

Another Revolution: Building New Worlds

Deadline: Feb 28, 2021

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For a prospective peer-reviewed cluster on Modernism/modernity's Print Plus platform, we seek proposals for original essays that analyze the role of art and culture in building modern worlds in the aftermath of revolutions. Situated within the discourse of global modernisms, the transdisciplinary cluster probes whether there is something intrinsic to the post-revolutionary reconstructive moment that can be teased out through focused studies on contemporaneous constellations between the aesthetic and the political around the globe during the twentieth century.

Demands for revolution emerge whenever the status quo makes an existing social order no longer tenable for a significant portion of the population. Revolution is often understood as a force from below, one in which a group exerts its will against an established governmental or political order. But revolutionaries usually have as their ultimate goal the establishment of a new social or political system—a new normal—rather than a perpetual state of upheaval. They envision new possibilities, and different worlds. The production of culture in various forms—fine art, literature, music, performing arts, visual culture, philosophy, and so on—are essential to their success, both in consolidating the revolution's narrative, and in producing as well as sustaining the resultant new realities. Indeed, the expectation of their role as spearheads in revolution is embedded in the very phrase "avant-garde."

If not an exclusively modernist phenomenon, localized revolutions in the modern era have been characterized as affirmative responses to Enlightenment values such as liberty and equality, and have frequently sought to overthrow absolutist, autocratic, and colonial rule. The establishment of new forms of government are often the result. But radical change is by no means guaranteed to be emancipatory, liberal, and egalitarian in character, nor is it always successful. As evidenced by Italian fascism, the so-called "conservative revolution" in Germany during the interwar-period, or the Chinese "Cultural Revolution," a revolution might well slide into dictatorship, create a power vacuum in which multiple agents claim control, or engender oppressive political systems. Similarly, avant-garde art and culture are not immune from stifling and perverting critical, transgressive impulses. Indeed, their post-revolutionary impact has sometimes been framed as "propaganda," or as "selling out" to become palatable to "the masses."

Taken together, the articles chosen for this cluster will map out parallels as well as divergences in "avant-garde" or otherwise transformative cultural attempts to displace "old" worldviews, institutions, and forms of coexistence by asking questions such as "What political developments affect-

ed cultural production and vice versa, particularly in their contact with ideological shifts and technological innovations?”, “What factors and conditions enabled new cultural practices and perceptions to take root?”, or “What transnational mechanisms were at work in cultural attempts at building modern worlds?”.

Offering an alternative understanding of revolutionary worldbuilding through culture from the vantage point of an era that is itself characterized by a multiplicity of crises and by profound, though not always progressive transformations, this cluster aims at challenging the once widespread perception of the “failure” of twentieth century revolutions and, with that, of the “death” of the avant-garde.

Topics of particular interest include but are not limited to theoretically-driven case studies from:

- The Bolshevik Revolution and the Russian avant-garde
- The 1911/Chinese Revolution and end of the Qing Dynasty
- The German or November Revolution and the Weimar Republic
- The Mexican Revolution and cultural renaissance
- Societal transformation in Japan during the late Taishō period and the Mavo art movement
- Postcolonial/independence movements in the second half of the twentieth century from Cuba to Iran

The cluster seeks to bring into dialogue regionally-specific scholarship in the humanities, especially in the arts and design, in literary and film studies, and in aesthetic and political theory, to foster a global perspective. We particularly welcome submissions that draw on the unique possibilities afforded by Modernism/modernity’s Print Plus platform. For recent examples of essay clusters, see <https://modernismmodernity.org/about>.

Abstracts of 250 words accompanied by short biographies are due February 28, 2021. A total of five to seven proposals will be accepted; completed essays of approximately 3,000 words will be due June 30, 2021. Once essays are submitted, the entire cluster will undergo peer review. Please submit abstracts and inquiries to Monica Bravo (bravo@cca.edu) and Florian Grosser (fgrosser@cca.edu).

Reference:

CFP: Another Revolution: Building New Worlds. In: ArtHist.net, Dec 7, 2020 (accessed Dec 18, 2025), <<https://arthist.net/archive/24083>>.