REGIMES ON NEWNESS: AN ESSAY OF COMPARATIVE PHYSIOGNOMY

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"In this observation, we may think that the art regime, in reality, exhibits an intriguing case of being a specific interface consisting of different sub-regimes that demonstrate different criteria for newness."

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The concept of interface obviously presupposes at least two entities that are, to a certain degree, mutually independent but interacting with each other. By definition, such entities can be either individual or collective. In fact, the idea of interface should be extended to the macro-sociological realms, to the interface between, say, the economic and political domains, but with the precondition that these domains are stipulated as mutually exclusive.

The social system theory of Niklas Luhmann[1], among other candidates, seems a good fit for initiating our reflection on such a macro-sociological interface, largely because of his neat formulation of modern society as an agglomeration of mutually exclusive subsystems, such as law, politics, and economy. For characterizing these domains, Luhmann adopted the biological autopoiesis theory[2] — namely, the claim that any biological system is characterized by a self-referential loop of reproduction that is closed to the outside world. This attempt made his description of such subsystems highly independent and exclusive from each other: for instance, the legal system concerns itself only with law and nothing else. In other words, the legal system does not care about aesthetic or market values, which is the job of the other social subsystems.

This neat formulation—in a highly abstract manner as social theory—provides a unique opportunity for reflecting upon the potential of the macro-sociological interface as a proper topic, as well as on its limits. Following Luhmann's formulation, each subsystem sings its own song (speaking metaphorically) without listening to any others. The potential interface between these subsystems is formulated either as *resonance* or as *structural coupling* in his theoretical corpus. In discussing ecological communication, which Luhmann[3] defines as the relation between any social subsystem and its environment, he describes the way each subsystem resonates with the others, each singing its song in response to the others' songs, in a mutually independent manner. Hence, what we eventually hear is a cacophony of the different songs that any subsystem sings, as we are living in the era of social differentiation.

In such an interface, also, the subsystems can be somewhat more steadily bridged for collaboration: this is called *structural coupling*[4]. This is exemplified, say, by the inevitable need of securing economic transactions by legal measures like property law.

This brief summary of sociological interface, à la Luhmann's system theory, reveals both its advantage of theoretical clarity and its shortcomings. The merit of Luhmann's theory is his focus on the highly differentiated characteristics of our modern society, in which there is no

1 Niklas Luhmann, *Social systems* (Redwood City, CA 1995).

2 Humberto Maturana and Francisco Varela, *Autopoiesis and cognition: the realization of the living* (Dordrecht 1980).

3 Niklas Luhmann, *Ecological communication* (Chicago 1989).

4 Luhmann, *Social systems*; Humberto Maturana and Francisco Varela, *The tree of knowledge: the biological roots of human understanding* (Boston 1987).

privileged center of gravity; but what is missing is the formulation of a more fluid form of interface not represented in such neat descriptions of differentiated subsystems. To be fair to his own intention, it is not his goal to describe the interfacial or interstitial phenomena between these different subsystems; however, his own conviction is that once such differentiation is completed, there would be no further development in the branches of such subsystems[5]. This theoretical assumption—wherein each subsystem is assumed to be so tightly accomplished that there is no way of subtle interface, even within such a domain itself—seems to be too narrow.

In this article, I pursue the possibility of observing an interface even within the specific domain of society that Luhmann calls subsystems. In fact, quite a few topics may spill over from this framework. For instance, although the core operation of a market economy is buying and selling, as Luhmann[6] simplifies, at the border of those very market mechanisms lie hybrid practices that mingle monetary and non-monetary exchanges. Luhmann may have thought of these as related to classic anthropology and relevant only in pre-modern societies. Or such a unitary description of any subsystems that are reduced to a core element of binary oppositions—like legal/illegal in the law and true/false in science—may raise empirical doubts as to a more empirically realistic way of describing their workings.

Hence, admitting the irresistible allure of the theoretical consistency of Luhmann's formulation of modern society, I nonetheless depart here from his too strict formulation of it, moving to my own concern of the intrinsic heterogeneity of these subsystems — which can also be described as open-ended and consisting of multiple principles when closely examined. The specific concern in this article is the internal dynamics of the world of art, which I believe cannot be reduced to a single code, like true/false or legal/illegal, such as Luhmann employs for describing these subsystems.[7]

Regimes

In discussing this topic as outlined above, I leave aside Luhmann's[8] concern with self-referentiality as the core of his depiction of each subsystem, in which the idea of its functional closedness dominates his theoretical focus. I am more intrigued by the loosely hybrid and heterogeneous nature of such largely differentiated social divisions as law or economy, which touches on matters of recent emphasis by scholars of science

5 Luhmann, *Social systems.*

6 Niklas Luhmann, *Die Wirtschaft der Gesellschaft* (Frankfurt/Main 1990).

7 Latour's recent argument somewhat similarly employed a certain version of differentiation theory, if given the fairly different characterization of them as different modes of existence. In fact, however, as each of these modes is given a distinct mode of existence per se, there seems no proper way of to observe their interface, even less so than is possible with Luhmann's concepts of resonance and structural coupling. See: Bruno Latour, *An inquiry into modes of existence: An anthropology of the moderns* (Cambridge, MA 2013).

8 Luhmann, *Social systems.*

and technology studies (STS). The loose unity of these subdivisions of society is henceforth referred to here as *regimes*. A regime may be defined as a socio-material entity that exerts substantial influence on the constitution of contemporary society.[9] A regime is regarded as a center-periphery structure wherein the center is the institutionally dense part, like the court in legal institutions, as well as legislation, bureaucratic elements, and so on. It is close to what psychologist Eleanor Rosch calls a "prototype"[10], the typical element that the regime represents. Luhmann's formulation seem to be largely descriptive of the normative structure of such a prototypical center in a regime. Peripheries, in contrast, are more like everyday practices, which can be hazy and even far from the strict formulation in the prototypical center. The meaning of heterogeneity relates to these multi-faced aspects of sub-areas, which constitute a regime as a historical composite or montage of these heterogeneous elements.

The physiognomy of newness

Starting with this tentative definition of regime, this article looks at the specific regime of art as an intriguing example for observing the phenomenon of multiple interfaces within its realm. For highlighting this point, I first provide a very rough overview between different regimes in regard to the idea of "newness" in the manner of comparative (socio-anthropological) *physiognomy*, borrowing the term from Frankfurt-school sociologist Theodor W. Adorno[11]. The reason for taking up this specific topic relates to my private uneasiness about the way artistic newness is hailed in the art world. Critical comments on the innovative character of this or that art work and related new waves in the art scene are common topics in major art journals. Superficially, the phenomenon looks almost identical with the way new material on, say, the mysterious *dark matter* in the universe is discussed in science or how a new version of commodities in market production is advertised. However, a closer look at the meaning of newness in each regime—here, science, the market, and art—seems to reveal rather substantial differences, which is what I intend to examine closely here.

9 For recent usage of the term "regime" in STS, see Stephen Hilgartner, *Reordering life: Knowledge and control in the genomics revolution* (Cambridge, MA 2017); and Masato Fukushima, Blade runner and memory devices: Reconsidering the interrelations between the body, technology, and enhancement. *East Asian Science, Technology and Society* 10 (2016), pp. 73–91, with a more limited focus on the subject of application such as regime of international sports and that of memory to compare the meaning of bodily enhancement by new technologies.

10 Eleanor Rosch et al. (eds.), *Cognition and Categorization* (Hillsdale, NJ 1978).

11 Theodor W. Adorno, On the fetish character of music and the regression of listening, in: Theodor W. Adorno, *The culture industry: Selected essays on mass culture* (London 1991).

Scientific regime

To address this aspect, I will first provide a brief sketch of how newness is regarded in the scientific regime. It probably goes without saying that being new is crucial to the scientific regime where researchers like me belong. One of the sadistic joys of the peer reviewer's role is to comment that a submission to a relevant journal has "nothing new" in it; it would be surrealistic if someone deliberately declared that the paper he presented provides an answer identical to that of a preceding paper. Meanwhile, there are naturally different degrees in the rigor with which newness is pursued in different sectors of the same regime: I remember reading a short essay by an amateur STS scholar in Japan, also a biologist, who half comically ridiculed the fact that whereas biologists' ordinary greeting is "What's new?" in every conversation, in his snapshot view of the science-policy world in STS, researchers repeated the same questions again and again without visible newness—at least to his eyes. However, this does not mean that policy researchers had repeated their utterances, as in minimalist composer Steve Reich's early experimental music "It's gonna rain," wherein this phrase is endlessly repeated; the main arguments of the policy researchers seemed to the biologist to be repetitious, unlike the more dynamic changes in the topics of biological research. In this sense, the natural sciences seem to offer an ideal model for defining the regime of newness, but its applicability to the different realm of our social life becomes an intriguing issue that we may explore further.

Economic regime

Superficially, the same principle of newness appears to be applicable to the realm of the contemporary market economy; however, the reality seems to be a little more complex than the pursuit of newness in the scientific realm. Market commodities appear to be similarly and constantly driven to newness if we look at the ubiquitous pressure for innovation around us. In fact, during my field research in a biology lab, a molecular biologist working there insisted that what they were doing in the lab was exactly the same as what workers in the small factories of Ohta-District (an industrial area of Tokyo) had been doing. In reality, I found this identification amusingly odd: such identification derives from the superficial similarity between the drives of scientific innovation and of the market, because factories, in the popular mind, are thought to lead innovation so they can survive in a competitive market. The misconception here is this: it is consumer demand that drives market innovation, whereas the quest for newness in science derives from a desire to impress one's peers.

In fact, there has been a tendency, in intellectual reflection on the history of all these technologies and commodities,

to regard them only according to such innovation; in other words, the prevailing regime is producing constant newness. Historian David Edgerton's book *The Shock of the Old*[12] is one of a few attempts to reorient our too innovation-centered way of reading the history of technology toward looking at its historical relation with users. Edgerton's counter-example of the far more common continuous use of everyday items, from condom to oxcart, is a revelation for readers. It challenges them to find the thick layers of materiality in a society that moves far slower, or even remains almost still, than does the ordinary historiography of technology, which tends to be based solely upon observations of the rapid change that characterizes innovation. If we pay attention, we will notice quite a few commodities that have shown hardly any changes in style, whether in food or a specific type of shoe, to name two examples. I have been using the same brand of shoulder bag since I was a high school student, despite the largely unfavorable micro-modifications to some parts of its style. In terms of my shoes, I eventually found a shop where I could reliably purchase the same style of shoes, which I have used for the last two decades—in this case, without much change of its style, except that the price has risen. Even in other cases, the user may resist changes that a given industry tries to impose, as in the case of Windows XP: its Japanese users have long stuck to its use, despite pressure from Microsoft to make them buy its more updated version. Common to these instances is that once the consumer becomes deeply adjusted to a certain temporal mode of commodity, he does not want changes that may disrupt this cozy equilibrium.

A technological infrastructure that affords other activities that rely upon it gives rise to similar observable issues. Any tools or infrastructure usually requires user skills and understanding of how to use it, and time is needed for mastering it so that it becomes invisible or transparent, at which point it becomes *infra*-structure[13]. As an example, a characteristic of traditional board games like chess or *Go* is that the basic rules have not been changed for a long time. This gives players the ability over time to accumulate diverse strategies and tactics for playing them. Somewhat similarly, any infrastructural tools require a certain level of mastery from users. This longitudinal process of mastery presupposes a certain level of stability in the object itself, hence the trouble often seen in the constant changes in the OS of computers where upgrades can be a nuisance for users' learning processes. In bio-informatics, for instance, biologists, the so-called wet part of it, very often complain of having to adjust their skills constantly to the changes that information engineers, the

12 David Edgerton, *The shock of the old: Technology and global history since 1900* (London 2006).

13 Susan L. Star and Karen Ruhleder, Steps toward an ecology of infrastructure: Design and access for large information spaces. *Information Systems Research* 7/1 (1996), pp. 111–134; Masato Fukushima, Value oscillation in knowledge infrastructure: Observing its dynamic in Japan's drug discovery pipeline. *Science and Technology Studies* 29/2 (2016), pp: 7–25.

dry part, have made in the field.[14] In another instance, in a conference discussing the role of databases for climate science, one of the presenters described this innovating aspect of databases as a "risk" for climate scientists that creates constant instability and uncertainty.[15]

If the production of newness is not always welcomed by users/consumers in the world of commodities and tool use, then why is there such a high level of (technological) innovation in the economic world? Japanese economic theorist, Katsuto Iwai, succinctly exposes the principle basic to the survival of capitalism: making use of "difference," which is systematically translated into profit.[16] He summarizes three phases or types: in commercial capitalism, the difference relates to spatial distance. For example, the East India Company from the Netherlands collected spices from the eastern island of Indonesia and brought them back to their homeland to sell at a high price. Meanwhile, industrial capitalism profits by maximizing the difference between the cost of commodity production and a cheap labor force. Finally, the most recent phase of capitalism relies on constantly creating technological differences that are supposed to drive the consumer to buy new commodities, one after another. This last aspect of difference, which is generally called innovation, is the reason we feel we are constantly driven by changes here and there in the present system, very often against our wishes. This kind of traditional contrast between technoscience and the life-world, after the thought of philosopher Jurgen Habermas, may lie in the heterogeneous constitution of the regime of economy with the logic of capital and our bodily logic of expertize.[17]

Art regime

Compared with the various regimes where the *raison d'être* of newness actually seems to be difference—namely, in the scientific regime, the newness is the *sine qua non* of all evaluative efforts, whereas in the market regime its status is more delicately balanced with other concerns, such as the usability of the commodities—the newness in the art regime is something that has been puzzling to me for decades. In the contemporary art regime, the issue of newness is seemingly divided into the different layers in which the concerned art work is situated. This is why the art regime is an intriguing example for discussing the interface between different sub-elements within the same regime.

Some parts of the system seem to have a vague kinship with the principle of the scientific regime in the form of a

14 Masato Fukushima, Constructing "failure" in big biology: The Socio-technical anatomy of the Protein 3000 program in Japan. *Social Studies of Science* 46/1 (2016), pp. 7–33.

15 These were drawn from the cases of conferences that I have attended on the topic.

16 Katsuhito Iwai, *Talking about capitalism* (Tokyo 1997).

17 Jürgen Habermas, *The theory of communicative action*, vol.2: *Life-world and system: A Critique of functionalist reason* (Boston 1987).

quest for a quasi-academic newness when the innovativeness of a particular artwork is represented in, say, the discourse of the history of art types. The major narrative of art history is replete with a litany of new names that symbolize a particular age or school or group. Naturally, these series of names are supposed to show the emerging newness of such trends from the Renaissance to relational arts. This convention of the historiography of newness, however, has a couple of anomalies about its significance.

First, unlike the scientific regime where the major audience for research outcomes, in principle, consists of sullen peers within the specific sub-discipline, the art regime is open to diversely different social realms that consist of academia, galleries, curators, museums, and the public at large.[18] The influence of such diverse realms, which demand different levels of newness each according to its own standard, makes the meaning of being new far more complicated in the art regime than in the scientific regime. A certain segment of such multiplicity, namely the mutual infiltration between the art and market regimes, is easier to comprehend, because it is based upon the taste of consumers. Just as Edgerton underscores above, no doubt the very traditional landscape paintings or portraits of realist art have very often been popular, even if the works have hardly merited the notice of academic discourse as something in the context of newness.[19] More complicated are the more academic evaluations of the newness of a particular artwork because they give the impression of being a vague shadow of the scientific regime, vague in the sense of the subtle differences between these two regimes.

New works, new names

One of the major forces in the evaluative machinery of scientific newness is, without doubt, the system of journals and peer reviews. The recent proliferation of academic journals is an indication of how our knowledge system is both diversified and segmented, so much so that it is becoming more difficult to find the proper peers to evaluate the real novelty of the submitted papers. This is counter-balanced with the scientific system of disciplines that consists of canonical textbooks, standardization, and so on, a favorite topic in STS.[20] STS itself, as a newly emerging discipline, is also a good example to observe reflexively this process of ongoing canonization and systemization, with the examples of mushrooming textbooks and handbooks that define what STS is to counter the

18 Howard S. Becker, *Art worlds* (Oakland, CA 1982); Sarah Thornton, *Seven days in the art world* (London 2009); Tetsuya Ozaki, *What is contemporary art?* (Tokyo 2018).

19 Edgerton, The shock of the old.

20 Thomas Kuhn, *The structure of scientific revolutions* (Chicago 1962); Martha Lampland and Susan L. Star (eds.), *Standards and their stories: how quantifying, classifying, and formalizing practices shape everyday life* (Ithaca, NY 2009).

potential of evading such canonization.[21] This process of standardization is pivotal for measuring the newness of any given products so that the peers supposedly are able to render correct judgment about the novelty of the concerned work. In reality, however, such thorough standardization hardly takes place in the actual process, so that a job that looks new from one aspect may appear to be less so from a slightly different angle. Hence, one journal may condemn a job for its lack of innovativeness, while the other may praise its innovative potential.

This particular type of an evaluation system for newness does not seem to have equivalence in the art regime: First, in art, it is not based on a particular closed field like scientific (sub)disciplines—such as chemical biology, a newly emerging hybrid field that I studied,[22] wherein its major constituency is the peers—but is open to diverse audience from art critics to the public at large. Here the standard of evaluation is based less on a narrowly stipulated disciplinary matrix than on a rather random choice of evaluators, whose backgrounds in art history can differ significantly from one another.

In terms of academic historiography, the alleged newness of an artwork or school is often expressed by giving it a new collective, quasi-academic denomination. Compared to the segmented structure of evaluation in the scientific regime, the very threshold by which artwork qualifies to be academically accepted as something new appears to be hazy and very often contingent upon the context where it is presented. Some Japanese art journals, like *Bijutsu Techo* (Art Notes), have long series of special issues reviewing new trends in contemporary art for the past few decades. A plethora of new catchphrases for everything from new paintings to bio-art—frequently bearing the prefix "new" or "neo"—have been presented, as if calling it "new" is tantamount to proving its novelty, like genomics, post-genomics, epigenetics, and so forth in the life sciences.

Yet, the way such collective categorization is given a certain level of accreditation in the art regime is accompanied with a persisting sense of uncertainty about its theoretical foundation. Shinro Ohtake, who is probably one of the most influential artists in contemporary Japan's art scene, provides such a case. The large scale retrospective of his works, *Zen-kei* (Total View) in the Tokyo Museum of Contemporary Art in 2006 was said to be phenomenally successful, attracting large audiences[23] (4). Among the guests was Japan's leading artist, Takashi Murakami, who once commented that he has been deeply influenced by Ohtake's pioneering activities.[24] Along with his fame for the diverse ways he

21 Ulrike Felt et al. (eds), *The Handbook of Science and Technology Studies*, Fourth Edition (Cambridge, MA 2016).

22 Masato Fukushima, Resilience in scientific research: Understanding how natural product research rebounded in an adverse situation. *Science as Culture* 25/2 (2016), pp. 167–192.

23 Action Committee, *Shinro Ohtake, Zen–Kei: retrospective 1955-2006* (Tokyo 2007); see also the exhibition at MOT Art Museum: http://www.mot-art-museum.jp/exhibition/22.html; access: April 2, 2018.

24 Takashi Murakami, Takashi's chronicle since 1962. *Geijutsu-Shincho 2012–5* (2012), pp. 45–49.

produces his art works, Ohtake is also well-known as an essayist[25] and author of surrealistic picture books. The latter includes a book titled *Jari Ojisan* (Uncle Jarry), which is taken from the name of surrealist Alfred Jarry[26] and which has been translated into various foreign languages. Yet, as Ohtake himself complains, his has been largely dismissed as part of what was called the ambiguous trend of "new paintings" in a trend against the preceding fever on the conceptual arts in 1970s, such as *Mono-ha* in Japan.[27] However, this category actually reveals nothing about his whole range of diverse works, which the *Zen-kei* Exhibition eloquently proved.[28]

Naturally, putting a single adequate catch-phrase on works as diverse as Ohtake's is difficult, even for critics, as has been proven by the relatively poor reactions from foreign curators familiar with his works. Quite a few of them regarded the collection of his work as not particularly *Japanese*, the sales point that these foreign curators seek in the context of presenting exotic "Japanese" art work.[29] At best, his enormously voluminous collage works are sometimes likened to those of other artists like Robert Rauschenberg, with vague comments about sharing a similar spirit but without further inquiry into what is unique in Ohtake's works.[30]

Newness and repetition

This case may be interpreted as a symptom of the shaky ground upon which rests the evaluation of alleged newness in the art regime, where the newness evaluation proves to be contingent upon diverse contextual factors. What attracts my attention further is the recent proliferation of the prefix of "new" or "neo-" to an existing category of art collectives. As mentioned above, there have been dozens of such neos, comparable to neo-Marxism, nouveau philosophes, or the recent new materialism in the world of social theory and philosophy. Ironically enough, the rhetorical emphasis on newness has reduced its impact through oft repetition. Perhaps this phenomenon constitutes a kind of satirical allusion to Marx's *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Napoleon*,[31] where the repeated second protagonists are described as farce. At least, it is unavoidable that the nuances of innovation will be confined to a

25 e.g. Shinro Ohtake, *Invisible sound, inaudible pictures* (Tokyo 2008).

26 Shinro Ohtake, *Uncle Jari* (Tokyo 1994).

27 Masato Fukushima, On small devices of thought: Concepts, etymologies, and the problem of translation, in: *Making things public: Atmospheres of democracy*, eds. Bruno Latour et al. (Cambridge, MA 2005), pp 58–63.

28 cf. Shinro Ohtake, Paste the world through!: Interview. *Eureka* 527/38–13 (2006), pp. 46–70.

29 Takashi Azumaya, Shinro Ohtake, in Uwajima-Island that has already been there. *Bijutsu-Techo* 58/889 (2006), pp.100–115.

30 Dorian Chong, An essay on Shinro Ohtake. *Bijutu-techo* 65/993 (2013), pp. 71–80.

31 Karl Marx, *The eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* (Crows Nest, New South Wales 1926).

certain incremental level, which in fact thoroughly frustrated Ohtake at being pigeonholed in the rather hazy category of *new* paintings, as described above. A Japanese curator, Yuko Hasegawa, has simply condemned this proliferation of neo-prefixes as a sign of saturation and of a void in real innovation.[32]

However, as I see it, those who are granted these repetitive "neos" are still lucky because at least they are assigned to a quasi-academic category. A huge number of artworks are simply dismissed by the critics so that no collective name whatsoever is given to their existence; this situation applies to the mounting popularity of realist paintings in Japan and elsewhere. Some art journals that are devoted less to the avant-garde and more to works that are popular among collectors have indicated that such realist artwork is always in currency and that its popularity even seems to be gaining momentum, as seen in the establishment of a museum specialized for collecting such realist art.[33] Meanwhile, even in the critical journals that notice it, the trend in realism seems not to have garnered a particular name, such as "new realism."

Internal diversity of art regime

The hiatus between the popularity in public and the silence of the art critics where the kind of the art regime on producing newness is intriguing, as this could be the sort of open experiment for directly observing the principal differences between the function of the scientific and/or market regime and their mutual entanglement in the existing art regime. On this point, a close observation of the critical silence may be similarly intriguing by observing their explicit discursive practices. Despite the general critical acceptance of pop art, for instance, as a major trend in the contemporary art scene, I have seen hardly any serious critical comment on, say, Hiro Yamagata's work in the contemporary art journals. Another intriguing case is that of Christian Riese Lassen, who has been popular in Japan and elsewhere, though thoroughly neglected by the critical circle. Recent publication of academic criticism on his works[34] has attracted attention, as this was the first book in Japan that straightforwardly discussed the artistic value of Lassen's work and looked at why his works have been collectively neglected. Some argue that behind such neglect lies antipathy to his almost unscrupulous way of selling his artwork to the public, along with the general antipathy toward

32 Yuko Hasegawa, An imperfect mapping: On the art from 1980s to 2000s. *Bijutsu-techo* 62/933 (2010), pp. 171–175.

33 see Hoki Museum, https://www.hoki-museum.jp/; access: March 23, 2018.

34 Yuki Harada et al. (eds.), *What was Lassen? Beyond consumption and art* (Tokyo 2013).

the subject of his paintings as simply kitsch.

In this case, the radical hiatus between public popularity and critical disregard is fundamental; there are, however, cases in which the subtle threshold that divides those who are critically accepted and those who are not can be more minutely contrasted. such a case is depicted in the movie *Big Eyes*, a 2014 film from director Tim Burton on the real life story of Americans Walter and Margaret Keane and their immensely popular paintings of girls with disproportionally big eyes in the 1960s.[35] The movie focuses on the real authorship of these paintings, as Margaret's works were falsified by her husband Walter. However, what attracted my attention was the reaction on the Web relating to the similarity between these paintings of big-eyed girls and a series of paintings on a young girl by Yoshitomo Nara. Nara is one of the most influential contemporary artists in Japan with an international reputation whose works have been successfully collected by a couple of prestigious museums, along with those of Takashi Murakami and others.[36] One film critic even audaciously asserted that Nara is a follower of Margaret Keane's legacy.[37] Yet from my perspective, the gap between them in terms of academic credibility is unbridgeable. I have heard hardly any collective appraisal from mainstream critics of Margaret Keane's works as the original pop-art. The Wikipedia article on her works bluntly states that "she has never been a critical success".[38] Nara's case is a radical contrast: his work is not only remarkable popular with the public but also highly acclaimed in academic circles, having garnered numerous prizes. However, the only theoretical arguments on the novelty of his work characterize it as "micro-pop," a vague umbrella term applied to the general trend in a new generation of Japanese artists to portray the everyday, minute details of the small world in which they live.[39] Nonetheless, such a label does not seem to be radically different from the rather unsubstantial labelling of "new paintings" that immensely frustrated Ohtake. This case causes us to think of what characteristics might define the workings of the invisible threshold that tacitly divides those who are critically hailed as new and those who are not: in this case, for example, the dividing line may be Nara's more authoritative educational background, which may grant him the aura of the inner circle of academia, as opposed to Keane who does not have it.

35 see https://www.imdb.com/title/tt1126590/; access: August 24, 2019.

36 see http://www.artnet.com/artists/yoshitomo-nara/; and for instance: http://zatta.sub.jp/doc/content.php?mode=bigeyes as well as: http://serendipitydiary.cocolog-nifty.com/blog/2015/02/post-765a.html; access: March 6, 2018, 10:00 am.

37 https://miyearnzzlabo.com/archives/21539; access: June 15, 2018, 10:00 am.

38 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Margaret_Keane; access: June 15, 2018, 10:00 am.

39 Midori Matsui, *The age of micropop: The new generation of Japanese artists* (Tokyo 2007).

Art regime as interface

In this observation, we may think that the art regime, in reality, exhibits an intriguing case of being a specific interface consisting of different sub-regimes that demonstrate different criteria for newness. Divided into a diverse set of sections, these may be roughly classified into a quasi-academic regime and a specific type of market sub-regime. Each has its own specificity. For the former, in terms of the quest for newness, it is not peer artists who evaluate the novelty of a particular art work, as in the scientific regime. Rather, it is critics, among others, who are expected to evaluate the specific newness of an artwork, preferably against a background of the entire history of Western art, very often within a large collectivity and in the context of similar emerging trends. Metaphorically speaking, such is closer to naming a newly emerging field in science as such—for example, epigenetics—than to evaluating the newness of a specific paper for established journals in epigenetics. Further still, naming practices in the art regime have been flexible and open to both critics and artist themselves, such as the case of the critics coining the term "micro-pop," as noted above, or the artists calling themselves *die blauen Reiter* or Dadaists. Sometimes, such naming is but a poor description of technological innovation, such as in media art or bio art. This naming practice seems akin to an aspect of classic social anthropology on ethnic identity, wherein the name is claimed by either a group itself or external observers.[40]

Given the lack of a regimented system for evaluating newness, as in the scientific regime, the role of critics in evaluating the newness of a particular work of art is almost tantamount to a mission impossible, probably far above their capacity to do in the face of the inundation of newly produced art works in recent decades. This situation reminds me of national border issues in the US and elsewhere, wherein the customs control is filled with the huge number of immigrants, both legal and illegal. Critics are like customs control, deciding which one is in and which one out for the academically acceptable world of regime, but now the border seems to work properly.[41]

Meanwhile, this very loose way of defining newness by giving a collective name to allegedly new trends actually fits with the market aspect of the art regime, which is, in essence, a one-of-a-kind item market. Consumers like it when the art work has a label for, say, its good quality of coziness, as may be demonstrated by my own hobby of purchasing inexpensive pastellist landscape paintings à la the Barbizon school. It is even better when it has brand value academically (in this context, in art history); for instance, I wish I could buy a real specimen of Vas-

40 cf. Machiko Aoyagi (ed.), *What is "ethnic"? : Basic papers on ethnicity* (Tokyo 1996).

41 Ozaki even claims that art critics are an "endangered species," see chap. 3 in Ozaki, *What is contemporary art?*

sily Kandinsky's later works or those of Christian Boltanski, but doing so requires a certain amount of wealth. These are the stories related to public auctioning of art works that occasionally has created sensations.

Antiques

The art regime as an interface where the different principles interact in determining the value of newness is probably unique, as it is distinct from that of either the scientific regime or the market regime for mass commodities. This said, it is also tempting to think of the real meaning of newness in the art regime by considering the meaning of its opposite: namely, the oldness.

The constant pursuit of newness has the somewhat ironical consequence of a constant senescence in what has been produced. Accelerated innovation entails the accelerated mass production of antiquatedness at the same time: the fashion industry is a good example for us to reflect upon in this sense with its rapidly alternating new trends, which simultaneously and just as rapidly become obsolete. In fact, this aspect of pursuing fashion is not confined to the fashion industry; some argue that even in the scientific regime, the pursuit of fashionable topics is inevitable under the banner of the scientific bandwagon and with proper socio-epistemological reasoning: namely, to avoid the risk of not being able to produce outcome in a limited amount of time.[42] Hence, quite a few areas within science are ignored because of their predictable non-doability,[43] with efforts tending to concentrate on specific areas where progress is at least half-guaranteed. Naturally, this does not exclude the almost heroic efforts of the pioneers to explore the *terra incognita* in science, but the very risk of not being able to produce anything can be enormous. Examples include looking for the solution of Fermat's theorem or a message from extraterrestrials, as depicted in the movie *Contact*, where Jodie Foster played a pioneering (mad) astronomer who spent years looking for it.[44]

In the scientific regime, antiquity, both in fact and in theory, seems to have little survivability. This is why science has its Janus faces, as Latour neatly describes: one relates to established fact or theory that looks to the future, and the other looks toward the past trace of controversies that are eventually forgotten.[45] One possible exception wherein the old matters for acting scientists, aside from those that concern science historians, is those instances in which an obsolete fact or theory is rediscovered and reincarnated as a premature pioneer of a cutting edge topic. In such a case, it is not the

42 Joan H. Fujimura, *Crafting science: a sociohistory of the quest for the genetics of cancer* (Cambridge, MA 1996).

43 Masato Fukushima, Resilience in scientific research: Understanding how natural product research rebounded in an adverse situation. *Science as Culture* 25/2 (2016), pp. 167–192.

44 see https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0118884/; access: August 24, 2019.

45 Bruno Latour, *Science in action: how to follow scientists and engineers through society* (Cambridge, MA 1987).

oldness that matters but the forgotten newness, which is rediscovered during the existing pursuit of newness.[46]

This probably is quite different in the case of the market regime where the consumers' preferences matter, and we have distinctive cases related to what we call "antiques." In addition, the market aspect of the art regime is different from, say, that of pop-music because that commodity is reproducible in mass scale and can be measured quantitatively by its sales. As already briefly noted, art consists largely of one-of-a-kind items, whose value lies in their singular character as products. As a result, we experience a kind of unique situation in the art regime: I emphasize that the production of newness in the art regime anticipates the production of a series of good antiques, which is a specific outcome of the interface between the quasi-academic sub-regime in art, vaguely imitating that in the scientific regime, and the market sub-regime, which constantly seeks good commodities, especially antiques. In fact, Marcel Duchamp, in a conversation with Richard Hamilton, once insisted that the real impact of newly born art works has a life of approximately 20 years, and the rest of the life of these artworks is consigned to museums.[47] This is where the concept of antiques matters. Market regime, in turn, thinks much of antiques because of their market value, as seen in those occasions when old paintings (old in the sense of not brand new) may demonstrate an almost astronomical value, from Leonardo Da Vinci to Takashi Murakami. In terms of the market aspect of the art regime, however, diverse forms in the recent development of art practices will demand a new way to define its purchasable form, such as installation art, performing art and so forth.

Closing words

At the beginning of this article, I referred to Luhmann's highly abstract social theory as a way to begin reflecting upon the potential for a macro-sociological version of interface. Though inheriting his concern with the social differentiation that characterizes contemporary society, I have introduced the more flexible concept of regime, which consists of a more diverse set of sub-elements than Luhmann's highly simplified way of describing these processes of differentiation. And though I have described the interface dynamics within the art regime here, I admit that I have omitted any reference to the internal friction between interfaces within both science and market regimes, a topic to be pursued elsewhere.

In this sense, the art regime is an interesting arena for observing the potential of enlarging the concept of interface to the macro-sociological domain—in this case, between two different sub-regimes

46 eg. Ernest B. Hook (ed.), *Prematurity in scientific discovery: On resistance and neglect* (Oakland, CA 2002); Masato Fukushima, Before Laboratory Life: Perry, Sullivan and the missed encounter between psychoanalysis and STS. *BioSocieties* (forthcoming 2019).

47 Marcel Duchamp, Interview from 1959, https://www.artspace.com/magazine/art_101/qa/a-1959-interview-with-marcel-duchamp-the-fallacy-of-art-history-and-the-death-of-art-55274; access: August 24, 2019.

that create a dynamic cacophony owing to the rapidly expanding art market in the age of the post-Duchamp era where the issue is becoming rapidly global. It is also a good occasion to ponder the reasons why we are so driven by the cult of newness, along with the inherently self-contradictory fact that the accelerated orientation of ever newer newness simultaneously means the mass production of obsolescence, where the concepts of *modernus* (newness) and *antiquus* (oldness) meet face to face.

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