

The Contemporary Condition

Coexistent Perspectives (ADC7001)

(Lecture 1)

*In the aftermath of **modernity**, and the passing of the **postmodern**, how are we to know and show what it is to live in **the conditions of contemporaneity**?*

The Contemporary Condition

Contemporaneity refers to the **temporal complexity** that follows from the coming together in the same cultural space of heterogeneous clusters generated along different historical trajectories, across different scales, and in different localities.

With the overall aim of questioning **the formation of subjectivity in time** and **the concept of temporality** in the world now, it is a basic assumption that **art can operate as an advanced laboratory for investigating processes of meaning-making** and for understanding wider developments within culture and society.

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Contemporary Dialogues

histories
(past)

a confluence of temporalities

futures

Contemporary Dialogues

Coexistent Perspectives

the role of
contemporary media
and computational technologies

and how art and design practice
makes epistemic claims

three broad lines of inquiry for investigation

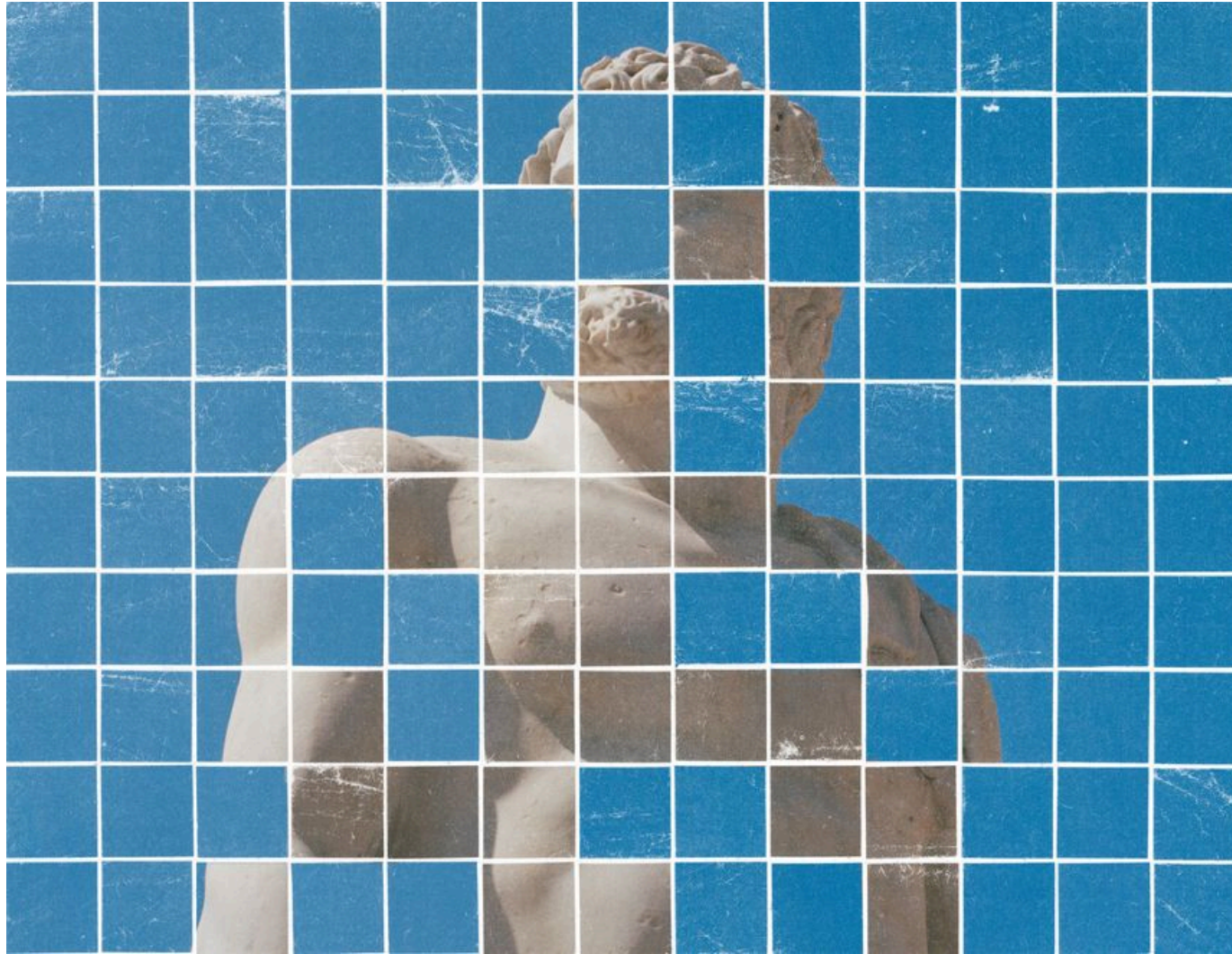
May You
Live In
Interesting
Times

BIENNALE ARTE
2019

11.05—24.11
VENEZIA
GIARDINI/ARSENALE



“We’re all facing down the same existential questions,” says Marc Payot, president of Swiss mega-gallery Hauser & Wirth. “What do we do now? What kind of art do we need?”

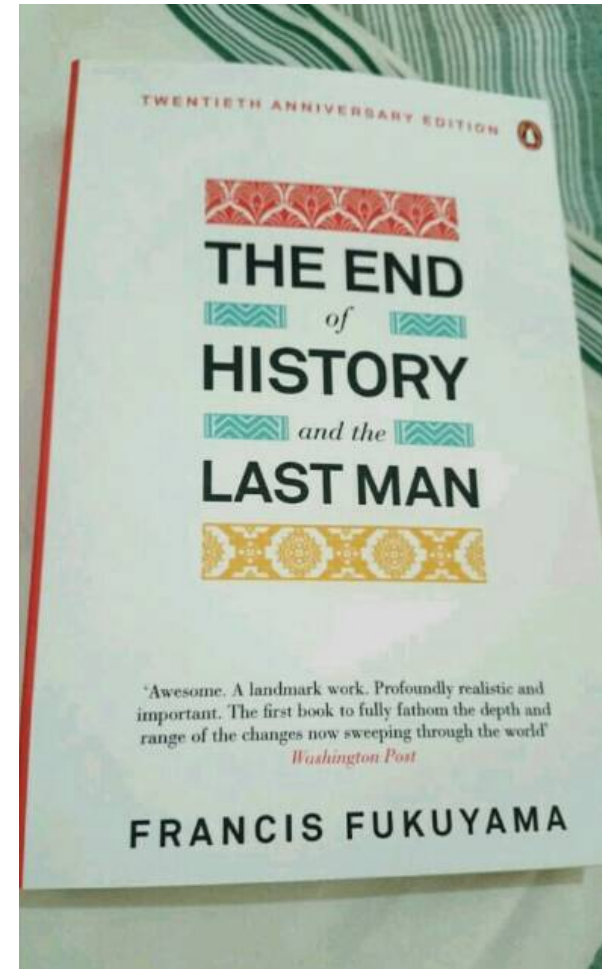


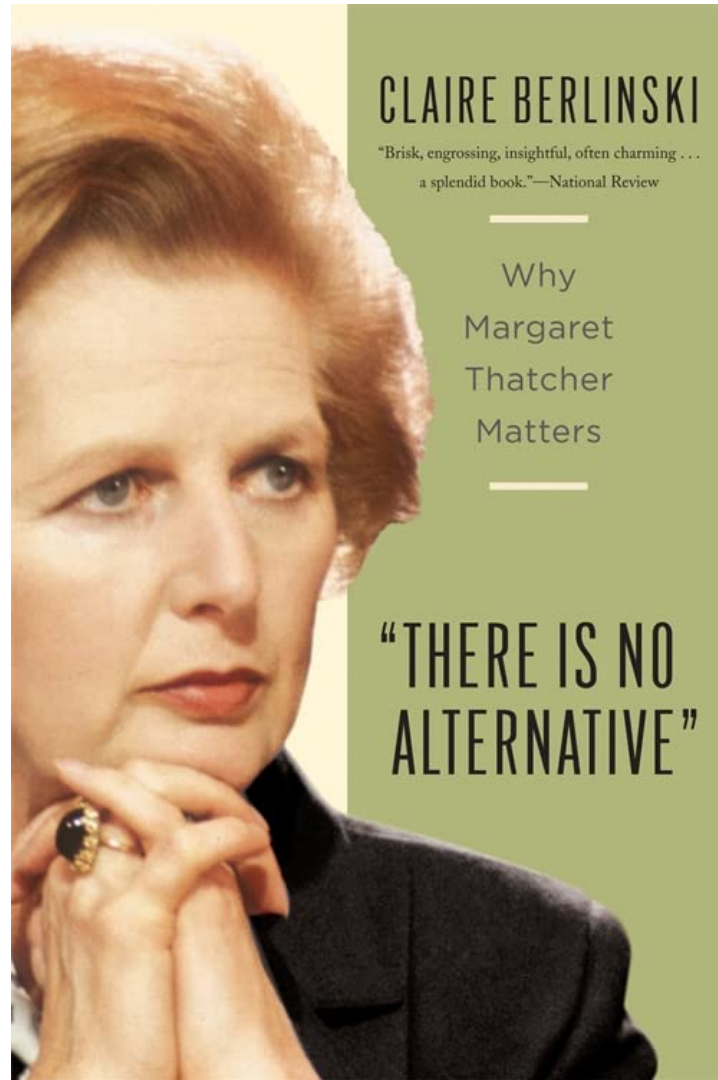
Post-Pandemic

The End of History and the Last Man

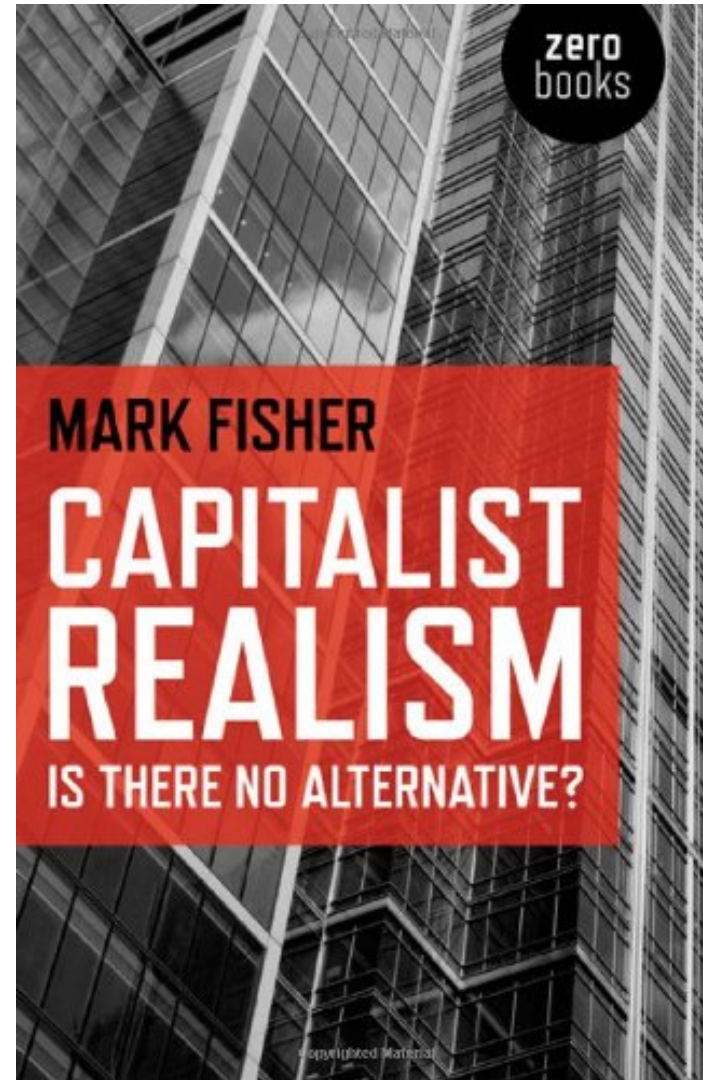
Francis Fukuyama

In his 1992 best-selling book *The End of History and the Last Man*, American political scientist Francis Fukuyama argued that **the dominance of liberal democracy** marked the end of humanity's political and ideological development.





Postcapitalist Futures



Is there no alternative?

This shift from modernity to an era of contemporaneity is connected to the realization that time changes with the events that fill it, and that time itself has a history and politics.

Time is constructed and reconstructed, multiple, and asymmetrical.

“History is the subject of a structure whose site is not homogenous, empty time, but time filled by the presence of the now .”

Walter Benjamin

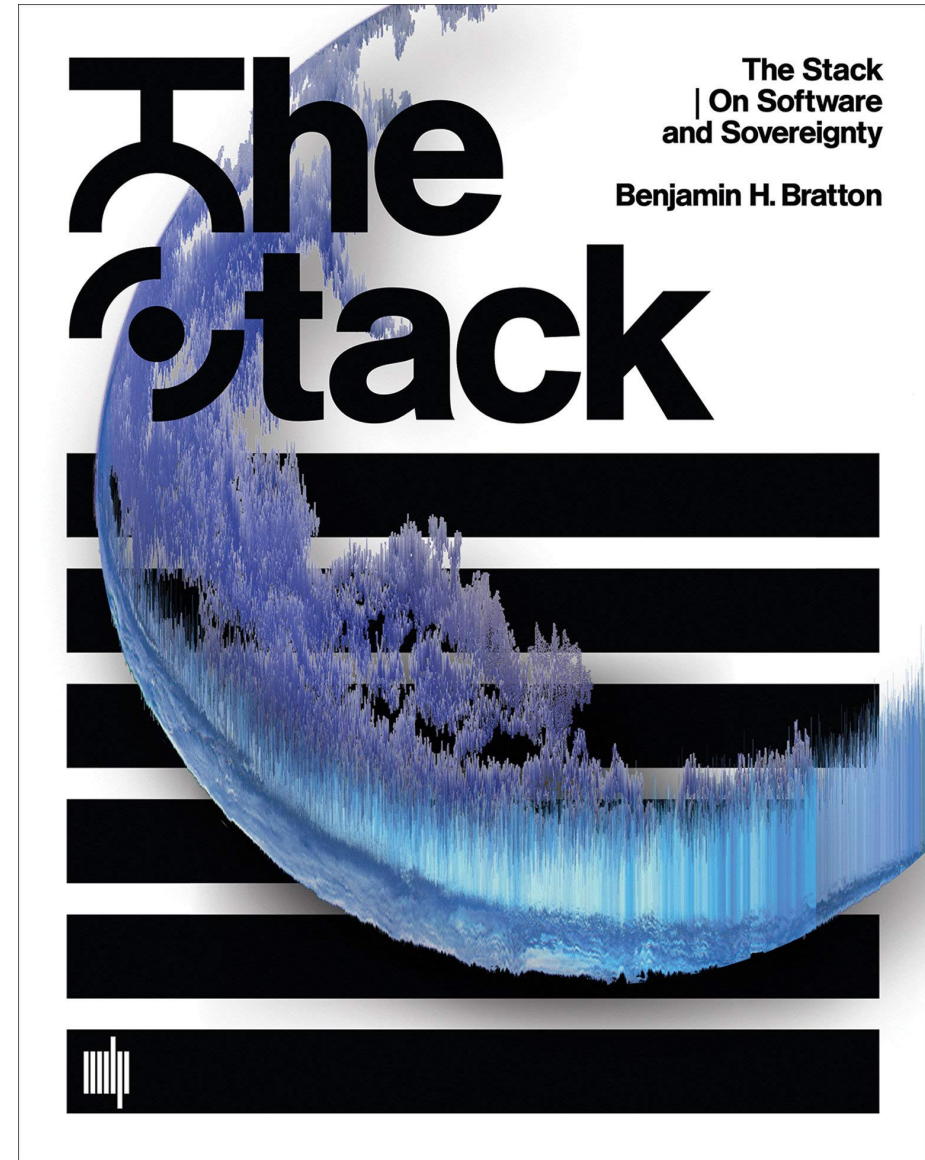
During this period, we have also gradually replaced the term “modern art,” and for a period “postmodern art,” with “contemporary art” as descriptor of the art of our historical present.

This can be detected in the fact that a large number of art museums and newly established international biennials define themselves as institutional agents of “contemporary art” rather than “modern art.

The Stack

- Our overall hypothesis is thus that **contemporaneity** —understood with Osborne as the coming together of different, but equally “present” **temporalities** or “times”— is a decisive element of the globalization of our historical present.
- We propose to investigate this contemporaneity, this temporality of globality itself, with closer attention to the ways in which informational and computational technologies have helped, and still help, to make it possible.

Geoff Cox & Jacob Lund

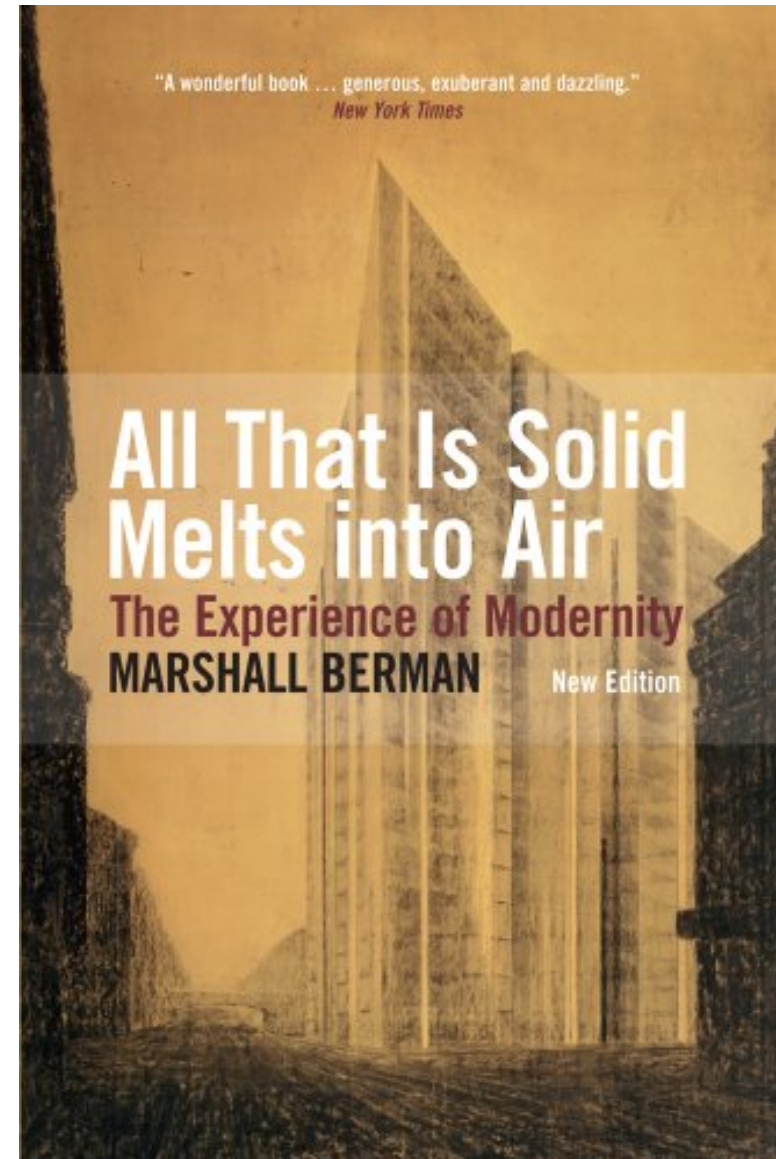


Modernism

Modernism is an art historical term used when people speak about modern art or certain forms of design.

Modernism is, in short, the philosophical idea which frames modern art.

Modernist forms of art and design arose as part of Western societies attempt to come to terms with **Modernity** (socio-political context).



Postmodernism

What does the term postmodernism (**social context**) refer to?

- as a result of modernity?
- the aftermath of modernity?
- the development of modernity?
- the rejection of modern

POSTMODERNITY POSTMODERNISM

SOCIAL

CULTURAL

Modernity

- Progress
- Optimism
- Hegemony
- utopianism

Postmodernity

- Exhaustion
- Pessimism
- Heterogeny
- dystopianism

Postmodernism tends to be defined as **the period after modernism** and as the 'condition' whereby established values are rapidly eroded by new technological advances. **Post-modernism endorses pluralism** but is by no means resolved at this time. This in itself is very post-modern: Living without fixed laws and standards.

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POSTMODERNITY POSTMODERNISM

SOCIAL

CULTURAL

The products of post-modern culture may sometimes hold similarities to modernist works, but their purpose is fundamentally different.

Postmodern art does not eclipse or replace modernist art, as it constantly refers to modernism by breaking modernist principles and aesthetics.



Manet, *Le Déjeuner sur l'herbe*, (1863)



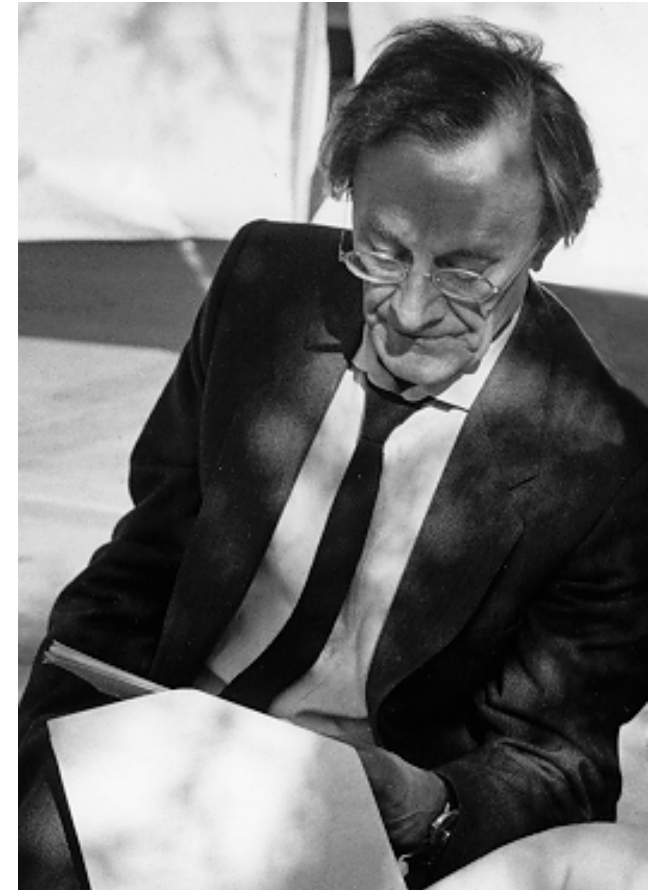
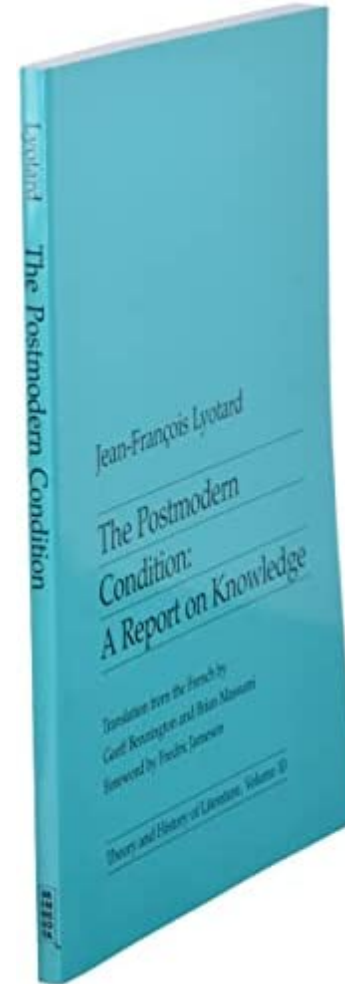
feminist parody of Manet's "*Le Dejeuner sur L'herbe*," Mara McAfee (1976)

The Postmodern Condition

A Report on Knowledge

Theoretical interest: The collapse of the '**grand narrative**'.

Lyotard's philosophy promotes a **heterogeneous** approach – diverse in character or content – an approach which fosters a multiplicity of possible perspectives. (**petits récits**)



Jean-Francois Lyotard (1924-1988)

Birth of the Modern Age

Grand Narratives Revisited

- Modernism
- The questioning of the certainties of modern science is a part of what **Lyotard** describes as '**incredulity toward metanarratives**'.
- Grand Narratives are authoritative. Establishing their political or cultural views as absolute truths beyond any means of criticism.
- For **Lyotard**, they have a totalizing effect on culture, reducing it to universal codes in favour of **the celebration of difference and understandings** located within particular knowledge regimes.
- In other words you have to believe the **metanarrative**.

MODERNISM

GRAND NARRATIVE

POSTMODERNISM

PETIS RECITS

‘the basic attitude of postmodernists was [is] a **scepticism** about the claims of any kind of overall, totalizing explanation’
(Butler, C. 2002, Postmodernism, OUP: 15)

modernism

singularity

modern knowledge rests on its
appeal to grand narratives

Essentialism

The Grid

postmodernism

plurality

knowledge is specific to **language-games**

**embraces local, plural and heterogeneous
knowledges.**

Anti-essentialist

Threads within Fabrics

Grids and Threads within Fabrics

between **Modernism**
and **Postmodernism**

**Evolving Narrative
Perspectives**

- Feminist method and theories have instead offered a socially concerned alternative to the increasingly mechanized evolution of art about art.
- The 1970's might not have been **pluralistic** at all if woman had not emerged during the decade to introduce **the multicolored threads of female experience into the male fabric of modern art.**



Elsi Giauque

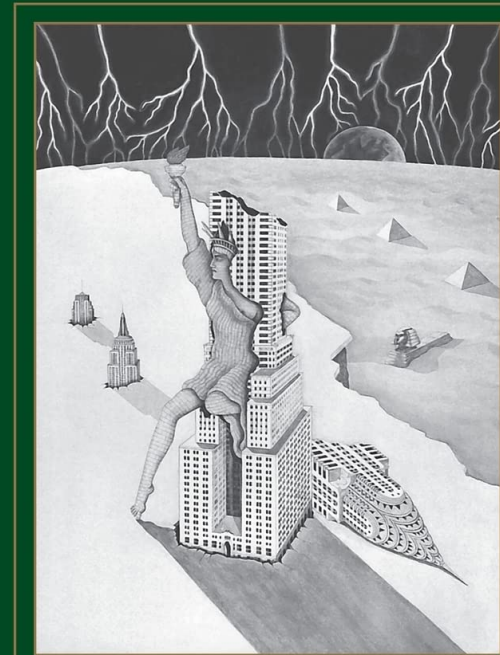
POSTMODERNISM

OR,
THE CULTURAL LOGIC
OF
LATE CAPITALISM



FREDRIC JAMESON

The **CONDITION** of POSTMODERNITY



DAVID HARVEY

The Society of the Spectacle

Guy
Debord

Critical Editions



The Consumer Society

Myths and Structures

Jean Baudrillard



Postmodernism, Pluralism and Perspectivism



A Single Multiplicity – Molar/Molecular

40-part Motet, Janet Cardiff, 2001

molar / molecular - D&G (Deleuze & Guattari)

In mechanics, **molar** properties are those of a mass of matter, as opposed to its parts -- atoms or **molecules**.

For **Deleuze and Guattari**, molarity is the site of coded wholes. It is a productive process: a making-the-same. Its attractor state is that of stable equilibrium. It is the mode of being, rather than becoming. The principle revolutionary objective of their writing is to break down molar aggregates in favor of molecularity, and the "microphysics of desire." They call for becoming rather than being, for becoming-other rather than being the same. For them, becoming-other is thoroughly political.

The **molar body** is defined by its **self-similarity** across its **variations**, or rather, its invariant self-identity. It seeks to make an **either/or from the both/and**.

Oedipus, phallocentrism, and personhood are all molar wholes. The **rhizome**, **pack**, **haecceity**, **singularity**, event.. all are molecular.

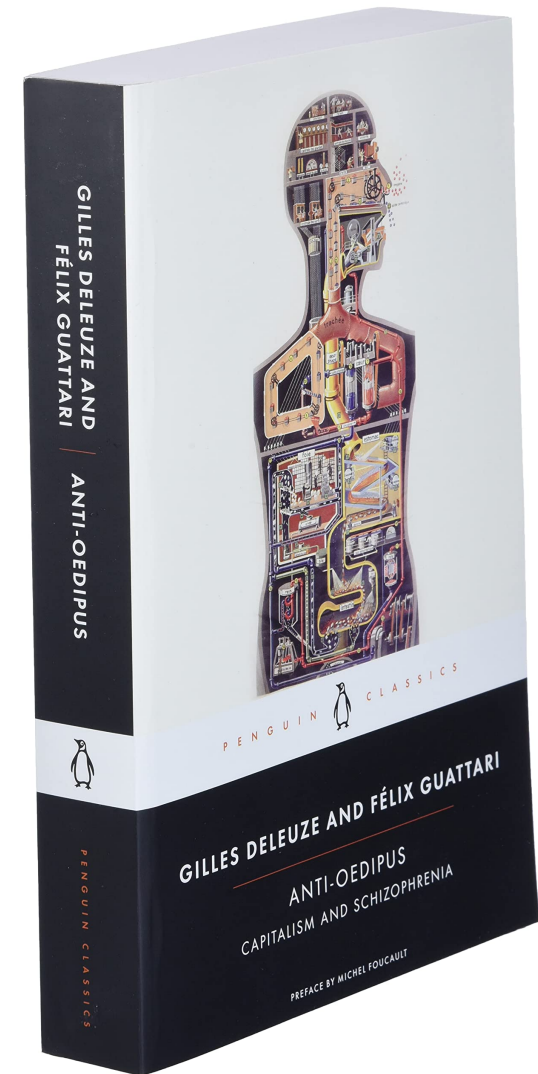
"Becoming is an equilibrium-seeking system at a crisis point where it suddenly perceives a deterministic constraint, becomes "sensitive" to it, and is catapulted into a highly unstable supermolecular state enveloping a bifurcating future." (Massumi, p.95)

"There is no becoming-man because man is the molar entity par excellence, whereas becomings are molecular...Man constitutes the majority, or rather the standard on which the majority is based: white, male, adult, 'rational,' etc., in short, the average European, the subject of enunciation. " (**A thousand Plateaus**, p 292) (see the critique of this concept in Elizabeth Grosz, **Volatile Bodies**, pp 173-183)

The **Body without Organs (BwO)** is a site of decoded flows. It opens a zone of indeterminacy, for imagination as a new circuit between the actual and the virtual, in the place of habit. **Becoming** bears on a population, even when it is initiated by a single body.

Haecceity: the property of being a unique and individual thing.

Rhizome: A **rhizome** is purely a **network of multiplicities** that are not arborescent (tree-like) with properties similar to lattices.



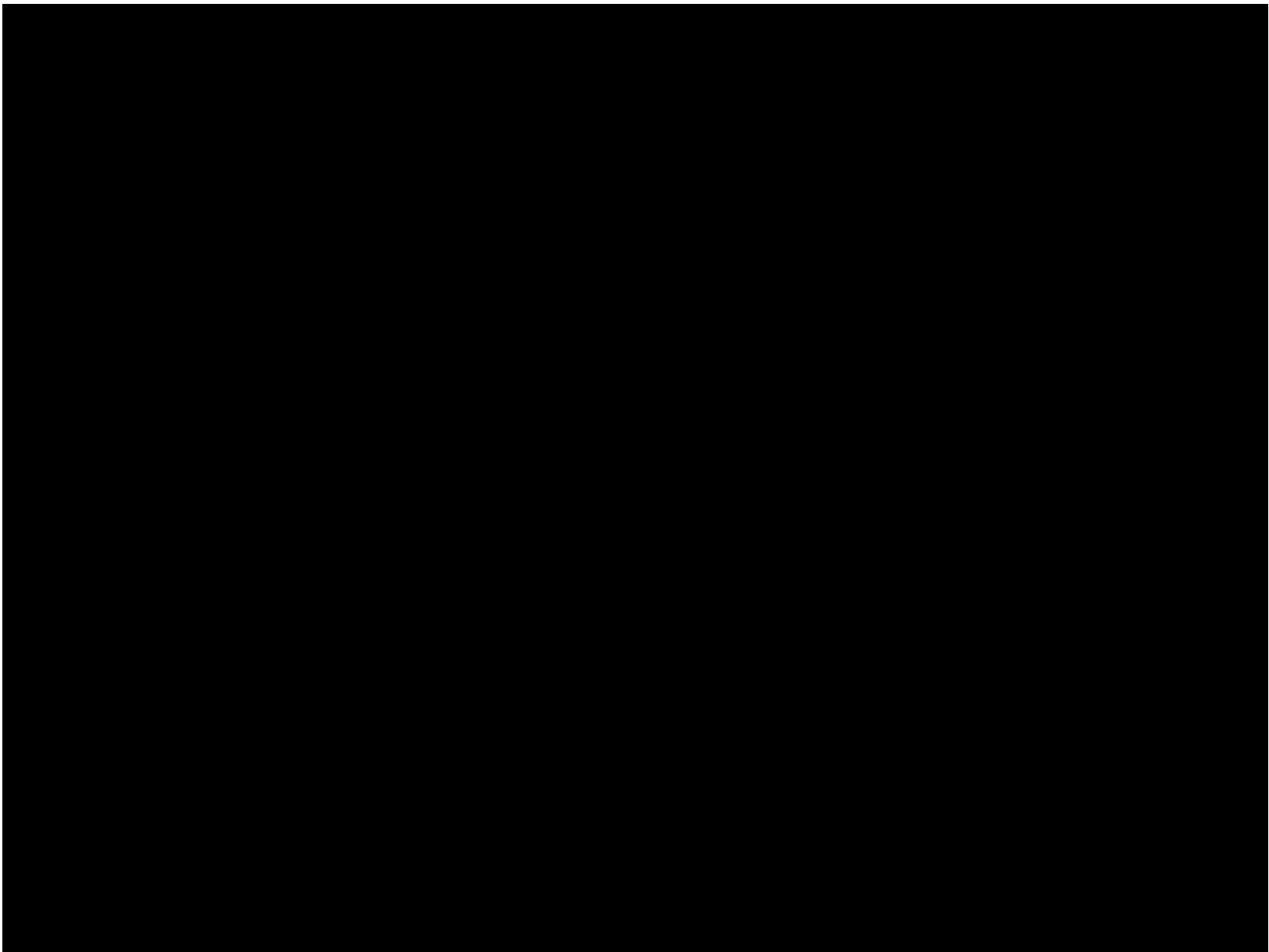
Capitalism and Schizophrenia

The man giving orders: *The Girl Chewing Gum* (1976)

The most striking aspect of this film is of course **the relationship between sound and image** or, more precisely, between the voice-over narration and the action it initially appears to direct. Immediately inviting consideration of issues to do with authorship and authority (of the male narrator over the images, but also that of the sound-track over the image-track) the film appears to engage with an **essentially 'modernist' cinematic sensibility**, if we understand **modernism** in its established sense as the desire to demystify the 'illusionism' of main-stream narrative cinema, in so doing facilitating a more critical relationship to what we see and hear. In this context, foregrounding the mechanisms by which mainstream cinema generates its illusions is key to their repudiation. This understanding of **cinematic modernism** has been entrenched in film studies since **Peter Wollen's seminal 1972 essay** detailing **the seven cardinal sins of narrative cinema versus the seven cardinal virtues of 'counter-cinema'**, best exemplified by Godard's post-1968 film practice.

Central to this operation is a **Brechtian separation of elements**, **Godard's strategic severing of sound and image or voice and body being a case in point**. As such, Smith's short film can be understood on one level as a witty participant in the modernist resistance to the coincidence of what we see and what we hear typical of mainstream cinema. Voice-over narration is a very particular permutation of this relationship however. Though most associated with markedly different film styles (that is, documentary and film noir) its role in both is roughly similar: the authoritative (or otherwise) certification of the seen. In highlighting the tension between **voice and image** or, to borrow other terms, between **discourse and figure**, Smith's film encourages another perspective, a point of view that could perhaps best be described **as postmodern**, not necessarily in the sense of coming after modernism, but rather in terms of how it engages certain incipient tendencies within modernism itself.





‘exclusion of the visible’ - ‘discourse’ and ‘figure’

It is a mistake to simply oppose the terms ‘modern’ and ‘postmodern’ however. For Lyotard, ‘A work can become modern only if it is first postmodern. Postmodernism thus understood is not modernism at its end but in the nascent state, and this state is constant’ (Lyotard [1979] 1984: 79). Likewise, discourse and figure cannot be easily separated, the one works within and against the other. Nor can figural activity be restricted to figurative representation alone. In foregrounding the relationship between sound and image, Smith’s film offers the opportunity to explore the tension between these registers: the discursive and the figural, or the semiotic and the sensual. In so doing, it situates itself on the cusp of an incipient post/modern sensibility.

The terms ‘**discourse**’ and ‘**figure**’ support Jean-François Lyotard’s distinction between a modern sensibility and a postmodern ‘mood’.

Lyotard argues that the transition ‘**from eye to ear**’ (Lyotard [1984] 1989: 82) (that is, the transition from the pagan worship of idols to a blind faith in the word of an invisible God) establishes the foundations of western modernity, which is predicated upon the ‘**exclusion of the visible**’ (Lyotard [1984] 1989: 72). **Modernity then is where the ‘visible’ and the ‘readable’ become opposed**, in the sense that **‘things’ become ‘signs’ to be deciphered, and the figural – that which resists erasure in the service of abstraction – is foreclosed**. In this context, **the postmodern is that which attends to the figural other in the space of representation**.



Postmodernism

Postmodernism may be considered 'an overused catch-all for anything playful, humorous, ironic, knowing, appropriative, pluralistic and code-breaking in our culture. The down-side of postmodernism's lack of fixed principles and standards is [arguably] a melancholic schizophrenia, in which the lack of boundaries becomes itself restrictive and even repressive'. (Meecham, P., Sheldon, J. 2005, Modern Art: A Critical Introduction, (2nd Edition) Routledge: 282

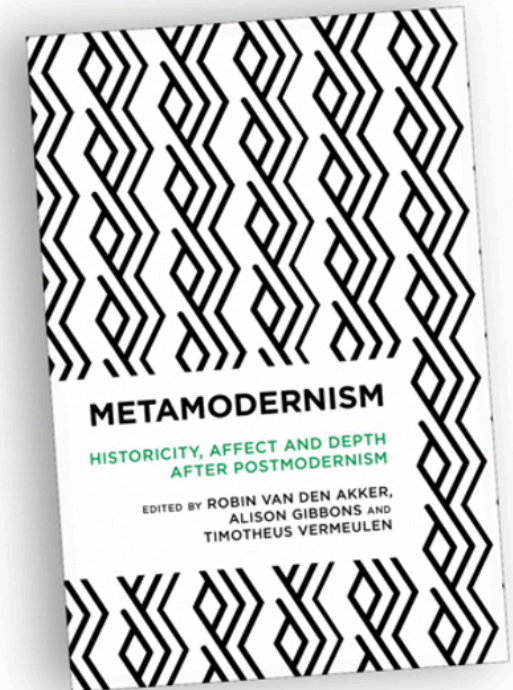
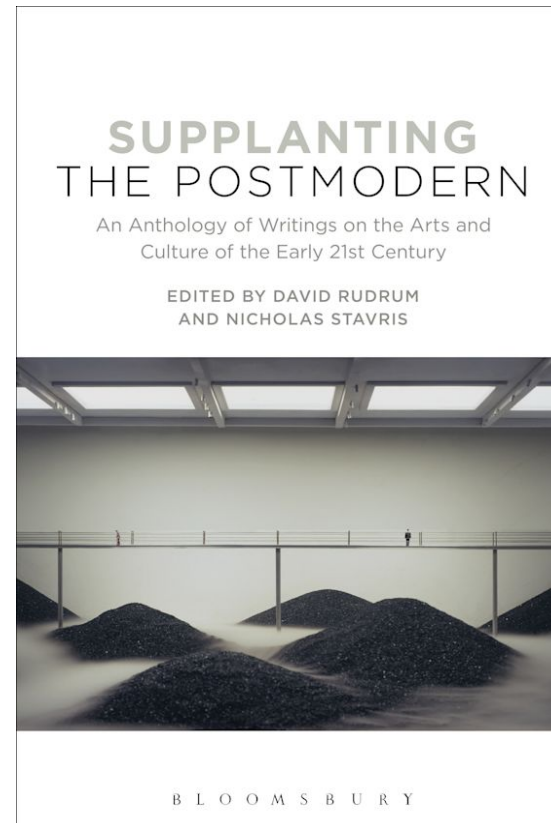
After postmodernism?

What next?

metamodernism

Metamodernism refers to a broad range of developments in art, culture, society, philosophy, as a historiographical between-ness that appears after and gestures **beyond postmodernism**, and at the same time attempts to meaningfully render emerging periodized post-postmodernism coherent.

One definition, in the domain of culture, characterizes the metamodern as an oscillation between aspects of both modernism and postmodernism; others see it as an integration of these as well as premodern (indigenous and traditional) cultural codes.



The New Sincerity

post-postmodernism

New Sincerity is a trend in music, aesthetics, literary fiction, film criticism, poetry, literary criticism and philosophy that generally describes creative works that expand upon and break away from concepts of postmodernist irony and cynicism.



Postcolonialism

The Postcolonial Constellation

It is a commonplace of the current historical thinking about globalization to say: *There are no vantage points from which to observe any culture since the very processes of globalization have effectively abolished the temporal and spatial distance that previously separated cultures.*'

Another way this thinking has been expressed is in the idea of globalization as the mode and ultimate structure of singularization, standardization, and homogenization of culture in service of instruments of advanced capitalism and neoliberalism.

After such totalization, what remains of the critical forces of production that throughout the modern era have placed a strong check on the submergence of all subjective protocols to the orders of a singular organizing ideology, be it the state or the market?

What may immediately follow this spatial and temporal reordering is to ask: *If globalization has established, categorically, the proximity of cultures, can the same be said about globalization and art?* Here, what marks the critical division between culture and art is that for centuries art as such has waged a fierce battle of independence from all cultural, social, economic, and political influences.



Woman Shooting Cherry Blossom, Yinka Shonibare (2019)

Okwui Enwezor



Okwui Enwezor (1963–2019)

The Postcolonial Constellation: Contemporary Art in a State of Permanent Transition

“to bury history in culture”

The alternative kind of exhibition that Enwezor required, he believed, a “spectacular difference” to mark it as genuinely other. What was that? On the face of it, Enwezor seems to be saying that **Documenta11** should take a form that would make it stand out against other contemporary mega-exhibitions, while also being one of their kind, like it or not. Fair enough.

Yet he also had in mind **Guy Debord’s** famous condemnation of capitalist commodity culture, *The **Society of the Spectacle***, specifically Debord’s insight that the function of spectacle is “**to bury history in culture**”, a process against which critical practice must intervene.¹¹

A critical exhibition must, therefore, intervene by introducing into the culture of spectacle a sharp awareness of the ongoing relevance of historical differentiation – not least, several reminders about how difference came into the world, and does so now.

Above all, this difference is not singular. It is the difference of the multitudes, as distinct from the totalization that globalizing Empire seeks to impose; it is the counter-models and “experimental cultures” constantly created by “those placed on the margins of full global participation”

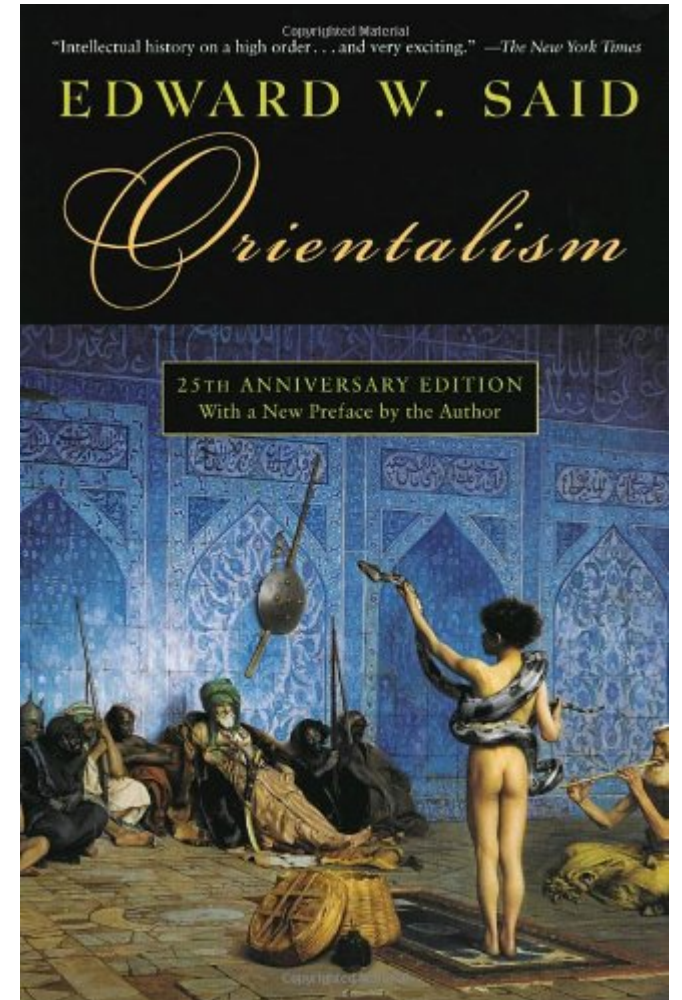
Postcolonialism



How Does a Girl Like You Get to Be a Girl Like You? **Yinka Shonibare** (1995)



Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak



Edward Said

Minority and becoming open an opportunity of moving toward the border of the discourse, to protest against the tyranny of language and order, and to dismantle the power. They portray a movement of molecular forces which subverts the violence that exists in the majoritarian social structure.

becoming-minoritarian

Minority, or 'minoritarian' according to Deleuze and Guattari, is a political action. It challenges power and domination; it resists the violent coercion of law and the predominant norms; it deterritorializes itself from majority. Minority does not refer to quantitative. It is a substantial position that lacks power; it looks for **escape-lines** (*ligne de fuite*) from institutions, political order and social structure. Minority is not a static position nor is it a quality or characteristic. It is a process of ever-changing identities, of potentiality, of becoming (*devenir*). Becoming minority, becoming a woman, becoming a little girl, becoming other or becoming an animal – **all represent forms of molecular politics that subvert molar identities and steady positions**. They trigger uncontrollable movements and **deterritorializations**, and they are characterised by an existence of an abiding change, by continuous metamorphosis.

Kafka: Towards a Minor Literature (1975), *A Thousand Plateaus* (1980), and elsewhere. In these texts, they criticize **the concept of "majority"**.

BIENNALE
ARTE 2022

THE
MILK OF
DREAMS

IL
LATTE DEI
SOGNI



23.04—27.11.22
Venezia
Giardini-Arsenale

© Felipe Baeza. Courtesy of the Artist and Maureen Paley, London



Lay back, keep quiet and think of what made Britain so great, **Sonia Boyce** (1986)

GRAN BRETAGNA



Posthumanism



‘The Milk of Dreams’ Tests a Theory of the Posthuman

At the Arsenale (Venice Biennale), monumental works question the place of the human in nature, and the nature of the human