

## INTRODUCTION

European avant-garde movements in literature and the arts at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century show, on the one hand, distinctive features of individual movements that reflect differing cultures in individual regions, in such areas as Expressionism, Surrealism, Futurism, and Russian Avant-garde. On the other hand, they can also be seen as parallel transnational and transcultural phenomena that interestingly happened to develop in the same period and in similar directions. Even with avant-garde movements that originated in and were strongly connected to specific regional cultures, we may note that they often later developed into larger movements. Examples of this can be found in various events and works from the period of roughly 1908 to 1910, a period that represents the birth of abstract art as well as the development of geometrical and structural characteristics: Picasso's "*Les Femmes d'Alger*" (1907), radical attempts conducted around 1908 by the second generation of *Wiener Moderne* (Schoenberg's transition to atonality and Adolf Loos' "Ornament and Crime"), the Manifesto of Futurism (1909, written in 1908), and Kandinsky's first step toward abstract art in 1910. We may also note that Analytic Cubism (Picasso and Braque) as well as Abstract Cubism (František Kupka, Robert Delaunay, and Fernand Léger) developed in about the same period, and that these abstract features culminated in Suprematism.

Our project intends to examine avant-garde movements in literature and the arts as a Pan-European phenomenon, on the basis of a cross-cultural approach and collaboration among scholars in various fields, and we intend to explore affinities among various European avant-garde movements, focusing our attention especially on the paradigm shift regarding human perception. In other words, while many studies on avant-garde movements either examine developments in specific movements within individual fields (e.g., literature, arts, and thought) or investigate

transcultural and transnational influences among them, we intend to examine avant-garde movements as a transnational and transcultural phenomenon that reflects the paradigm shift in perception, and to explore its significance in the history of thought. The shift from “Naturalism” (mimetic representation of the external world) to historical avant-garde arts (abstract and structural representation of inner and outer worlds) is strongly connected to significant changes in technology and their influences on perception. Such connections among arts, technology, and perception can be found in both of two contrasting types of avant-garde art: one characterized by the geometrical representation of concrete objects of the outer world (e.g., Cubist works of Picasso and Braque) and the other characterized by abstract representation of inner feelings (e.g., works of Kandinsky in the 1910s). Thus, one of our fundamental purposes will be to examine typical tendencies in the historical avant-garde towards geometrical, abstract, fragmented representations, taking into consideration changes in perception resulting from the development of new technologies.

It is possible to outline two different approaches to examining the relationship between perception and technology in the avant-garde paradigm shift, in accord with the individual focuses of their respective analyses: while one might put more focus on perception and the subject, another might put more focus on technologies and media in a quite broad sense. These two approaches are, of course, strongly connected to each other.

The first approach is represented by Jonathan Crary, who, in his two well-known books, focused his attention on the reorganization of subjectivity that occurred in the process of modernization. In his “Techniques of the Observer: on Vision and Modernity in the Nineteenth Century” (1990), Crary distances his argument from the common explanation that the paradigm shift (from mimetic reproduction of the external world to a new kind of visual representation) originated in Modernism at the end of 19<sup>th</sup> century. Examining the framework of perception and thought of the “observer,” rather than of the “works” produced by artists, he tries to demonstrate that the shift of representation (from mimetic representation based on the model of *camera obscura* to a new way of representation based on an active role of the subject) derived from changes in the fields of technology and

scientific discourse in the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Starting from such a point of view and taking into consideration mechanized and fragmented incorporeal “visuality” (typically seen, for example, in modern computer graphics), we can explore how traditional ways of visual perception in modern Europe went through the process of abstraction. In any case, our approach is similar but not exactly the same as that of Crary because we aim to discuss works of literature and the arts themselves in relation to changes in perception, while Crary’s research is aimed at the reconsideration and reconstruction of perception itself.

The second approach is represented by Walter Benjamin, who showed how our perception was changed by new media and technologies. While this type of approach has been adopted as the fundamental framework for media theory, we would like to avoid sticking to the schematic understanding, often seen in media theory, of the relationships between technologies and perception. We would rather like to go back to pay our attention to the vivid images of physicality presented by Benjamin in the period of dramatic changes in media and technology, and to explore the core of this shift and its essential features. For instance, the well-known term “the optical unconscious” not only refers to similarities between psychoanalysis and some film techniques, such as slow motion and fast motion, but also can be used to understand one of the general characteristics of avant-garde arts: that they contain potential structures beyond simple physical perception and cognition

Our research aims to theorize such common features of avant-garde movements, as well as to examine different features of specific cases. By exploring transcultural aspects of avant-garde movements, we will also be able to shed light on their local and individual aspects.

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