature on "global art" has neglected to investigate the "form" of anti- or a-formal artworks. Critical assessments have privileged sociological, geopolitical or content based readings, neglecting to mediate analyses of geopolitical transformations through analyses of art's formal innovations. In response, the articles proposes a dual theoretical framework to reinterpret these works. First, it employs Theodor W. Adorno's perspicacious concept of "*Verfransung*" the fraying of the boundaries between the art genres, explicated in "Art and the Arts" (1967), arguing for its relevance for resituating "global art" in the present. Second, it uses the Warwick Research Collective's (WReC) model of "combined and uneven development" to understand these practices as formed by a dialectic of core/periphery relations of the capitalist world-system.

Through this framework, the article explores how formal instability relates to artistic intimations of catastrophe and crisis, to art's articulation of the continuities between colonialism, fascism and capitalism. By interpreting how these surrealist works index the uneven temporalities and violent hierarchies of global modernity—for example, through methods of "telescoping,"—the article demonstrates modes of political aesthetics that attempt to corrode the naturalised categories of racialisation, genre, and value. It argues that these aesthetic practices point toward an unfinished project of liberation, one that requires embracing art's capacity for boundary violation, in ways that have contributed and might still contribute to forms of anti-fascist and anti-colonial resistance.

Keywords: *Anticolonial Surrealism; Political Aesthetics; Chris Marker; Suzanne Césaire; Uneven and Combined Development; Global Art; Instability of Form; Crisis; Museum; Liberation; Capitalism; Colonialism; Fascism*

"The Most Unsettling Reality is Our Own": Instability of Form After the Global Turn

Rose-Anne Gush

> *I'm not going to confine myself to some narrow particularism. But I don't intend either to become lost in a disembodied universalism. […] I have a different idea of a universal. It is a universal rich with all that is particular, rich with all the particulars there are, the deepening of each particular, the coexistence of them all.*
>
> —Aimé Césaire, Letter to Maurice Thorez

> *Fascism was a monster born of capitalist parents. Fascism came as the end-product of centuries of capitalist bestiality, exploitation, domination and racism—mainly exercised outside of Europe. It is highly significant that many settlers and colonial officials displayed a leaning towards fascism.*
>
> —Walter Rodney, *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*

Today, in the fields of art and politics, questions of *instability* and security abound, expressed through appeals to, and fears of, purity and containment as well as toxicity and contagion. What was, just a few years ago, nation states hardening their territorial boundaries against so-called "threats" of "waves" of refugees and migrants, dispossessed of their homes and security by ongoing crises and geopolitical wars over land and resources, has become, for example, in Trump's USA, emboldened fascisisation. The reality of arrests, confinements, and deportation of dissenting peoples illustrates the intensifying attack on what Aziz Rana calls the "racial liberalism" that dominated the latter half of the twentieth century and continues through to today.[1] This process reopens a horizon of segregationist policies, the erasure of decades of "progressive inclusion," and attacks on the basic rights of noncitizens and citizens alike.

In 1972, the Guyanese historian Walter Rodney described fascism as "a deformity of capitalism" that "heightens the imperial tendency towards domination, which is inherent in capitalism," and in this sense, it secures the "principle of private property."[2] As he underlines, "fascism reverses the political gains of the bourgeois democratic system such as free elections, equality before the law,

parliaments."[3] Today's political reversals structurally echo Rodney's description. As liberal values disintegrate, capitulation to the extreme-right agenda by progressive liberal institutions has become common.[4]

The emergent global, neo-imperial tendencies manifest as the brutal military wars in Ukraine, Sudan, Congo, Myanmar, and Yemen, as well as the ongoing Israeli occupation and genocide of Palestinian people. Trump's imperialist declarations on Canada and Greenland, with the expressed wish to plunder rare earths, count as other examples. We can add to this list the global COVID-19 pandemic as well as planetary heating and its concomitant environmental collapse, where hurricanes, flooding, melting glaciers, forest fires, and geopolitical shocks translate this instability into price rises and increased inflation, along with the increased difficulty for working-class or lumpenised people to reproduce their lives.

This article refers to the political concept of instability as it dominates the present to reexamine historical surrealist poetic works by Suzanne Césaire published in the journal *Tropiques* in the 1940s, and the 1953 surrealist film *Statues Also Die* (*Les statues meurent aussi*) by Chris Marker, Alain Resnais, and cinematographer Ghislain Cloquet. It assesses this through what I term "instability of form," in light of the turn to global theories of art and its histories.

"Instability" derives from Old French, *instabilité*, referring to inconsistency, and from Latin, *instabilitatem*, unsteadiness. The word conjures a sense of giddiness, lack of control, overwhelm, lack of fixity. Deriving from the Latin *forma*, "form" invokes notions of shaping, or building, borrowed from the Greek *morphê*, the form, beauty, or outward appearance, the shape or contour of an object (consider the plan of a house, the shape of a sculpture; grammatical forms within language). As I have argued elsewhere, from the viewpoint of critical aesthetics, the relevance of artistic form becomes urgent under the capitalist mode of production due to the dominance of the commodity form and its form of value. Here, the magnitude of the value of a product is expressed in the labour time, its duration, congealed in it.[5] As such, Marx writes that these forms "bear the unmistakable stamp of belonging to a social formation in which the process of production has mastery over man, instead of the opposite," appearing naturalised.[6] This inversion reifies the social world, and can be extended with the meaning given by anti-colonial poet and politician Aimé Cesaire in *Discourse on Colonialism* (1950): "My turn to state an equation: colonization = 'thingification.'"[7] Because of the useless social labour that constitutes art, in the sense posited by Theodor W. Adorno in *Aesthetic Theory*, art has the potential to corrode and deform capitalist form of value. As posed here, however, my question relates to how we can think this in relation not just to modern capitalism, as Adorno conceived of it, but also to capitalism

as underwritten by imperial expansion and the destruction of existing (infra) structures and forms of social life, with colonial extraction and cultivated forms of dependence, subjugation, and violence.

The work that I explore in this article was produced during and in the immediate aftermath of historical fascism, where crises, including man-made famines or hunger plans, racialised persecution and war, saw the upsurge of mass migration and national borders redrawn in line with both imperial declines and expansions, decolonisation and thus newly independent nation states. The aspect that I focus on is this instability of boundaries simultaneously within artistic materials and as expressed within artworks. In this sense, the article brings the works in question into contact with Adorno's perspicacious concept of *Verfransung*, the fraying of the boundaries between the art genres, explicated in "Die Kunst und die Künste" ("Art and the Arts," 1967), arguing for its relevance for transforming the dominant understanding of "global art" in the present.

To date, literature on "global art" has neglected the notion of "form." Critical assessments have instead privileged sociological, geopolitical, or content-based readings, neglecting to mediate analyses of geopolitical transformations through analyses of art's formal innovations. In returning to the advent of art's hybridisation, I aim to shift the dominant art historical and theoretical understanding of this process, by looking to a longer history of surrealist artists working within both the core and the periphery of a world divided along axes of imperialism and colonialism.

My intention is to interpret this art and its social context in two ways. First, I argue that Adorno's notion of *Verfransung* allows us to consider *how* formal instability in art relates to manifestations of catastrophe. I show how this concept—which describes the boundaries between different art genres as becoming fluid or frayed—can also help us think through artistic mediations of the crises and unevenness of global capitalist modernity.[8] Second, I draw on the methodology of the Warwick Research Collective (WReC), as outlined in *Combined and Uneven Development: Towards a New Theory of World-Literature* from 2015. The WReC consider world-literature in a broad sense as the "literature of the modern capitalist world-system," which develops and is developed unevenly, thus putting into question any straightforward periodisation of modernity.[9] By bringing together surrealist poetic works by Césaire and the anti-colonial film *Statues Also Die* with these two frameworks, my aim is to set up the conditions of possibility for a significant shift in perspective in relation to the "global turn" in art history and theory that will account for the anti- or a-formal investments in art in relation to the combined and uneven temporalities undergirding global capitalist development.

The Global Turn

Recent developments in art theory and history have focussed on contemporary art's situatedness and praxis, as well as its "urgency" under the conditions of globalisation.[10] Under the rubric of what is often called the "global turn," art historians and theorists have shown how, while allowing for exceptions, modern art's historical centres (Paris, the Weimar Republic, the Soviet Union during the 1920s, and New York after 1945) have, with the rise of biennial cultures and art fairs, expanded to become global.[11] During the last few decades, biennials and their variant triennials and quinquennials have taken place in cities from Shanghai to Ljubljana, São Paulo to Sharjah and Havana, among many others. These events have increasingly attempted to consciously manifest this "global turn." The advent of global "biennial culture" coincided with the collapse of the Soviet Union, the Yugoslav wars, and the consolidation of the EU as a bloc. This period also saw the expansion, or globalisation, of capitalist social relations in their current deregulatory neoliberal phase of intensified and prolonged crises. Peter Osborne has described such attempts to represent art of the globe as a "self-actualising institutional fantasy" where the biennial is understood as the "first category," or the "theoretical ambition," of "global art history."[12] Osborne contends that "locality" normalised as opposed to "globality," is, especially in the biennial context, produced and circulated within or recuperated by global relations.[13]

A broad decentring and disconnection between Western modernism and art's geo-historical "extensity" testifies to a shift in focus from the imperial centres to the "unmarked" peripheries that has galvanised what John Roberts describes as the "imaginative insertion of the art of the peripheries into the timelines and spaces of the imperialist centre."[14] As well as 1989, the 1970s are seen as a moment of "respatialisation," when Western art is fractured as an "arbiter of modernity."[15] This de-parochialisation is, for Roberts, the other side of an "englobalizing" process.[16] Moreover, art historians have also considered theorisations of the pre-modern "global" and modernity's globalisation, comparing "networked" social formations with the global. A third term that arises is *world-forming*, from the French *mondialisation.* While the network is defined as open-ended (Latour), against the closed system implied by the "global," world-forming, or *mondialisation*, refers to a "multidirectional phenomenon of diffusion of ideas, things, and people."[17]

In relation to the recent turn to the "global" in the field of art, I want to cite two relevant examples. *The Milk of Dreams*, the exhibition of the 2022 Venice Biennale curated by Cecilia Alemani, claimed to question the transformation of the definition of the human through the exhibition's concern with

representation of the body and its metamorphoses, its hybridity; the relation between the human and technology, and the human and the earth. Alemani cites the COVID-19 pandemic as catalysing a state of emergency that heightened the urgency of these questions. The protagonist of Alemani's exhibition was the surrealist artist and writer Leonora Carrington, because Carrington makes manifest the ongoing entanglement of art and life.[18] Carrington's life was marked by struggles: she fled National Socialism to live a life in exile, also finding herself in psychiatric hospitals. For the curator, Carrington's work is an object lesson in resisting the hardening of entrenched reaction that defined the twentieth century.

A second example is the 2024 to 2025 exhibition *Aber hier leben? Nein danke. Surrealismus + Antifaschismus*, at Munich's Lenbachhaus, which presented a history of surrealism that has been marginalised from its more easily consumable history in the visual arts. While the exhibition title, perhaps ironically, references a line by the antideutsch band Tocotronic, the history exhibited refers to surrealism's anti-imperialist, anti-fascist, and anti-colonial commitments, often presented in short-form statements and texts. Although I was inspired by both exhibitions, which bring into view (a plethora of) works that have not been included in the official canon of art, what was missing from both is an account of the artworks' mediation within capitalist development and crisis.

I suggest that an account of the unevenness of global capitalist development will enable new perspectives to emerge in relation to the history and exhibitions of modern and contemporary art—in its globality in light of the permanent social condition of crisis which, as Osborne recently argues, structures the field of contemporary art.[19] Alongside attending to this transition to the global, authors have critically examined art history's historical and epistemological inheritances: a discipline formed in European universities at the turn of the twentieth century. Noting how Eurocentricity still lingers after decolonisation,[20] scholars have questioned the suitability of Eurocentric theoretical frameworks for studies that challenge art's geography and the politics therein.[21] Authors have also questioned the foundational epistemologies of the Western canon of philosophy and aesthetics. Sylvia Wynter reveals its definition of the human via the "overrepresentation" of "man" as Western and bourgeois, while David Lloyd argues, using Cedric Robinson's concept, that aesthetics articulates a "racial regime" founded on violent dehumanisation and the historically constructed division between the "human" and the racialised and pathologised exclusions from this category.[22]

Instability of Form

How can political instability appear in art, we might ask? How can art mediate the specific historical conditions of fascism, colonialism, and capitalist crisis? As mentioned above, Adorno writes of *Verfransung* in the 1967 essay "Art and the Arts," describing the boundaries between different art genres as becoming fluid. This essay can be situated in the context of revived debates concerning the history of the *Paragone* (comparison), wherein the arts—namely, painting, sculpture and architecture—were positioned in competition with each other. During the 1950s, this debate was taken up by Paul Oskar Kristeller, who established that the arts, defined as five major arts, each approximate an area/realm of art in themselves, a grouping established in the eighteenth century, constituting the modern (and thus if we reframe this as modern-colonial, we would also extend to imperial and colonial) system of the arts and the ideology of art's autonomy.[23] In light of this, I argue that Adorno's concept of *Verfransung* and his respective interpretation of this idea can be used to rethink the turn towards anti- or a-formal works by referring to a different history than the oft-cited birth of "conceptual" and "intermedia" art, which in turn allows us to read Adorno against the grain of his own Eurocentrism.

Adorno mobilises the concept of *Verfransung* during a political and cultural turning point in the second half of the twentieth century that was determined by a growth in "complex systems," and networks, and the reconstruction of Europe—funded by the Marshall Plan and colonial exploitation leading to the post-war boom and the explosion of credit markets (the postwar transition from real to fictitious capital). Contemporaneous to his writing, struggles against gendered, racialised, and classed oppression, such as anti-colonial wars in Algeria and across colonised territories, the Non-Aligned Movement, women's liberation movements, students' and workers' strikes, and civil rights movements in the USA, surged from below. In this moment, Adorno recognised a tendency where art ceases to respect its boundaries, writing: "Whatever tears down the boundary markers is motivated by historical forces that sprang into life inside the existing boundaries and that ended up overwhelming them."[24] For Adorno, fraying contains a logic.

This is the point that I want to follow, the decomposition of art's boundaries contributes to the antagonism that pits ostensibly progressive, "contemporary" art against the so-called public, resulting in a *fear* of violated boundaries, hybridity, and defensiveness against miscegenation, part of the afterlife of fascism. Adorno writes that this assumed pathological dimensions during National Socialism, with the "cult of pure race and the denigration of hybridity."[25] While the boundaries that confined art *and* pseudo-racialisation

are historically produced, art is posited as revelling in promiscuity, violating the taboos of civilisation. The artistic movements that Adorno cites—cubism, Dada, and surrealism—exemplify this boundary violation. Here, art's decomposition seeks out an "extra-aesthetic reality" rather than merely *reflecting* reality. In this sense, art participates in objective thing-like matter, in matter that is foreign to itself. It does not simply imitate it. Art becomes like other things, among them: over time we lose our capacity to recognise it. This trajectory culminates in a paradox which Adorno captures as follows:

> The consistent negation of aesthetic meaning would be possible, only if art were to be abolished. The latest significant works of art are the nightmare of such an abolition, even though, by their very existence they resist their own destruction; it is as if the end of art threatens the end of mankind, a mankind whose sufferings cry out for art, for an art that does not smooth and mitigate. Art presents humanity with the dream of its own doom so that humanity may awaken, remain in control of itself, and survive.[26]

This passage clarifies that the abolition of aesthetic meaning would also conjoin with the abolition of art. In Adorno's Marxist aesthetics, the erosion of art's boundaries contributes to its tendency towards self-abolition, but art is not capable of this act. Instead, works of art are the nightmare of this tendency. They testify to the horror of the world. These works can give voice to pain and suffering without mitigating it. It is this capacity to testify to subjugation that surrealism, for example, can also contribute to an antifascist and anticolonial aesthetics, presenting "humanity with the dream of its own doom"—to shock it into awakening. I will return to this.

The concept of artistic fraying finds resonance in recent scholarship on histories of conceptual or action art, as well as "intermedia" or installation art.[27] Kerstin Stakemeier and Marina Vishmidt build on Adorno, tracing the transition from "artistic genres" to "artistic media" as a de-purifying process. They argue that "genre specificity had made possible the strict separation of artistic work from other labour, while at the same time technical media, and, more generally, extra artistic sources and means, were incorporated into artistic production."[28] Thus, art was synchronised with "developments in industrial reproduction taking place outside of art"—in line with thinking on the new.[29]

More recently, Stakemeier develops an astute history of what she calls radical "anti-modern" art, which builds on Adorno's notion of fraying, as well as on the work of the corpus of figures including Lu Märten, Carl Einstein, and Peter Gorsen. She names "debordered formalism" an aesthetic practice that exceeds fantasising a realm beyond art; rather, "actualising its debordering." In this sense, she aims to write an art history of art's "self-degeneration."[30] By reconsidering the movement of art's de-arting (*Entkunstung*), with Stakemeier,

we find in anti or a-formal art a radical exploration of form. Yet, contra her "anti-modern" position, I want to argue that if viewed through the optics of combined and uneven development, the radical artistic exploration of form in the twentieth century can be understood as mediating art's entanglements with, and resistance to, gendered and colonial forms of capitalism and its global modernity.

Beneath All Cultural Production, a Dialectics of Core and Periphery

The question of form and crisis can also be animated via the debate on the term combined and uneven development. This term is addressed within the debates on the transition to, or origins of, capitalism, where two camps generally exist: those on the side of Robert Brenner and Ellen Meiksins Wood, who see the transition emerging within feudal societies, in particular, in England; and those who take the world systems approach, after Immanuel Wallerstein, wherein the transition is located in the long sixteenth century. The WReC has adopted the latter, defining world literature broadly as the "literature of the modern capitalist world-system."[31] They emphasise this system's unevenness, thereby questioning any straightforward periodisation of modernity. It is worth noting how this framework can impact the field of art history, as Ciarán Finlayson does:

> Where it was once a Trotskyist tool for analyzing political possibility in a modernizing periphery, today it speaks to the fundamental unity of cultures around the world, where unevenness can now be understood not as evidence of the "incompleteness" of either capitalism or modernization but as the expression of a necessary underdevelopment produced by an already unified system.[32]

Here Finlayson traces the term to Leon Trotsky's diagnosis of the proletarian revolutions in the periphery—within Russia and around the world, especially outside of Europe. Trotsky brought the dialectical idea of totality into his theorisation as a way to comprehend and analyse revolution outside of national economic determinants and contexts, extending these theories in the book *Permanent Revolution* in light of the mobilisation of the Second Chinese Revolution. It was not until the *History of the Russian Revolution* (1930) that two distinct categories, "combined development" and "uneven development," were articulated. Michael Löwy highlights this dynamic when writing that "with the appearance of capitalism as a world system, world history becomes a (contradictory) concrete totality and the conditions of socio-economic development undergo a qualitative change."[33] In this period, capitalism's global development was matched by the possibility of world revolution, in which art could play a vital role.

This belief in art's revolutionary potential was a consistent thread in Trotsky's thought. While my primary concern is not Trotsky's engagement with culture, it should be acknowledged that his interest was wide-ranging. In 1924, he published *Literature and Revolution*, applying a Marxist analysis to the artistic movements that emerged from the 1905 and 1917 revolutions. This engagement took a new turn in relation to the surrealists: while they published a statement denouncing Trotsky's expulsion from the Soviet Union, following André Breton's denunciation of Stalin, Trotsky permitted Breton to visit him in Mexico. During the summer of 1938, the pair co-authored a libertarian communist "Manifesto for an Independent Revolutionary Art," which was published in *Partisan Review*, and signed by Breton and Diego Rivera. Löwy argues that Trotsky deliberately omitted himself as a signatory because he believed that a manifesto on art should only be signed by artists.[34] The text, which is as anti-fascist as it is anti-Stalinist, affirms a revolutionary form of art that stages the power of inner life to confront the horrors of reality.

If we pivot back to the notion of uneven and combined development—a revolutionary global theory traceable to Trotsky—we can see ways in which it has been employed in relation to cultural production. As I have outlined, the WReC build on this approach to frame capitalism as a world-system. Modernity is thus cleaved to this capitalist world-system, which is developed unevenly, meaning it is also de-developed and underdeveloped. Undergirding this is an acknowledgement of the "'complex and differential temporality' of the capitalist mode of production on a global scale, 'in which episodes or eras were discontinuous from each other, and heterogeneous within themselves'." Drawing on a body of literature that grew out of studies from imperialist contexts where capitalism was imposed in differentiated ways, they claim that this partial impacting of sectors of the economy creates outcomes that combine highly capitalised forms, mixed with the "archaic."[36]

In this sense, the WReC compels us to critically rethink forms of hybridity—including the model that I have described given by Adorno—as well as globalisation and connectivity. The role of national borders and notions of (cultural) hybridity or impurity have also featured strongly, positively and negatively, as post-, anti-, and decolonial theories have begun to be integrated into art history and theory.[37] While I do not idealise or celebrate these developments, I argue that by decentring mid-twentieth-century artistic innovation from imperial centres (New York, Paris, etc.), the logic of core/periphery should be integrated into the analysis, considering how each pole informs the other. The WReC describe this not as modernism or modernisms, but as "dialectics of core and periphery that underpin all cultural production in the modern era."[38] Thus, within this view, to consider a world-system of capitalism, is also to investigate the mechanisms central to cultural production that reveal the conflicts and struggles between core and peripheral positions.

I suggest that this literature can set up the conditions of possibility for a transformation in perspective in relation to the "global turn" in art history and theory, which will account for the combined and uneven temporalities undergirding global capitalist development. Recontextualising global art in this manner aids our questioning of the temporalisation and periodisation of modernity in order to put the fetishisation of the "new" into question. For the WReC, thinking with uneven and combined development assists with a form of time travel, which the authors describe as a "telescoping" function. This function aids in bridging temporal modes within the same space—characteristic of the artworks in question. The task is remapping the history of modernism and the "intertwined trajectories of world literary wave formations," as they recount it.[39] The WReC refer to Fredric Jameson's model for thinking modernity as a "time-space sensorium corresponding to capitalist modernisation," positing modernity as both singularity and simultaneity.[40] In this sense, Jameson draws on both a reverberation of the dialectical materialist discussion of totality, system, and universality, and philosopher Ernst Bloch's *Gleichzeitigkeit des Ungleichzeitigkeiten*, notions of non-simultaneity, where modernity is determined by unevenness and thus also by the co-existence of temporal logics.

A Poetics of Inverted Worlds

I want to explore this model—thinking through formal instability as a modernism of "dialectics of core and periphery that underpin all cultural production in the modern era"—with two examples: first, the surrealist literary and poetic work of Suzanne Césaire; and second, the 1953 film *Statues Also Die* by Chris Marker, Alain Resnais, and cinematographer Ghislain Cloquet among others.

Suzanne Césaire (née Roussy), a surrealist poet born in the French colony of Martinique, engaged with the intellectual currents of the Black diaspora while living and studying in Paris in the 1930s. There, she collaborated with her partner, Aimé Césaire, on the journal *L'Étudient Noir*. In 1939 they both returned to Martinique, where, in 1941, together with René Ménil, they founded *Tropiques*. The journal's editorial team (which expanded to also include Lucie Thésée, Aristide Maugée, and Georges Gratiant, active with *Légitime Défense*, a Marxist-surrealist journal founded in Martinique in 1932) was steeped in the already existent Marxist-surrealist tradition and saw the magazine and surrealism itself as a tool in the anti-fascist struggle against colonialism and alienation.

For Suzanne Césaire, surrealism inhabited the domains of strangeness, the marvellous, and the fantastic; it was located in the space where "the poet, the painter, and the artist" preside "over the metamorphoses and the inversions of the world under the sign of hallucinations and madness."[41] Though her focus lay on the irrational and the unconscious in ways that exceeded the limits of Marxism—embracing the anticolonial—she also linked surrealism to socialism, Négritude, and Romanticism, inventing a vernacular of anti-colonial Marxist aesthetics. Her contributions to *Tropiques* were surrealist manifestos addressing colonial capitalist society, and the violence of "civilisation"—which should also be understood as being produced from within a fascist society, since at this time Martinique fell under fascist, Nazi-collaborator Vichy rule. Indeed, *Tropiques* was read widely by dissident anti-fascists until 1943 when, on 10 May, it was banned by the regime's censors until the end of the regime's rule later that year.

I am interested in how Césaire's language moves between opacity, "camouflage" or "hide and seek" to use her own terms, and a poetic-mnemonic politics of history.[42] We find a language that figures the "inversions of the world" that have produced and fixated colonial categories. For example, she excoriates the false choice between inferiority or assimilation, as elaborated in her text "The Malaise of Civilisation" (1942). Malaise invokes sickness, a sick civilisation. Out of this diagnosis, the text charts her search for the expression of a Martinican "collective self" (28). Situating her critique in the tropics—a "strip of land" defined by its history of being colonised and integrated into plantation slavery—Césaire emphasises the violent legacies of these inheritances, which have produced this malaise: "Imported Blacks had to struggle against the heavy mortality rates of the early stages of slavery, against chronic malnutrition—a reality that persists to this day" (28). And yet she persists: "Let us question life on this island of ours. What can we see?" (28).[43]

The answer to this question pivots back to art: in Césaire's words, what happened to the cultural artefacts, the "unique styles […] that flourished so magnificently on African soil? Sculptures, ornate fabrics, paintings, poetry?" and why didn't they survive in Martinique? (28–29). The question is posed to bring us back to the modern colonial-imperial system of the arts, just as this system has relegated non-European arts to a sphere of non-art or craft. In answer, Césaire reflexively testifies to the racist colonial narratives that dismissed Afro-Caribbean peoples as culturally barren, and their arts, destroyed. Her poetic assertion counters this narrative: she claims that her contemporaries are strong, elegant, and beautiful, capable of producing "authentic works of art" despite centuries of domination and oppression. This cultural vitality defies racist colonial logic, which she attributes to the "horrific conditions of transplantation onto a foreign soil" (29). Engaging with the paradox central to Négritude thought, Césaire asks how to reclaim culture while acknowledging—not forgetting—the erasures

and psychological violence that took place under the sign of slavery and its afterlives. The "malaise" of Martinican society, she asserts, stems from a "forced submission" to colonial "civilisation" under the threat of "the whip and death," producing a fractured consciousness—a "style" of unstable existence reflected in her text, more alienated than the tropical landscape itself, a kind of enforced maladaptation where survival demanded psychological dissociation (29).

Post-emancipation, Césaire identifies a tragic misdirection: the colonised, internalising the myth of European superiority, sought empowerment through "mimicry." Mimicry is revealed as an error—a "collective lie" that she terms "pseudomorphosis," borrowing from German ethnologist Leo Frobenius (31). Frobenius, who studied the history of African civilisations, was taken seriously by the group behind *Tropiques*, in particular his argument that "the idea of the barbaric Negro is a European invention" (3–10). This concept, this "pseudomorphosis," denoting a culture that is deformed and disfigured by external forces, becomes Césaire's lens for analysing colonial (legal) violence. The form of her text swerves between trying to find a voice, an identity, a collective self-assertion, to invoking the mnemonic, "let us remember," telescoping in eighteenth-century edicts designed to codify Black inferiority, including the 1764 ban on Black medical practice, 1765 prohibitions on Black law clerks, 1779 laws dictating segregation and enforced deference to White colonisers, and the 1788 decree requiring free people of colour to obtain permits for any work beyond "the fields" (31). Such statutes, she stresses, were not only bureaucratic tools but also instruments of psychic colonisation, ensuring that even after abolition in 1848, liberation mutated into a bourgeois obsession with fortune, social climbing, and middle-class respectability—a hollow mimicry of Whiteness that perpetuated forms of self-alienation.[44]

Césaire's critique of mimicry anticipates later postcolonial theories of hybridity, yet her proposal rejects both assimilation and nostalgia. Invoking Frobenius's metaphor of the "plant-human"—a being surrendering to nature's rhythms—she imagines a decolonial futurism rooted in Martinique's syncretic reality (31). She concludes her text by citing this directionality: "It is not at all about a backwards return, a resurrection, of an African past that we have learned to know and respect" (33). For Césaire, the Caribbean's history of creolisation is not a weakness but generative:

> It is about the mobilisation of every living strength brought together upon this earth; it is about becoming conscious of the incredible store of varied energies locked up within us. We must now deploy them to the maximum without deviation, without falsification. Too bad for those who consider us mere dreamers. (33)

Surrealism inaugurates a form of subjectivation that seeks to undo the power of ossified colonial categories, including the modern categorisation of the arts into

genres. Her closing declaration, "the most unsettling reality is our own," serves as both warning and call to action: liberation—and art—begin by confronting the internalised wounds of colonialism, not reproducing its hierarchies (33). The poet calls for this vernacular as a means to dissolve the border constructed in the self, and to dissolve the mimetic relation to the oppressor.

In a later text, "Surrealism and Us" (1943), Césaire builds on this idea of border dissolution, affirming surrealism as a global movement. Reaching artists from Brazil, to New York, Mexico, Argentina, Cuba, Canada, and Algiers, it is said to operate as a way to systematically explore and express "the forbidden zones of the human mind, in order to neutralise them: an activity which desperately seeks to give humankind the means of reducing the ancient antinomies that are 'the true alembics of suffering'" (34–35). Surrealism could revolutionise the mind, revealing the unconscious in order to deflate its power. It is posited as "a total activity" that can liberate humankind, the combination of art and life, illuminating the "blind myths"—the fixated and enduring colonial dogmas—that resulted in what Césaire called civilisational "malaise" (37).

"Surrealism and Us" illuminates the quest to assert an identity as a means of self-actualisation, but not in the form of conformist bourgeois personhood, rather as a means to liberation: "And now, a return to ourselves" (37). She writes:

> We know where we stand in Martinique. The arrow of history dizzyingly indicated for us our human task: a society, corrupt from its origins through crime, reliant for the present on injustice and hypocrisy, fearful of its future because of its guilty conscience, must morally, historically, and inevitably disappear. […] Already one result is established. At no moment during these difficult years of Vichy domination was the image of freedom ever totally extinguished here, and we owe this to surrealism. […] Millions of black hands will fling their terror across the furious skies of world war. Freed from a long benumbing slumber, the most disinherited of all peoples will rise up from plains of ashes. Our surrealism will supply this rising people with a punch from its very depths. (37)

This passage presents a vision of history, revolutionary in its drive towards justice. It declares that a society founded on crime, sustained by injustice and hypocrisy, and haunted by its guilt, is set to disappear—the conditions structuring the colonial world should disappear. Crucially, it credits surrealism with preserving the essential "image of freedom" even during the violent and oppressive Vichy regime. Looking forward, and inheriting something like Walter Benjamin's coterminous "tradition of the oppressed," or foreseeing Frantz Fanon's "wretched of the earth," it prophesies a cataclysmic uprising: colonised peoples, "millions of black hands," awakening, "freed from a long benumbing slumber" and rising from devastation, "plains of ashes" or scorched

earth, to unleash transformation upon a world under the sway of fascism and war.[45] Here, surrealism is said to operate as a vital weapon in this liberation, providing the rising people with a powerful, deeply rooted force, "a punch from its very depths" to fuel their struggle. Thus, in this historical moment of crisis, fascism, imperialism, and war, Césaire's form of surrealism can register the colonial continuities within "civilisation," telescoping in the colonial violence of past centuries that paved the way for malaise, to connect it to the historical fascism of Vichy, *and* thinking with other means—surrealism—to inaugurate a syncretic reality, providing a mode of resistance of the imagination.

Surrealism in a Global Context

The significance of the surrealist group behind *Tropiques* lay in its bridging radical traditions, as historian Robin D. G. Kelley has argued. In his foreword to Cedric Robinson's *Black Marxism*, Kelley posits that surrealism linked Marxism and the Black radical tradition.[46] *Tropiques* and its authors drew on modernism while recognising and appreciating pre-colonial African modes of practice. As such, surrealism stands in "as the strategy of revolution of the mind, and Marxism as revolution of the productive forces," as Kelley writes.[47] Thus, this literature—elaborating an anticolonial current that maintained a revolutionary horizon—contributes to a broadening and innovation within Marxist aesthetics, as they are more generally associated with canonised thinkers not limited to Adorno. One can also take note of an array of Black radical intellectuals—including Aimé Césaire, Wifredo Lam, and René Ménil, among others who were active in the surrealist movement and who helped define it—whom, following Kelley, we can interpret as innovating within and expanding its remit.[48] There is a contradiction at the heart of surrealism, as Kelley highlights: it drew on Marx and Freud, but could not reconcile the two; it embraced the critique of capitalism and imperialism, *and* the unconscious, spirit, magic, and love that was disavowed by socialist realism. As such it also innovated within Marxist aesthetics.

Incidentally, many surrealists, including Breton, Lam, and Jacqueline Lamba, landed on Martinique as they fled fascist Europe. Here, they found *Tropiques* by chance and then found its authors. Spring 1941 was the moment Breton would meet Suzanne and Aimé Césaire. After the mid-1920s, European surrealists (the Paris Surrealist Group and the far-left of the Communist Party) publicly supported the uprising against French colonialism in Morocco led by Abd-el-Krim, calling for an overthrow of the regime. They participated in a counter exhibition to the 1931 Colonial Exposition in Paris—which both commemorated and promoted the French Empire—that they called *La Verité*

sur les Colonies (The truth about the colonies), and protested, as Jody Blake and others have shown, the French government's "use of art in support of its civilising mission."[49]

They also attacked colonialism in the 1932 text "Murderous Humanitarianism," which according to Kelley, was mostly written by René Crevel but signed by Breton, Roger Caillois, René Char, and the Martinican surrealists Pierre Yoyotte and J.-M. Monnerot, among others. The text scorns everything from colonialism, to capitalism, the clergy, the black bourgeoisie, and sanctimonious hypocritical liberals, as Kelley also notes.[50] Preceding Suzanne Césaire's manifestos and Aimé Césaire's later *Discourse*, "Murderous Humanitarianism" makes the now-familiar argument that the foundations—the humanistic foundations of modernity in the West—were also used to justify slavery, colonialism, and what was later called genocide. They write,

> we Surrealists pronounced ourselves in favour of changing the imperialist war, in its chronic and colonial form, into a civil war. Thus we placed our energies at the disposal of the revolution, of the proletariat and its struggles, and defined our attitude towards the colonial problem, and hence towards the colour question.[51]

The authors declare surrealism's explicit commitment to revolutionary anti-imperialism and anti-colonialism. They advocate transforming the persistent, oppressive wars waged by imperialist powers into class-based civil wars—revolts where the oppressed within imperialist nations turn against their own ruling classes. By doing so, they placed their creative and political efforts or "energies" entirely in service of the proletarian revolution and its internationalist struggles. Crucially, this stance forced them to directly confront and define their position on colonialism, which they linked to "racial oppression" or "the colour question." Their opposition to empire was thus inseparable from their opposition to racism, recognising colonialism as a foundational system of exploitation and dehumanisation.

While Suzanne Césaire's writings echo these sentiments, Aimé Césaire's 1950 *Discourse* goes yet further. Written after the Second World War and the revelation of the horrors of the Holocaust, Césaire links colonialism with fascism. In this philosophical surrealist essay-manifesto, he points to the silent contract the European proletariat made with the ruling class, claiming that Europeans tolerated

> Nazism before it was inflicted on them, that they absolved it, shut their eyes to it, legitimised it, because, until then, it had been applied only to non-European peoples; that they have cultivated that Nazism, that they are responsible for it, and that before engulfing the whole edifice of Western, Christian civilisation in its reddened waters, it oozes, seeps, and trickles from every crack.[52]

This text should be situated amid a larger context of Black intellectuals, as Kelley argues, who "come to the same conclusions before the publication of *Discourse*" and were "a group of radical black intellectuals, including W. E. B. Du Bois, C. L. R. James, George Padmore, and Oliver Cox, [who] understood fascism not as some aberration from the march of progress, an unexpected right-wing turn, but a logical development of Western Civilization itself."[53] These groups shared a comprehension of fascism as the sibling of regimes of slavery and imperialism, systems rooted in both the capitalist economy and racist ideologies that were ensconced in the dawn of modernity. Aimé Césaire writes,

> First we must study how colonization works to decivilize the colonizer, to brutalize him in the true sense of the word, to degrade him, to awaken him to buried instincts, to covetousness, violence, race hatred, and moral relativism; and we must show that each time a head is cut off or an eye put out in Vietnam and in France they accept the fact […]. And then one fine day the bourgeoisie is awakened by a terrific boomerang effect [*choc en retour*]: the gestapos are busy, the prisons fill up, the torturers standing around the racks invent, refine, discuss.[54]

Suzanne and Aimé Césaire were both intent on breaking the myths of European Enlightenment and its racial boundary policing that worked to fake a "purity" of the European race and sediment racism; a fiction that it alone invented modernity, and everyone else was Other. This fiction masked Europe's violent exploitation of its colonies—via exploitation of labour and raw materials—that was described in *Tropiques* and more explicitly in the *Discourse*, leading to the conclusion that emancipation would also contribute to a full re-humanisation of all.

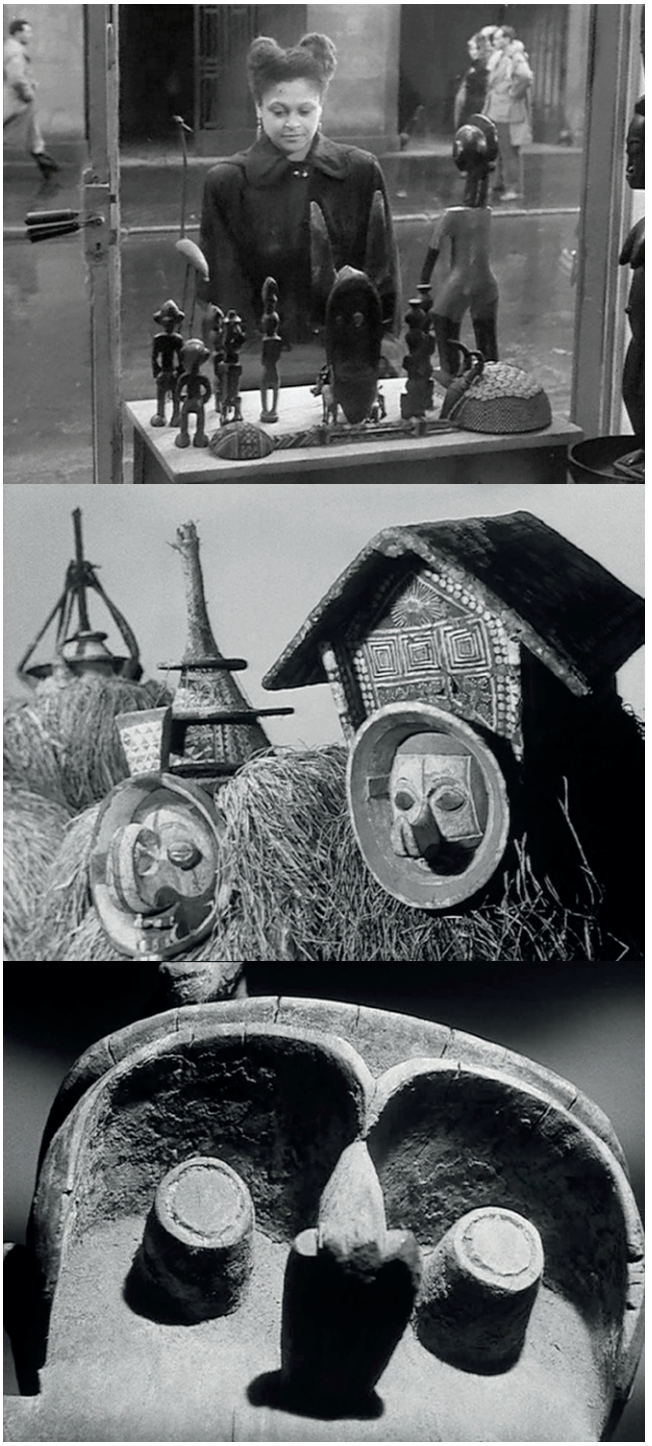
Statues Also Die

The WReC's framework of "telescoping" temporalities helps us account for the combined forms of temporality in cultural production under capitalism in its fascist, colonial, and imperial guises. If combined and uneven development exposes capitalism's violent stitching or melding of "archaic" and advanced forms, where colonisation fuels metropolitan growth, then the film *Statues Also Die* illuminates this dialectic in a surrealist manner. In the final part of this article, I want to explore this film in light of how it macerates the boundaries of "the arts," and the dynamic of modernism as dialectics of core and periphery. Indeed, the film's production history testifies to the cultural logic of uneven development. What follows throughout the film is an investigation of the hypothesis of the dying statues—the colonial gaze, and appropriation of African art—in what could be described as anti-anti-primitivism.

Statues Also Die was commissioned in 1950, after the Second World War by *Présence Africaine* (a Black diaspora journal that included Aimé Césaire, alongside Georges Balandier, Albert Camus, André Gide, Michel Leiris, Théodore Monod, Alioune Sarr, Jean-Paul Sartre, Léopold Sédar Senghor, and Richard Wright). It was to be made by Chris Marker as director, Alain Resnais as editor, with Ghislain Cloquet as cinematographer. As such, the film foregrounds the dynamics of the anti-colonial struggle within culture from within the imperial core. However, when the film was shown to the censorship commission of the Centre Nationale de la Cinématographie, it was immediately banned; censored by the French state for a decade because of its depictions of the brutal exploitative conditions of colonialism, in particular conditions of labour.[55] It was only released in 1965 in Cannes, during a moment marked by the optimism of independence (which would come to be further generated by forms of neo-imperialism), in other words, a moment which didn't align with the anti-colonial critique the film pursued.

The film's opening thesis is narrated by Jean Négroni: "When men [sic] die, they enter history. When statues die, they enter art. This botany of death is what we call culture."[56] Through the lens of this analogy, this complaint against the museum as a site of death, the film traces the colonial hierarchy of modern art and its art genres—as they are organised into the deathly Western art museum, directly critiquing the debate concerned with art genres, outlined above from Kristeller to Adorno. The film depicts how African artefacts, looted from their worlds that were also destroyed by colonisation, end up sterilised, or even slaughtered in European museums, severed from their living contexts, their cultural ancestors, from notions of heritage, and rendered as modernist fetishes outside the boundaries of the "arts." As the narrator states, "an object dies when the living gaze trained upon it has disappeared." *Statues Also Die* does not present an image of hybridity; rather, it presents necropolitical extraction. The "death" of statues in vitrines parallels the "thingification" Césaire diagnosed in colonial Martinique; this is also extended in the second half of the film, which focuses on the brutality of labour conditions under colonialism.

Yet, *Statues Also Die* does not merely lament cultural theft. Its montage juxtaposes African masks with works from the canon of Western art history, or ritual objects with European museum labels, embodying the dynamic of what Trotsky called "combined development." By filming the museum(s) and combining this with the image of brutal conditions of colonial labour, the film reflexively forces a collision between the "archaic," mislabelled as primitive, and the "modern," revealed as derivative, *exposing* the violence animating modernity's core/periphery dependency by virtue of the hierarchical boundaries between the arts and capital's extraction of value. The censoring of the film—like *Tropiques*'



1. Film stills from *Statues Also Die* (1953, *Les statues meurent aussi*) by Chris Marker and Alain Resnais © Revue Présence Africaine. It is prohibited to reproduce this image in any medium whatsoever without authorization from Revue Présence Africaine.

1943 suppression—confirms the image of culture in a world-system where, as Rodney warned, fascism and colonialism share capitalist parents.

The film was shot in the Musée de l'Homme in Paris, the British Museum in London, and the Belgian Museum of the Congo in Tervuren, now known as the Africa Museum—all in the imperial core. Tristan Tzara and Charles Ratton were consultants, while Jean Debuffet and Leiris contributed to the film. While African art is posited as a counter to the morally bankrupt and exhausted culture of the West—a culture also underwritten by malaise—the film echoes the positions of both Césaires in terms of their critique of colonial Europe that culminated in the atrocities of the Second World War. It argues that the art of the periphery is killed by the structuring logic of the houses of representation, the museums of the core.

This problem of object death and displacement is taken up in Ariella Aïsha Azoulay's *Potential History, Unlearning Imperialism* (2019). Azoulay considers the origins of modern art as a direct consequence of imperial plunder that laid the foundation for, and gave rise to, the modern art museum. She coins the notion of "potential history," in which the point is to consider the "status and identity of art objects" in order to reverse and revoke it.[57] For Azoulay, this enables "the rights inscribed in these looted objects to be recognized. Once recognized, these rights can become the basis for providing the victims of mass looting a place—not just an 'asylum'—close to their objects, or enabling them to unite with these objects under various arrangements."[58] These rights, which stem from the original cultural context of the artefact and its violent removal, signal a potential process of restitution and repair, by means of reversal and revocation. In other words, the goal here is not to keep the objects safe in "asylum" but to organise a concrete reconciliation and a restoration of those destroyed worlds. Analysing the film's central theme, she argues,

> Alain Resnais and Chris Marker contend in their 1953 film *Statues Also Die*: "When men die, they enter history. When statues die, they enter art." Yet objects do not simply die. When they are uprooted from the communities in which they are made, when they are forced to leave the people to whom they belong and who belong to them, they are placed under death threat and are prevented from fulfilling what Resnais and Marker correctly identify as their role: "guarantors of the relationship between men and the world." And of course, it is not only they who are threatened with death. It is their people, too. Objectless, they are exposed to different types of violence, including the sort that consists of not recognising them as people capable of producing such objects.[59]

Azoulay critiques the passive metaphor at play in the title, of statues "dying" when entering Western art institutions. She argues this framing obscures the violent colonial process behind their displacement and its dehumanising

consequences, where the possibility of making is even taken away from the people. The argument is made that the metaphorical "death" mystifies the conditions and infrastructures of displacement, themselves enacting death threats on objects and peoples. Azoulay seeks to show how this harm takes place. She refers to the film's own thesis—that objects guarantee the relationship between humans and their world, claiming that this metaphor "death" prevents the object from fulfilling this role.

In my interpretation, *Statues Also Die* invokes the museum as reifying tool. When they enter the museum they are no longer seen as part of living culture—a process which extends beyond the bounds of African art. In fact, the film works with this problem, attempting to re-animate the statues, depicting them liberated from their vitrines, no longer encased by the museum. It attempts to revive this art by means of montage—connecting African works with forms from everyday life—wood, cloth, pottery—imbuing them with movement and dynamic force. Marker's narration also reveals how the statues cannot be demarcated into genres of art—because they belong to a culture that has deemed all creation *sacred*, where everything is art—a form of thinking that Marxist aesthetics in its German Enlightenment tradition would describe as pre-modern. The statues die when they are "classified, labeled, conserved in the ice of showcase and collections, they enter the history of art."[60] In this logic, the historic (looted) African art contained in Western European art museums is relegated to craft and placed outside of modernity. It is pushed outside of the temporal development of the arts, and as such it is devalued.

Just as Suzanne Césaire saw surrealism as a "punch from the depths" against Vichy fascism, *Statues Also Die* uses filmic fragments to destabilise our perception of colonial time—bringing together the combination of forms, animating the statues, and presenting the conditions of colonial modernity that animates Western modernity in its full brutality. The film ends with a statement: "There is no rupture between African civilisation and ours," speaking to a promise of an as yet unrealised "humanism."

Coda

The materials that I have explored in this article, Suzanne Césaire's surrealist manifestos in *Tropiques* and Marker's and Resnais's censored essay film *Statues Also Die*, were produced within or in the wake of the vortex of mid-twentieth-century fascism, colonial violence, and capitalist crisis. I have shown how they are not just reflections of their tumultuous times but active mediations of its contradictions, that they took a position on the side of freedom in the struggle

against the violence and domination animating modernity. As such, they can be read with Adorno's *Verfransung*, the fraying of artistic boundaries—in both cases calling into question not just the "art genres" but the categories of "civilisation," "art," and the "arts" themselves, showing how these constructs have been used to subjugate and marginalise colonised peoples and cultures to the recesses of modernity.

Césaire's writings, pregnant with the revolutionary potential of the unconscious, deployed surrealism against the psychic and material violence of Vichy rule and colonial reification. Her call for a Martinican consciousness rooted in its syncretic reality, rejecting both assimilation and nostalgia, prefigured a truly decolonial futurism (including the psychic life). Simultaneously, *Statues Also Die* exposed the necropolitical logic underpinning Western modernity: the museum as a mortuary where looted African artefacts, severed from their living worlds and reclassified as "art," become symptoms of a culture built on plunder and the denial of coevalness. Its censored montage enacted the "telescoping" of temporalities (WReC) produced by uneven development, engaging a confrontation between the variant temporal forms existent within it: what is pushed out of the modern is reflexively positioned within the modern. Both examples question genre—positing the embrace of montage, the exploration of the irrational—as linked to anti-fascist and anti-colonial resistance. This instability corrodes the reified forms of capitalist value and the racialised boundaries of the "human" and its "genres" of art, constructed by colonial-imperial modernity. As such they challenge "racial liberalism," prefiguring Azoulay's call for "potential history" and concrete forms of restitution, recognising the rights inscribed in looted objects and the worlds destroyed to acquire them.

I have shown how the "global turn" in art history and theory, while expanding the canon, often fails to grasp this deeper mediation. By reading Suzanne Césaire and *Statues Also Die* through the lens of combined and uneven development, we see that the formal innovations within these works are not isolated aesthetic gestures but function as engagement with the violence of the world system that we inherit today. They reveal how art produced in the periphery or under occupation actively shapes and contests the meaning of modernity itself, refusing the false "liberal" universalism critiqued by Aimé Césaire.[61]

As fascisisation, neo-imperial wars, ecological collapse, and the hardening of borders define our current moment, these historical artworks offer something like a methodology, which in turn highlights the efficacy of understanding modernity through the prism of uneven and combined development. They remind us that confronting the "unsettling reality" of our present—the resurgent "deformity of capitalism" that Walter Rodney warned of—requires

embracing art's capacity for instability and boundary violation, in order to engage with the "punch from the depths," as a means to shatter the naturalised forms of oppression and imagine, as Suzanne Césaire urged, the deployment of "every living strength" towards a liberation that remains radically unfinished.

NOTES

1 Aziz Rana, “Constitutional Collapse,” *NLR/Sidecar*, March 21, 2025, https://newleftreview.org/sidecar/posts/constitutional-collapse.

2 Walter Rodney, *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa* (Howard University Press, 1981), 196.

3 Rodney, *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*, 196.

4 In the field of culture, Trump’s historical revisionist attacks on the Smithsonian are one example of ridding cultural and education institutions of exhibits examining histories of colonialism or slavery. Joseph Gedeon, “Trump Administration’s Anti-Woke Campaign Targets Smithsonian Museums,” US News, *The Guardian*, August 21, 2025, https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2025/aug/20/trump-administration-smithsonian-museum-review.

5 Rose-Anne Gush, *Artistic Labour of the Body* (Brill, 2025), 15.

6 Karl Marx, *Capital: Critique of Political Economy, Volume One*, trans. Ben Fowkes (Penguin Classics, 1990), 174–75.

7 Aimé Cesaire, *Discourse on Colonialism*, trans. Joan Pinkham (Monthly Review Press, 2000), 42.

8 Theodor W. Adorno, “Art and the Arts,” in *Can One Live After Auschwitz? A Philosophical Reader*, ed. Rolf Tiedemann (Stanford University Press, 2003), 368 (translation modified); Theodor W. Adorno, “Die Kunst und die Künste,” in *Gesammelte Schriften*, Bd. 10 (Suhrkamp Verlag, 1977), 432.

9 Warwick Research Collective, *Combined and Uneven Development: Towards a New Theory of World-Literature* (Liverpool University Press, 2015), 15. For a geopolitical account of the rise of Western hegemony framed by combined and uneven development, see Alex Anievas and Kerem Nisancioglu, *How the West Came to Rule: The Geopolitical Origins of Capitalism* (Pluto Press, 2015).

10 On “globalisation” and situatedness, see John Roberts, *Revolutionary Time and the Avant-Garde* (Verso, 2015), chapter 4, and Peter Osborne’s essays, “Global Modernity and the Contemporary: Two Categories of the Philosophy of Historical Time” and “Existential Urgency: Contemporaneity, Biennials and Social Form,” both in Peter Osborne, *The Postconceptual Condition: Critical Essays* (Verso, 2018).

11 For example, in the 2006 Singapore Biennial, ninety-five artists from more than thirty-eight countries took part. See Steve Edwards and Gail Day, “Global Dissensus: Art and Contemporary Capitalism,” in *Art & Visual Culture 1850–2010: Modernity to Globalisation*, ed. Paul Woods and Steve Edwards (Tate Publishing, 2013); Larissa Buchholz, “What Is ‘Global’ about Contemporary Art? Some Clarifications on the Global Field Perspective and ‘Distant Seeing’,” *Nonsite* 148 (2024); Joshua I. Cohen, Foad Torshizi, and Vazira Zamindar, “Art History, Postcolonialism, and the Global Turn,” *ARTMargins* 12, no. 2 (June 1, 2023): 3–17; Larissa Buchholz, *The Global Rules of Art: The Emergence and Divisions of a Cultural World Economy* (Princeton University Press, 2022); David Joselit, *Heritage and Debt: Art in Globalization* (MIT Press, 2020); Anthony Gardner and Charles Green, “Biennials of the South on the Edges of the Global,” *Third Text* 27, no. 4 (2013): 442–55; Nuit Banai, “From Nation State to Border State,” *Third Text* 27, no. 4 (2013): 456–69; *Making Art Global (Part 1): The Third Havana Biennial 1989*, ed. Rachel Weiss (Afterall, 2012); *Making Art Global (Part 2): “Magiciens de La Terre” 1989*, ed. Lucy Steeds (Afterall, 2013); *Global Visions: Towards a New Internationalism in the Visual Arts*, ed. Jean Fisher (Kala Press, 1994); Jonathan Harris, ed., *Globalization and Contemporary Art* (Wiley-Blackwell, 2011).

12 Osborne, *Postconceptual Condition*, 110.

13 Osborne, *Postconceptual Condition*, 112.

14 Roberts, *Revolutionary Time*, epub.

15 Roberts, *Revolutionary Time*, epub.

16 Another model that counters the dominant narrative of globalisation is Łukasz Stanek’s description of “global socialism,” which emerges through the historical “global” collaboration between an expanding network of socialist states, including the Non-Aligned Movement, and the mobility that they afforded. Stanek sees global socialism as embedded in an idea of world-forming (*mondialisation*) where, in the Lefebreian sense, “the world is an emerging dimension of practice.” Łukasz Stanek, *Architecture in Global Socialism: Eastern Europe, West Africa, and the Middle East in the Cold War* (Princeton University Press, 2020), 29.

17 Barry Flood et al., “Roundtable: The Global Before Globalization,” *October* 133 (2010): 3–19, here 5.

18 Cecilia Alemani interviewed by Marta Papini, “The Milk of Dreams,” in *Biennale Arte 2022: The Milk of Dreams Exhibition Catalogue*, ed. Cecilia Alemani (Silvana, 2022), 27.

19 Peter Osborne, *Crisis as Form* (Verso Books, 2022).

20 Most notably with Heinrich Wölfflin, *Principles of Art History: The Problem of the Development of Style in Later Art* (Dover Publications, 1950).

21 Consider: Thomas da Costa Kauffmann, *Towards a Geography of Art* (2004); the volume, *Circulations in the Global History of Art*, ed. Thomas DaCosta Kaufmann, Catherine Dossin, and Béatrice Joyeux-Prunel (Routledge, 2017); James Elkins’s series of volumes exploring art and globalisation; and Nataša Petrešin-Bachelez, “For Slow Institutions,” *E-Flux* 85 (2017).

22 See tendencies developed in Black Studies: Sylvia Wynter, “Unsettling the Coloniality of Being/Power/Truth/Freedom: Towards the Human, After Man, Its Overrepresentation—An Argument,” *The Centennial Review* 3, no. 3 (2003): 257–337; David Lloyd, *Under Representation: The Racial Regime of Aesthetics* (Fordham University Press, 2019). See also Fred Moten, *In the Break: The Aesthetics of the Black Radical Tradition* (University of Minnesota Press, 2003).

23 The modern concept of art that Kristeller recognises as self-conscious emerged in the eighteenth century and is a Western concept. It refers to a supposedly self-conscious art or advanced or demanding art, arises in the modern era, and is typically defined against craft, against the artisanal, as well as against entertainment and the culture industry. Paul Oskar Kristeller, "The Modern System of the Arts: A Study in the History of Aesthetics Part I," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 12, no. 4 (1951): 496–527, here 497.

24 Adorno, "Art and the Arts," 370.

25 Adorno, "Art and the Arts," 370.

26 Adorno, "Art and the Arts," 385.

27 Lucy R. Lippard and John Chandler, "The Dematerialisation of Art*," in *Changing: Essays in Art Criticism* (Dutton, 1971), 255–76. Additionally, Juliane Rebentisch frames Adorno's notion of fraying alongside Greenbergian formalism: she highlights fraying as both the unravelling and reconstitution of the art genres, positioning this transformation on a continuum constituting aesthetic modernity against theories of a break. Juliane Rebentisch, *Aesthetics of Installation Art* (Sternberg Press, 2012), 99–141. Contra this position, I want to reconceptualise the notion of modernity itself, so that it is not simply aligned with the idealisms of progress.

28 Kerstin Stakemeier and Marina Vishmidt, *Reproducing Autonomy: Work, Money, Crisis and Contemporary Art* (Mute Books, 2016), 96.

29 Stakemeier and Vishmidt, *Reproducing Autonomy*, 96.

30 Kerstin Stakemeier, *Entgrenzter Formalismus: Verfahren einer antimodernen Ästhetik* (b_books, 2017), 10.

31 Warwick Research Collective, *Combined and Uneven Development*, 15.

32 Ciarán Finlayson, "Uneven and Combined Development," in *Kunst und Politik. Jahrbuch Der Guernica-Gesellschaft –Schwerpunkt: Keywords for Marxist Art History Today*, ed. Larne Abse Gogarty and Andrew Hemingway (V&R unipress, 2020), 157.

33 Finlayson, "Uneven and Combined Development," 158.

34 It was subsequently revealed that Breton co-wrote this manifesto with Trotsky. Diego Rivera and André Breton, "Manifesto for an Independent Revolutionary Art. Signed: André Breton and Diego Rivera" (1938), available at https://www.marxists.org/subject/art/lit_crit/works/rivera/manifesto.htm; Michael Löwy, "Leon Trotsky and Revolutionary Art," *Verso*, August 26, 2020, https://www.versobooks.com/blogs/news/4838-leon-trotsky-and-revolutionary-art.

35 Warwick Research Collective, *Combined and Uneven Development*, 15.

36 See Johannes Fabian, *Time and the Other: How Anthropology Makes Its Object* (Columbia University Press, 2010).

37 See Kobena Mercer, "New Practices, New Identities: Hybridity and Globalization," in *The Image of the Black in Western Art, The Twentieth Century, The Rise of Black Artists*, ed. David Bindman and Henry Louis Gates, Jr. (Belknap Press, 2014); Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (Verso, 1993); Stuart Hall, *The Fateful Triangle: Race, Ethnicity, Nation*, ed. Kobena Mercer (Harvard University Press, 2017); Edward W. Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (Vintage, 1994); Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (Routledge, 1994).

38 Warwick Research Collective, *Combined and Uneven Development*, 51.

39 Warwick Research Collective, *Combined and Uneven Development*, 19

40 Warwick Research Collective, *Combined and Uneven Development*, 12.

41 Suzanne Césaire, "The Domain of the Marvellous," *View*, 1941, 1.

42 The essays "The Malaise of Civilisation" (1942) and "Surrealism and Us" (1943) appear within the collected volume Suzanne Césaire, *The Great Camouflage: Writings of Dissent*, ed. Daniel Maximin, trans. Keith L. Walker (Wesleyan University Press, 2012), 46; hereafter, page numbers are given in text and refer to this volume.

43 See also, Robin D. G. Kelley, "A Poetics of Anticolonialism," *Monthly Review*, 1999, https://monthlyreview.org/1999/11/01/a-poetics-of-anti-colonialism/; Michael Richardson and Krzysztof Fijałkowski, *Refusal of the Shadow: Surrealism and the Caribbean* (Verso, 1996), 28.

44 Recalling this legal history foresees and anticipates practices by contemporary artists today, such as Cameron Rowland.

45 Walter Benjamin, "On the Concept of History," in *Selected Writings, 4: 1938–1940*, ed. Michael W. Jennings (Belknap Press, 2006), 389–400; Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. Richard Philcox (Grove Press, 2005).

46 Robin D. G. Kelley, "Foreword," in Cedric J. Robinson, *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition* (University of North Carolina Press, 2000), xxi.

47 Robin D. G. Kelley, *Freedom Dreams: The Black Radical Imagination* (Beacon Press, 2002), 169.

48 Kelley in Aimé Césaire, *Discourse*, 16.

49 Jody Blake, "The Truth about the Colonies, 1931: Art Indigène in Service of the Revolution," *Oxford Art Journal* 25, no. 1 (2002): 35–58, here 38.

50 Surrealist Group, "Murderous Humanitarianism," trans. Samuel Beckett, in *"Negro" Anthology*, ed. Nancy Cunard (New York Public Library, 1934), 574; Kelley in Robinson, *Black Marxism,* xxi.

51 Surrealist Group, "Murderous Humanitarianism," 574.

52 Aimé Césaire, *Discourse*, 36.

53 Kelley in Aimé Césaire, *Discourse*, 20.

54 Aimé Césaire, *Discourse*, 35–36. In the English translation of the *Discourse*, "*choc en retour*" is rendered "boomerang effect," but as Michael Rothberg has argued, this might be more accurately translated as "reverse shock," or backlash. Michael Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory: Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Decolonization* (Stanford University Press, 2009), 23.

55 Catherine Lupton, *Chris Marker: Memories of the Future* (Reaktion Books, 2004), 36.

56 Chris Marker, "The Statues Also Die," trans. Lauren Ashby, *Art in Translation* 5, no. 4 (2013): 429–38, here 431.

57 Ariella Aïsha Azoulay, *Potential History: Unlearning Imperialism* (Verso Books, 2019), 65.

58 Azoulay, *Potential History*, 64.

59 Azoulay, *Potential History*, 122.

60 Marker, "Statues Also Die," 435.

61 Aimé Césaire, "Letter to Maurice Thorez," trans. Chike Jeffers, *Social Text* 103, no. 28.2 (2010): 145–52.