The Conceptual, the Romantic, and the Nonhuman:
The SÚM Group and the Emergence of Contemporary Art in Iceland, 1965-1978

by

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Abstract

This dissertation considers the emergence of contemporary art practices in Iceland through the activities of the artist collective SÚM between 1965 and 1978. The founding of SÚM in 1965 brought forth, for the first time, a generation of Icelandic artists whose practices closely correspond to that of experimental artists globally, especially those aligned with Fluxus and conceptual art. As I highlight, this relied on Iceland's belated modernization and changes to the country's geopolitical status in the twentieth century, as well as on global efforts to decentralize the artworld. And yet, SÚM's challenge to the definition of the art object is also uniquely configured through the artists' complicated relationship to the local tradition of landscape painting and the concomitant romantic nationalist discourse which had shaped Icelandic self-identity, cultural practices and discourses since the turn of the twentieth century. In particular, SÚM's practice developed through a critical engagement with the idealized place of nature in Icelandic national identity—a critique which sought to complicate the boundary between nature and culture. SÚM artists' efforts to subvert Icelandic nationalist ideology and artistic tradition are complicated, however, by their alliance with the postwar political resistance movement against the growing economic and cultural influence of the United States in Iceland as well as its neocolonial practices globally. This led the artists to situate their work in relation to a specific, yet ill-defined, local Icelandic way and sense of being. Often characterized in terms of a "poetic" or "romantic" attitude, this typically focuses on the centrality of the natural in the work of prominent members of SÚM, their engagement with "premodern" Icelandic cultural traditions, folk belief and art, and their suggestions for an intuitive or emotional basis for their practice. Highlighting the dialectical tension between the globalizing and localizing impulses of SÚM, I argue that to understand the specificity of Icelandic contemporary art, one must consider the degree to which its emergence, through SÚM, was produced within the context of the country's changing geopolitical position and its longer history as a peripheral territory within the Danish colonial empire.

Lay Summary

This text examines the history of the artist collective SÚM, established in Iceland in 1965 and active until 1978, the practices of which were foundational for the emergence of contemporary art in Iceland. Analyzing SÚM's translation of avant-garde forms and practices of art into Iceland, it highlights the dialectical tension between the artists' ambitions towards participation in the increasingly "global" artistic sphere of the 1970s and their positioning of their work in opposition to certain dominant forms of contemporary art, as well as their adoption of distinctly "local" themes and subject matter. Focusing on SÚM artists' ambiguous relationship to Icelandic nationalist discourse and their critical engagement with the idealized place of nature in Icelandic national identity, this study argues that the terms of SÚM work and of contemporary art from Iceland can be understood as produced in the longer geopolitical history of Iceland since the Early Modern period.

Preface

This dissertation is an original and independent work by the author, Heiða Björk Árnadóttir.

All translations from the Icelandic into English throughout this dissertation are the author's except where otherwise noted.

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Dedication

For Nína and Leó, my loves

Introduction

When artistic practice emerged as a professional endeavor in Iceland at the turn of the twentieth century, during the country's quest for political independence from Denmark, its discourse was fundamentally shaped by the ideals of romantic nationalism.[1] In particular, the romantic notion that Iceland's unique geography and natural environment constitutes *the* foundational influence on the art of its people – a trope which hinges on the supposed sensual and emotional connection of Icelandic artists to the island's nature – dominated the discourse of art throughout the twentieth century. Meanwhile, the historical avant-gardes of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century had limited impact on Iceland's artistic sphere. As the literary and cultural historian Benedikt Hjartarson notes:

> … in the first half of the twentieth century no avant-garde journals or magazines were published in Iceland, no organised groups or movements of radical artists were formed, and no collective manifestos or declarations concerning the characteristics and aims of the "new art" appeared. In other words, there was an absence of the radical cultural and aesthetic practices usually referred to as the *historical avant-garde.*[2]

The founding of the artist collective SÚM in 1965, however, brought forth a new generation of Icelandic artists whose practice closely paralleled that of experimental artists globally and relied on a (re-)discovery of the practices and paradigms of the European

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[1] See Ólafur Kvaran, ed., *Íslensk listasaga frá síðari hluta 19. aldar til upphafs 21. aldar,* vol. I and II (Reykjavík: Listasafn Íslands, 2011).

[2] Benedikt Hjartarson, "The Early Avant-Garde in Iceland," in *A Cultural History of the Avant-Garde in the Nordic Countries 1900-1925,* ed. Hubert van den Berg, et al. (Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, 2012), 615. Original emphasis.

historical avant-garde. From its conception in 1965 until its dissolution in 1978, SÚM was instrumental in introducing Icelandic audiences to new art forms such as kinetic art, collage, combines, ready-mades, artist multiples, artist books, happenings, installations, conceptual art and land art. And through collaborations with European and American Fluxus artists and conceptual artists, and exhibitions presented at Gallery SÚM (est. 1969) in Reykjavík – Iceland's capital – and elsewhere, SÚM played a crucial role in introducing Icelanders to global artistic trends.

SÚM's participation in expanding global networks of artists, their presentation within Iceland of international contemporary art and the exhibition of their own work at major institutions of art in Europe in the 1970s, both reflected and capitalized on the widespread ambitions of artists and curators at the time to decentralize and democratize the art world.[3] In 1971 SÚM was invited to exhibit at Amsterdam's Stedelijk Museum, one of Europe's most influential art institutions and a pioneer in the exhibition of postminimalist artistic trends in the late sixties.[4] A year later, three members of SÚM – Hreinn Friðfinnsson and brothers Kristján Guðmundsson and Sigurður Guðmundsson – established In-Out Center in Amsterdam, the city's first independent artist-run space (1972-1974), alongside Latin

[3] In addition to their collaboration with Fluxus artists in exhibitions at Gallery SÚM and at the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam, SÚM artists contributed to alternative groups and spaces such as the artist-run Galerie Seriaal in Amsterdam and Gallery Inhibodress in Sydney, Australia; Festival of W.O.R.K.S. (We. Ourselves. Roughly. Know. Something.) in Calgary, Canada, in 1972; and Fluxus artist Ken Friedman's Omaha Flow System at the Joslyn Art Museum in Omaha, Nebraska in 1973. See the biographies for Hreinn Friðfinnsson, Kristján Guðmundsson, and Sigurður Guðmundsson at i8 Gallery, accessed April 2018, https://i8.is/artists.

[4] *SÚM IV,* Edited by Sigurður Guðmundsson, Frits Keers and Gijs van Tuyl (Amsterdam: Stedelijk Museum, 1971), Exhibition catalogue.

American artists Raúl Marroquín, Michel Cardena and Ulises Carrión, and Dutch artists Hetty Huisman, Pieter Laurens Mol and Gerrit Jan de Rook, creating a space of artistic experimentation in performance, video art, visual poetry, audio art, conceptual art and artist books.[5]

The ideal of a decentralized and democratized art world was made manifestly evident in *SÚM 1972,* a group-exhibition organized by SÚM and presented for the 1972 Reykjavík Art Festival, a biennial multidisciplinary event held in the capital of Iceland since 1970. With participants including American artists Dennis Oppenheim, Vito Acconci, Carolee Schneemann, the English artist John Latham, the Dutch artist Bas Jan Ader, and the French artists Ben Vautier and Robert Filliou, the exhibition presented about two-hundred works by fifty-eight artists from sixteen different countries, in various locations within and outside of Reykjavík, including paintings, sculptures, installations, performances, films, slide projections, and presentations through radio and television.[6] The ideal of decentralization was further visualized in several contributions, including Fluxus artist Robert Filliou's plan to translate the names of every Icelander to English and then to Chinese, or SÚM artist Jón

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[5] Dutch art historians and curators of the In-Out Center Archives Tineke Reijnders and Corinne Groot have argued that the founding of the contemporary art center De Appel by Wies Smals in 1975 was a direct response to the closing of the In-Out Center in 1974. See Tineke Reijnders and Corinne Groot, "History," In-Out Center Archives, accessed March 2017, https://deappel.nl/en/exhibitions/in-out-center.

[6] *SÚM 1972,* Edited by Hreinn Friðfinnsson et al. (Reykjavík: Gallery SÚM, 1972), Exhibition catalogue, Gallerie SÚM Papers, Box 4/5, Folder O-P, The Archive of Artist-Run Initiatives, The Living Art Museum, Reykjavík, Iceland.

Gunnar Árnason's *Thought Lines* (1972),[7] a work for which thoughts would be "sent" across the earth, from Reykjavík to New York, San Francisco and Sydney.[8]

And yet, the image chosen by SÚM for the cover of the catalogue of the 1972 Reykjavík Art Festival exhibition also tests such evocations of global connectedness, at least insofar as processes of globalization have been understood to increase cultural equivalence and homogeneity and threaten peripheral or minority cultures. Reproduced on the front and back covers of the catalogue are photographs of a traditional Icelandic turf house at Keldur in Rangárvellir, in south Iceland [Figures 0.1-0.2]. On the one hand, the covers seem to point to the international movement of Land art that started to emerge in North America in the work

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[7] There is a distinct resonance between Jón Gunnar's *Thought Lines* (1972) and Robert Barry's *Telepathic Piece* (1969), "exhibited" at Simon Fraser University in Vancouver in 1969. The latter was performed via telephone hook-up from New York to Burnaby and described in the catalogue as follows: "[During the Exhibition I will try to communicate telepathically a work of art, the nature of which is a series of thought that are not applicable to language or image.]" See *Catalogue for the Exhibition* (Burnaby, B.C., Canada: Centre for Communications and the Arts, Simon Fraser University, 1969), Exhibition catalogue, accessed November 2017, http://www.primaryinformation.org/files/catalogueforexhibition.pdf. Furthermore, as Reiko Tomii has noted, Barry's piece also resonates with Japanese artist Matsuzawa Yutaka's proposed use of telepathic power for the construction of art works five years prior, in 1964, and his subsequent exhibitions of invisible art works in remote locations. See Reiko Tomii, "'International Contemporaneity' in the 1960s: Discoursing on Art in Japan and Beyond," in *Japan Review,* vol. 21 (2009), 141. However, as Tomii argues – and as the comparison of Yutaka's work with Barry's demonstrates – the general assumption that such similarity can be explained with reference to the transmission of a direct "influence," of artists from the "center" of the artworld to ones at its "periphery," must be abandoned in favor of a more critical and evolved analysis of similarities and differences. See Ibid, 140-141.

[8] See *SÚM 1972*; "Hugsar gegnum hnöttinn," in *Þjóðviljinn,* June 4, 1972, 3, accessed June 2015, http://timarit.is/view_page_init.jsp?issId=220460&pageId=2831472&lang=is&q=HUGSAR%20GEGNUM%20HN%D6TTINN.

of American Robert Smithson around the end of the 1960s; on the other, it suggests an idea of autochthonous Icelandic identity.

Tensions between the local and the global, in fact, surface repeatedly in discussions of the work of SÚM artists and in the group's own verbal and symbolic framing in the 1960s and seventies. For instance, in an interview published in a Reykjavík newspaper in 1969, SÚM member Kristján Guðmundsson declared: "Our art does not reflect the society we live in. As an artist I could just as well be German or something else."[9] Yet two years later, in 1971, Kristján's fellow SÚM member, Tryggvi Ólafsson would describe SÚM artists as "children of a different environment" than their non-Icelandic co-exhibitors, in an account of SÚM's exhibition at the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam.[10] Further, while several statements made by SÚM artists reveal their anxiety about the negative and restrictive effects that Iceland's peripheral geographical and cultural location could possibly have on the reception of their work, the work of prominent members of SÚM came increasingly to be characterized – by the artists themselves, throughout the 1970s, and by critics and curators within and outside of Iceland since then – as bound to a specific, yet ill-defined, Icelandic

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[9] "Öll list og öll fegurð eru háð tímanum – segja tveir ungir listamenn sem sýna ásamt níu öðrum," in *Alþýðublaðið,* March 19, 1969, 8-9 and 12, accessed May 2015, http://timarit.is/view_page_init.jsp?issId=226513&pageId=3022301&lang=is&q=1969.

[10] Tryggvi writes: "We Icelanders generally appear at *SÚM IV* as children of a different environment, than e.g. Brecht, Gever or Filliou." In the original: "Við Íslendingarnir komum yfirleitt fram á SÚM IV sem born annars umhverfis en t.d. Brecht, Gever eða Filliou." See Tryggvi Ólafsson, "Frásögn af SÚM IV í Amsterdam (ekki algildur gæðadómur)," in *Þjóðviljinn,* April 28, 1971, 6-7 and 9, accessed May 2015, http://timarit.is/view_page_init.jsp?issId=220129&pageId=2827573&lang=is&q=af%20S%DAM%20IV.

way and sense of being, and thus as representative of the fundamental "otherness" of Icelandic art and culture.

Often described in terms of a "poetic" or "romantic" attitude, characterizations of SÚM work's distinctiveness typically focuses on the centrality of nature in the work of SÚM artists, their engagement with "premodern," "archaic" Icelandic cultural traditions, and their suggestions for an intuitive or emotional basis for their practice.[11] The designation of SÚM work as "poetic" or "romantic" has further been justified in terms of the relative lack of industrial development in Iceland and the Icelandic people's purportedly direct relationship or engagement with the wilderness.[12] While I find it crucial to contend with SÚM artists' declarations of alterity, in what follows I argue that this narrative must be situated in the context of the continued strength of Icelandic nationalism in the postwar period, especially as it stems from Iceland's history as a peripheral territory in the Danish Empire from the late fourteenth century, and the mythical image of Icelandic culture built up since the Early Modern period.

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[11] See e.g. "Öll list og öll fegurð eru háð tímanum," 8-9 and 12; "*Án titils* – Rætt við Kristján Guðmundsson," in *Teningur,* May 1, 1987, 48-60, accessed July 2015, http://timarit.is/view_page_init.jsp?issId=343545&pageId=5385372&lang=is&q=Kristj%E1n%20titils%20Kristj%E1n; Kristín D. Jóhannesdóttir, "Rendez-vous: Sigurður Guðmundsson in conversation with Kristín Dagmar Jóhannesdóttir," in *Dancing with the Horizon,* ed. Jóhannesdóttir, 198-207.

[12] See e.g. Gregory Volk, "Report from Reykjavík: Art on Ice," in *Art in America,* vol. 88, no. 9 (2000), 40-45; Christian Schoen, "Preface," in *Icelandic Art Today,* ed. Christian Schoen and Halldór B. Runólfsson (Ostfildern, Germany: Hatje Cantz Verlag, 2009), 7; Adrian Searle, "Sweet Dreams," in *The Guardian*, June 17, 2007, accessed November 2017, https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2007/jul/17/art; Jacquelyn Davis, "The Polar Series 14: Hreinn Fridfinnsson," in *Art Slant,* Oct. 10, 2011, accessed November 2017, https://www.artslant.com/chi/articles/show/28298-the-polaris-series-14-hreinn-fridfinnsson.

Iceland was among the last significant land masses to be inhabited by human beings. Icelandic, English and Irish sources tell of the existence of Irish monks and hermits (Icel. papar) in Iceland as early as A.D. 795.[13] The island was then colonized by Norsemen – people originating from present-day Norway, Sweden, and Denmark – in the early ninth century, as well as free or unfree people from the Norse colonies in the British Isles,[14] and the Icelandic Commonwealth was formed with the establishment of *Alþingi,* a parliamentary court held on the boundary of the Eurasian and North American tectonic plates now known as Þingvellir (Parliamentary Fields), in 930. After fierce fighting between the ruling families of Iceland in the thirteenth century, during the so-called Age of the Sturlungs (Icel. Sturlungaöld), Iceland allegedly entered into a union with the King of Norway by an agreement known as the Old Treaty (Icel. Gamli sáttmáli) in 1262, and in 1380 the Icelandic people fell under Danish rule, as Norway was subsumed into the Danish monarchy through the marriage of Haakon VI of Norway to Margaret I of Denmark.[15]

While there is some evidence to suggest a nascent concept of a separate cultural and legal identity for Icelanders in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries – such as the referral to Icelanders as a separate *þjóð* (nation) on the basis of language in the *First Grammatical*

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[13] See e.g. Sigurður A. Magnússon, *Northern Sphinx: Iceland and the Icelanders from the Settlement to the Present* (Montréal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1977), 8.

[14] See e.g. Ibid; Gunnar Karlsson, *The History of Iceland* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000); Richard F. Tomasson, *Iceland: The First New Society* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1980); Jón Jóhannesson, *A History of the Old Icelandic Commonwealth – Islendinga Saga,* trans. by Haraldur Bessason (Manitoba: University of Manitoba Press, 2007); T. Douglas Price and Hildur Gestsdóttir, "The first settlers of Iceland: an isotopic approach to colonisation," in *Antiquity,* vol. 80 (2006), 130-144.

[15] Eiríkur Bergmann, *Nordic Nationalism and Right-Wing Populist Politics: Imperial Relationships and National Sentiments* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 93-124.

Treatise (Icel. *Fyrsta málfræðiritgerðin*), written before 1175, and the distinction of Icelanders from foreigners in the Gray Goose Laws (Icel. *Grágás*), the legal code of the Icelandic Commonwealth,[16] preserved in two main manuscripts from the thirteenth century – the question of whether Icelanders identified as a separate nation at this time is a matter of debate.[17] In any case, Icelanders were forced to accept the absolute power of the Danish monarchy in 1662, along with other subjects of the empire. A Danish monopoly on trade in Iceland had been introduced in 1602 and was in place until 1786. Following the rise of romanticism and nationalism in Europe in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and the end of absolutism in Denmark in 1848, an Icelandic independence movement was born. After a lengthy struggle, Iceland won formal sovereignty in 1918, winning the right to govern all internal and most external affairs. Still, it remained in a union with the Danish monarch as head of state, until full independence was won in 1944, against the will of Denmark and during the latter's occupation by Nazi forces.[18]

While Iceland's quest for political independence officially concluded in the mid-1940s, the country's occupation by British and American forces during WWII and the continued presence of an American military force in the postwar period, sanctioned by the Icelandic government in 1951, fueled the fires of nationalist ideology.[19] The military

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[16] The Icelandic Commonwealth refers to the republic (Icel. *þjóðveldið*) existing in Iceland in the period of 930-1262.

[17] See Verena Höfig, "A Pre-Modern Nation? Icelanders' Ethnogenesis and Its Mythical Foundations," in *Scandinavian Studies,* vol. 90, no. 1 (Spring 2018), 110-132.

[18] See Bergmann, *Nordic Nationalism and Right-Wing Populist Politics*, 93-124.

[19] British forces invaded and occupied Iceland on 10 May 1940. The invasion was motivated by fears that the Germans would attempt to take control of Iceland – which held potential strategic importance given its geographical location – as they had Norway and Denmark one month earlier. As the war progressed, in early

presence and Iceland's entry into the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) in 1949 continued to be the most divisive issues of Icelandic politics in the coming decades. Financial aid provided to Icelanders through the European Recovery Program (also known as the Marshall Plan, after the U.S. Secretary of State George Marshall),[20] initiated by the U.S.

July 1941, Britain persuaded the Icelandic parliament to approve an American occupation force. The United States Marine Corps arrived in Iceland shortly thereafter, five months before the U.S. officially entered the war. Some 60,000 foreign soldiers, mostly Americans, were stationed in Iceland. By comparison, in 1940 the Icelandic population counted only about 120,000, with one-third residing in the capital of Reykjavík and its vicinity, so the Allied military forces had a considerable presence within Icelandic society. The Keflavík airfield was used by the United States as a stopover for bombers and fighters on their way to the fighting areas in Europe. The U.S. military based in Iceland was also tasked with keeping the sea lines to Britain and the Soviet Union open and combatting German U-boats in the North Atlantic. See Valur Ingimundarson, "Buttressing the West in the North: The Atlantic Alliance, Economic Warfare, and the Soviet Challenge in Iceland, 1956-1959," in *The International History Review,* vol. 21, no. 1 (1999), 80-103; Valur Ingimundarson, "Immunizing Against the American Other: Racism, Nationalism, and Gender in U.S.-Icelandic Military Relations during the Cold War," in *Journal of Cold War Studies,* vol. 6, no. 4 (Fall 2004), 65-88; "Population Key Figures 1703-2017" [tablet], Statistics Iceland [Hagstofa Íslands], last updated on March 28, 2018, http://px.hagstofa.is/pxen/pxweb/en/Ibuar/Ibuar__mannfjoldi__1_yfirlit__yfirlit_mannfjolda/MAN00000.px/?rxid=268d5238-3a9a-4b28-9e26-bb2de2cd9c7c; "Population by municipalities 1901-1990" [tablet], Statistics Iceland [Hagstofa Íslands], last updated on April 9, 2008, http://px.hagstofa.is/pxen/pxweb/en/Ibuar/Ibuar__mannfjoldi__2_byggdir__sveitarfelogeldra/MAN02120.px/?rxid=268d5238-3a9a-4b28-9e26-bb2de2cd9c7c.

[20] A combination of Iceland's poor economic position and U.S. interest the country, based on its geographical position, gave Icelanders reason to apply for the economic assistance offered by the U.S. despite not having endured any direct destruction during the war. Icelanders participated in the Marshall Plan between 1948 and 1953 and received $38 million during that period. As historian Valur Ingimundarson notes, this is "in relative terms more than any other European country." Given Iceland's distance from the war zone of Europe and its lack of direct impact, the strategic political importance of the Marshall aid provided to Icelanders seems even more blatantly obvious than elsewhere in Europe. Valur has argued that this aid served the purpose of not only ensuring economic

in 1947, and the influx of American popular culture through the U.S. army base and U.S. cultural initiatives in Iceland fundamentally transformed the economic, social and cultural landscape of the country, propelling Iceland from northern Europe's poorest country in 1939 to one of the richest in the world by the end of WWII.[21] Nevertheless, there was widespread ambivalence among the local population about the effects of their sudden and imposed interface with America on national identity and on Iceland's newfound political independence. Among the political Left – populated by many of Iceland's cultural and artistic elite – American interests and intervention in Iceland were understood largely as an extension of America's neocolonial policies.[22]

This study takes as its object SÚM's translation of avant-garde and experimental postformalist practices into Icelandic art in the period 1965-1978. In this process, SÚM artists came to focus specifically on a critical reconfiguration of the boundaries of culture and

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stability but heading off Communist encroachment in Iceland, a threat which Valur demonstrates was not insignificant in the 1950s. See Ingimundarson, "Buttressing the West in the North," 80-103; Gunnar Á. Gunnarsson, "Ísland og Marshalláætlunin 1948-1953: Atvinnustefna og stjórnmálahagsmunir," in *Saga,* Jan. 1, 1996, 85-130, accessed September 2018, http://timarit.is/view_page_init.jsp?issId=334802&pageId=5279875&lang=is&q=Gunnarsson%20%EDsland%20og%20Marshall%E1%E6tlunin%20og.

[21] Ingimundarson, "Buttressing the West in the North," 83.

[22] For extensive discussion of the economic and political relations between Iceland and the United States in the postwar period see Gunnarsson, "Ísland og Marshalláætlunin 1948-1953," 85-130; Ingimundarson, "Buttressing the West in the North," 80-103; Guðni Th. Jóhannesson, "To the Edge of Nowhere? U.S.-Icelandic Defense Relations during and after the Cold War," in *Naval War College Review,* vol. LVII, no. 3/4 (Summer/Autumn 2004), 115-137; Valur Ingimundarson, "Immunizing Against the American Other," 65-88; Valur Ingimundarson, "Britain, the United States and the Militarization of Iceland 1945-1951," in *Scandinavian Journal of History,* vol. 37, no. 2 (2012), 198-220.

nature, and of the human and the nonhuman. Critically, several SÚM works figure matter as not only dynamic and unstable but also active and agentive. It is on this basis that I describe the work of SÚM members Sigurður Guðmundsson, Kristján Guðmundsson and Hreinn Friðfinnsson as directed towards a critical rematerialization of the artwork. This project can be understood, firstly, as the result of SÚM artists' encounter with Fluxus critiques of reification and Fluxus artists' resistance to the dematerialization and virtualization of the artwork. Secondly, SÚM artists' rematerialization of the artwork and the ambiguous framing of their work as simultaneously global and local can be understood as the result of a longer history of the definition and re-definition of Icelandic culture and identity through processes of transculturation since the Early Modern period. More specifically, SÚM work, together with its discursive framing and reception, can be understood in the context of Icelandic nationalism and its relation to Iceland's political history and geopolitical status, as formed through a complex dialogue with debates on the relationship of culture and nature within European capitalist modernity.

As I have noted, the impact of romanticism and nationalism on the discourse of art in Iceland is visible first and foremost in the central place and role afforded to nature in the formation of Icelandic national culture, identity and art. Throughout the twentieth century, romantic ideals of Icelanders' "pure" and "unspoilt" relation to nature mix with older negative associations of Icelanders' own supposed state of nature.[23] Both are related to the historical positioning of Icelandic culture outside of modernity.

[23] The coexistence of these differing frameworks is clearest in the notion of the "primitive," which is closely associated with nature and entails both denigration and idealization. I discuss this in Chapters 1 and 4 of this dissertation.

The explicit attempts to ground Icelandic art in national stereotypes, which marked discussions of Icelandic art in the early-twentieth century, may now be a thing of the past. However, the romantic notion that the characteristics of Icelandic art can be explained with reference to the Icelandic landscape and the hostility of natural forces in Iceland is still predominant in discussions of contemporary art from Iceland. This is exemplified by the first internationally distributed account of contemporary art in Iceland, written by American art critic Gregory Volk and published in *Art in America* in September 2000. While enthusiastic about the Icelandic art scene, which he described as diverse, thriving and accomplished, Volk noted that "no matter how internationally minded Icelandic artists are… eventually the country itself comes to figure in their work: as a physical locus, as a trove of images and materials or – more mysteriously for outsiders – as a comprehensive force with which one is perpetually in dialogue."[24] Cultural anthropologist Arjun Appadurai's articulation of the anthropological construction of the notion of the *native* – as a person who not only belongs to a particular place but is understood to be uniquely confined or incarcerated in that place – may serve to highlight how this idea has served historically to marginalize Icelandic artists.[25] As Appadurai points out the "critical part of the attribution of nativeness in remote parts of the world is a sense that their incarceration has a moral and intellectual dimension. They are confined by what they know, feel, and behave. They are prisoners of their 'mode of thought.'"[26] To understand the specificity of SÚM's experiments, or Icelandic art since the 1960s more broadly, within the context of international art practice, one must consider the

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[24] Volk, "Report from Reykjavík: Art on Ice," 41-45.

[25] See Arjun Appadurai, "Putting Hierarchy in Its Place," in *Cultural Anthropology,* vol. 3, no. 1 (Feb. 1998), 37-38.

[26] Ibid, 37.

degree to which this geopolitical specificity – Iceland's "nativeness" or "mode of thought" – is at once taken up or exploited by the artists themselves and also produced within a longer history of Iceland's colonized status and concomitant romantic discourse. This language continues discourse to mark both the discourse on art produced in Iceland, and the practice of Icelandic artists to the present moment.[27]

The Current Literature

Scholarly engagement with the practice and discourse on art in Iceland has a short history. The first survey of the history of art in Iceland was written by the art historian Björn Th. Björnsson and published in two volumes in 1964 and 1973.[28] It was updated only recently with the five-volume *History of Art in Iceland* (Icel. *Íslensk listasaga, frá síðari hluta 19. aldar til upphafs 21. aldar*), published by the National Gallery of Iceland (Icel. Lisasafn Íslands, est. 1884) in 2011. Co-authored by a number of art historians and spanning the

[27] The impact of this history on the practice of art in Iceland is perhaps most directly visible in the work of Ragnar Kjartansson (b. 1976), an artist whose practice – which includes performances, installations, video and painting – has focused explicitly on the legacy of romanticism, and whose video work *Nýlendan* (*Colonization,* 2003) stands as a unique example of an Icelandic artist's direct engagement with Iceland's history as a colonial territory. *Nýlendan* was presented at the recent exhibition *Exvlusively Inclusive* at Gerðarsafn Kópavogur Art Museum, which was curated by Jonathan Habib Engqvist and opened on 25 October 2018, as part of the Cycle Music and Art Festival titled *Inclusive Nation*. There it was presented as part of a broader investigation of Iceland's history as a colonized territory and its relation to other former Danish colonies, as well as its contemporary geopolitical status. See "Exclusively Inclusive," Cycle, accessed Dec. 2018, http://www.cycle.is/exhibition-1; "Inclusive Nation," Cycle, accessed Dec. 2018, http://www.cycle.is/kpavogur-2018/.

[28] Björn Th. Björnsson, *Íslenzk myndlist á 19. og 20. öld: drög að sögulegu yfirliti,* Vol. I-II (Reykjavík: Helgafell, 1964 (1973)).

history of artistic practice in Iceland from the late-nineteenth to the early-twentieth century, this collection is an important contribution towards the field of the history of art in Iceland. Nevertheless, its analysis of the history of SÚM, and the history of contemporary art in Iceland more broadly, has serious shortcomings. No attempt is made to examine the specificity of SÚM artists' translation of the practices of the historical avant-garde and postwar networks of experimental artists into the Icelandic cultural and political context in the postwar period. Instead, general descriptions of the postwar economic boom, the Cold War and the emergence of popular youth culture, "free love" and hippy idealism are offered. While the significant influence of nationalism on the framing of landscape painting in the early twentieth century and in the reception of abstract art in the 1940s and fifties is emphasized by the authors of the recently published *History of Art in Iceland,* its continued effects in the postwar period, and on the reception and framing of SÚM in particular receives scant critical attention. The history of SÚM is told through an account of the group's collective exhibitions as well as a somewhat more detailed discussion of the work of selected artists. A casual narrative of the "influence" of pop art, Fluxus, Happenings and conceptual art on SÚM gives no indication of the specificity of the artist's engagement with these artforms. Furthermore, no effort is made to critically interrogate these terms and the authors repeat uncritically descriptions of SÚM work as "romantic" and "poetic."[29]

The decision to treat the work of SÚM members individually without much serious consideration for the context of the presentation of individual works, and their collective, social and historical context, can perhaps be explained by the tendency of SÚM artists' themselves to emphasize the heterogeneity of the collective. SÚM was "diverse and

[29] See Kvaran, ed., *Íslensk listasaga frá síðari hluta 19. aldar til upphafs 21. aldar,* vol. IV.

internally divided," as member Guðbergur Bergsson described it in an essay published in the catalogue for the first survey exhibition of SÚM work, held by the Reykjavík Art Museum (Icel. Listasafn Reykjavíkur) in 1989.[30] This is not unfounded, as there are obvious discernible differences in the practice of SÚM members, which included poets, novelists, and composers in addition to visual artists. Nevertheless, SÚM artist Jón Gunnar Árnason claimed in an interview in the same publication that SÚM members were united in their opposition to the transformation of art into commodity under capital, the most obvious example of which they found in the practice of contemporary abstract painters. As Jón Gunnar stated: "We could not help but see how abstract art was, at the time, losing all contact with reality and degenerating into bourgeois decoration."[31] The avant-garde narrative of authenticity and criticality are thus repeated. However, as I will argue, the social, economic, political and cultural reality of SÚM artists had a much different historical basis than that of postwar experimental movements in Europe or the United States.

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[30] See Guðbergur Bergsson, "Andinn sem ríkti í SÚM" ["The spirit that reigned in SÚM"], in *SÚM 1965–1972*, ed. Gunnar B. Kvaran (Reykjavík: Reykjavík Art Museum – Kjarvalsstaðir, 1989), 105.

[31] Gunnar B. Kvaran, "Jón Gunnar Árnason," [Interview] in *SÚM 1965–1972,* ed. Kvaran, 44. A statement on SÚM's mission, written by Tryggvi Ólafsson in Copenhagen in 1970, declares it SÚM's agenda to "provide counter-information in modern society," explaining further that this amounts to a "demolition of the system of convention, including state-run systems of culture," and that SÚM's function is to operate as a "socialist art movement." In the original: "Eitt meginhlutverk Súm sé að veita gagnupplýsingar um möguleika í nútíma þjóðfélagi. Þetta er sama og að rífa niður vanakerfið, þ.e. hið menningarlega ríkiskerfi… Hlutverk menningarfél. Súm er að reka socialistiska listastefnu." Ólafsson, Tryggvi. Announcement about SÚM's ideal function (Icel. Yfirlýsing um æskilega starfssvið SÚM). 1970. Gallerie SÚM Papers, Unfiled [Icel. óskráð]. The Archive of Artist-Run Initiatives. The Living Art Museum, Reykjavík, Iceland.

Another potential reason for the lack of critical attention to the history of SÚM may be the difficulty that arises from historical neglect, lack of documentation and preservation of works, in particular of ephemeral media such as installations, land art, biodegradable work and performance. While the Living Art Museum (Icel. Nýlistasafnið, est. 1978) in Reykjavík preserves some works by SÚM artists and acts as an important archive of documentary material related to the artist collective's activities, several works have unfortunately been lost. Some of the blame for this historical negligence must be ascribed to the National Gallery of Iceland which, as artists increasingly pointed out in the 1970s, absolutely failed its legal duty in the 1960s and seventies to "gather, preserve and exhibit as perfect a collection of Icelandic art as possible."[32] "It is not an understatement to say that this is a SCANDAL. Deliberate forgery [of history]," artist Níels Hafstein wrote on the National Gallery's ninety-year anniversary, referring to the historical narrative of Icelandic art created within the National Gallery in the 1960s and seventies.[33] Among the gaps in the gallery's collection, Níels pointed out, was twentieth century folk art, kinetic art, surrealism, op-art, pop art, conceptual art, minimalism, photography, performance and environmental or Land art.[34] The

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[32] "Lög um Listasafn Íslands, þskj. 399, 89. löggjafarþing 1968-69, 11. mál," Vefútgáfa Alþingistíðinda, accessed May 2017, https://www.althingi.is/altext/89/s/pdf/0399.pdf; "Frv. til laga um Listasafn Íslands, þskj. 381, 89. löggjafarþing 1968-69, 11. mál," Vefútgáfa Alþingistíðinda, accessed May 2017, https://www.althingi.is/altext/89/s/pdf/0381.pdf; "Frv. til laga um Listasafn Íslands, þskj. 11, 89. löggjafarþing 1968-69, 11. mál," Vefútgáfa Alþingistíðinda, accessed May 2017, https://www.althingi.is/altext/89/s/pdf/0011.pdf.

[33] Níels Hafstein, "Listasafn Íslands: Hugleiðingar í tilefni 90 ára afmælis á þessu ári," in *Þjóðviljinn,* Nov. 9, 1975, 9, accessed June 2016, http://timarit.is/view_page_init.jsp?issId=221480&pageId=2847258&lang=is&q=N%CDELS%20Listasafn.

[34] Ibid.

outrage over the historical neglect of SÚM work and other work that did not fit the dominant aesthetic of modernist abstraction or romantic nationalist landscape painting, exemplified by Níels's statement, was one of the main catalysts for the establishment of the Living Art Museum that same year in 1978.[35]

Indeed, it was not until 1976 – eleven years after SÚM's inaugural exhibition *SÚM I* and long past the point of SÚM artists' engagement with or mobilization of the term pop art – that the National Gallery of Iceland hosted a small exhibition of "Icelandic pop art" in the hallway of the museum building.[36] But no further exhibitions of pop art or other contemporary art forms followed. The Reykjavík Art Museum hosted the first survey exhibition of SÚM work in 1989, as I have noted, and two years prior, the Nordic House (Icel. Norræna húsið) in Reykjavík hosted a survey exhibition of works by SÚM member Jón

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[35] "Stofna nýtt listasafn, NÝLISTASAFNIÐ," in *Dagblaðið,* Jan. 24, 1978, 4, accessed June 2016, http://timarit.is/view_page_init.jsp?issId=227533&pageId=3074558&lang=is&q=Stofna%20n%FDtt%20listasafn. The founding collection of the Living Art Museum was "comprised of gifts from Ragnar Kjartansson and Níels Hafstein, as well as works retrieved from the SÚM group's storage space." Ragnar Kjartansson's (grandfather of contemporary artist Ragnar Kjartansson previously mentioned) contribution consisted of sixty works by Dieter Roth in his possession, while Roth declared he would gift the museum with his *Reykjavík Slides*. Tinna Guðmundsdóttir, "Introduction" and "Timeline 1978-2008," in *Nýlistasafnið / The Living Art Museum 1978-2018,* ed. Tinna Guðmundsdóttir (Reykjavík: The Living Art Museum, 2010), 12 and 14.

[36] Aðalsteinn Ingólfsson, "Íslenzk popplist," in *Morgunblaðið,* March 17, 1976, 10, accessed June 2016, http://timarit.is/view_page_init.jsp?issId=372777&pageId=6067470&lang=is&q=A%F0alsteinn%20ING%D3LFSSON; Aðalsteinn Ingólfsson, "Um popplist – Seinni grein: Íslenskt popp," in *Dagblaðið*, March 29, 1976, 11, accessed June 2016, http://timarit.is/view_page_init.jsp?issId=226969&pageId=3060525&lang=is&q=A%D0ALSTEINN%20ING%D3LFSSON.

Gunnar Árnason.[37] In 1991 an exhibition of photographic works by SÚM artist Sigurður Guðmundsson from the 1970s and eighties was presented by the National Gallery, alongside a sculpture by Sigurður from the collections of the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam.[38] Two years later, in 1993, a survey exhibition of Hreinn Friðfinnsson's work, organized by the Institute for Contemporary Art in Amsterdam, was mounted in the National Gallery of Iceland,[39] and in 1994 the gallery organized a survey exhibition of Jón Gunnar Árnason's work.[40] Around the same time, an effort was made by the board of the National Gallery to fill in some of the gaps declared by Níels Hafstein in 1978 and several works exhibited at SÚM exhibitions, along with some later works by SÚM artists were was acquired.

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[37] Ólg, "Sól, hnífar, skip," in *Þjóðviljinn,* July 11, 1987, 7-9, accessed September 2016, http://timarit.is/view_page_init.jsp?issId=225219&pageId=2910524&lang=is&q=S%F3l%20hn%EDfar%20skip.

[38] "Listasafn Íslands: Þemasýning á listaverkum Sigurðar Guðmundssonar," in *Morgunblaðið,* Oct. 4, 1991, 18, accessed September 2016, http://timarit.is/view_page_init.jsp?issId=124285&pageId=1751644&lang=is&q=Listasafn%20%EDslands%20%DEemas%FDning%20Sigur%F0ar%20Gu%F0mundssonar.

[39] "Yfirlitssýningu Hreins að ljúka," in *Morgunblaðið,* March 19, 1993, 11, accessed September 2016, http://timarit.is/view_page_init.jsp?issId=117900&pageId=1529504&lang=is&q=Yfirlitss%FDningu%20a%F0%20lj%FAka%20yfirlitss%FDningu.

[40] "Grennslast fyrir um verk Jóns Gunnars Árnasonar," in *Morgunblaðið,* Dec. 7, 1993, 11, accessed September 2016, http://timarit.is/view_page_init.jsp?issId=126014&pageId=1797042&lang=is&q=um%20verk%20J%F3ns%20Gunnars%20verk%20um; "Listasafn Íslands: Hugarorka og sólstafir – yfirlitssýning á verkum Jóns Gunnars," in *DV,* March 18, 1994, 20, accessed September 2016, http://timarit.is/view_page_init.jsp?issId=195287&pageId=2624371&lang=is&q=Listasafn%20%EDslands%20Hugarorka%20og%20s%F3lstafir%20Listasafn.

The most significant scholarly work to date on the history of SÚM is a recent essay by art historian Æsa Sigurjónsdóttir titled "New Maps for Networks: Reykjavík Fluxus – A Case of Expanding Connections," published in 2017.[41] Here the author begins the task of questioning the impact of Iceland's historical geopolitical status on the development and international reception of contemporary art from Iceland. Significantly, Æsa proposes that the In-Out Center may have functioned, for its Icelandic and Latin-American founders, as an "in-between-space," as defined by postcolonial theorist Homi K. Bhabha in his *The Location of Culture* (1994),[42] operating to propel "postcolonial artists" from local into global institutions of art.[43] Such a transfer, she concludes, can be understood to have been successfully achieved with SÚM artists' participation in the 8th Biennale de Paris in 1973 and the invitation by Pontus Hultén to exhibit their work at the opening of the Centre Pompidou

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[41] See Æsa Sigurjónsdóttir, "New Maps for Networks: Reykjavík Fluxus – A Case of Expanding Connections," in *Narratives Unfolding: National Art Histories in an Unfinished World,* ed. Martha Langford (Montréal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2017), 189-208.

[42] In *The Location of Culture,* Bhabha describes "in-between" spaces as "moments or processes that are produced in the articulation of cultural differences," which provide "the terrain for elaborating strategies of selfhood – singular or communal – that initiate new signs of identity, and innovative sites of collaboration, and contestation, in the act of defining the idea of society itself." Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 2004), 2. He further notes that "it is the 'inter' – the cutting edge of translation and negotiation, the *inbetween* space – that carries the burden of the meaning of culture. It makes it possible to begin envisaging national, anti-nationalist histories of the 'people.'" Ibid, 56. For Bhabha, this Third Space – this space of the in-between – carries the potential to "open the way to conceptualizing an *in*ternational culture, based not on the exoticism of multiculturalism or the *diversity* of cultures, but on the inscription and articulation of culture's *hybridity.*" Ibid, 56.

[43] Sigurjónsdóttir, "New Maps for Networks," 203.

in Paris in 1977.[44] While Æsa's critique of the continued marginalization of artists working on the peripheries of the so-called global art world is important, her essay is necessarily limited by its brevity and scope. It addresses not only the history of SÚM but that of its successors such as Gallery Suðurgata 7 (1977-82) and Gallery Lóa (1976-78), and the legacy of artists associated with these spaces in contemporary Icelandic art within the format of the short essay.

One of the objectives of the present work is to contribute to the historical examination of SÚM's history, begun by Æsa Sigurjónsdóttir, and to challenge the notion of the "nativeness" of artistic production in Iceland by considering the history of the collective, its activities and the work of individual members in the context SÚM artists' collaboration with global artist networks, most crucially Fluxus. This demands a consideration of the role of the Swiss-German artist Dieter Roth, who lived and worked in Iceland between 1957 and 1964 and whose connections to artists associated with ZERO, Nouveau Réalisme and Fluxus played a significant role in opening SÚM up to these and associated networks of artists. In order to clarify the specificity of the translation of the terms, practices and artistic formats developed within these networks into Icelandic art through SÚM, this dissertation thus also engages critically with the question of Roth's position within such transnational networks and his relation to Icelandic culture and art.

As SÚM's most sustained relationships were to artists associated with Fluxus, I focus particular attention on Roth's relation to Fluxus, and the congruence and incongruence of his practice, work, and attitude to both the "official" project of Fluxus headed by George Maciunas and the looser cluster of artists associated with Fluxus more broadly. Despite his

[44] Ibid, 203.

contributions to Fluxus publications and events, Dieter Roth is a marginal figure in its history. German gallerist René Block relates this to George Maciunas's tendency to marginalize and exclude from Fluxus artists that would not submit to his specific vision for the collective.[45] My research supports this conclusion but also highlights the considerable degree of overlap that exists between Roth's practice and Fluxus. My objective here is not to claim Roth as a Fluxus artist, but rather to reveal some of the significant parallels and differences between Roth's practice and Fluxus work, with the ultimate aim of illuminating some of the critical aspects of the process of translation of contemporary artistic practices into Icelandic art through SÚM. Nor is my discussion of Roth's role in SÚM history meant to eulogize or to suggest a one-way relationship of influence from the more mobile and connected Roth to a static, peripheral art scene in Iceland. On the contrary, my analysis of Roth's practice reveals the considerable importance of Iceland and Roth's relationships to

[45] In an interview with Tobias Berger Block makes the following statement about Maciunas: "He took a childish pleasure in banning people from Fluxus. This was clearly his own personal fun and you cannot base a serious historical analysis on it, or even a definition of Fluxus. It seems that Maciunas' one-eyed way of seeing wasn't able to envision the relevance of Fluxus to art history, nor did he recognize it. Otherwise he would never have banned those artists whose voluntary loyalty to Fluxus played such a crucial role in getting its name into the art history books. Beuys and Vostell can be named in this respect, but he also had highly problematic relationships with Dieter Roth, Arthur Koepcke, Dick Higgins and Nam June Paik... Over the years, all those artists who wouldn't let themselves be controlled by Maciunas, most of them European, were ignored by the New York headquarters. Maciunas involuntarily contributed to fulfilling one of his ultimate goals, the self-elimination of Fluxus. In New York he succeeded in this very well. In Europe, however, he didn't - where, with all due respect to Maciunas, another concept of Fluxus took over its place in art history." Tobias Berger, "René Block and Tobias Berger [Interview]," in *What's Fluxus? What's Not! Why,* ed. Jon Hendricks (Detroit: The Gilbert and Lila Silverman Fluxus Collection Foundation, 2002), 39-40, Exhibition catalogue.

Icelandic artists to his practice.[46] More specifically, my examination of the development of Roth's work and his relationship to Icelandic art and culture highlights the implicit role that his confrontation with Iceland had on the specific terms of his rejection of Concrete art and modernist aesthetics, and his turn towards more process-based work in the 1960s.

Like Fluxus works, Roth's works after 1960 resist reification through their explicitly material yet ephemeral "concreteness."[47] Through his incorporation of biodegradable materials, Roth extended the material presence of the artwork to such an extent as to completely undermine the traditional distinction of the spheres of culture and nature, allowing for the active and independent engagement of nonhuman entities, beings, and materials with the art object. In this, Roth's work reveals an aspect of the Fluxus project which has been overlooked within the literature, namely George Brecht's call for the radical equation of nonhuman and human productivity in his 1959 essay "Chance-Imagery."[48] More significantly for this study, Roth's de-differentiation of nature and culture had an immediate impact on the work of several SÚM artists and considerably shaped their translation of the practices of Fluxus into the Icelandic context.

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[46] In this I extend the critical interrogation of Roth's role in the emergence and development of Icelandic contemporary art begun by Æsa Sigurjónsdóttir in her essay "New Maps for Networks: Reykjavík Fluxus – A Case of Expanding Connections." There, Æsa discusses Roth's fascination with vernacular Icelandic culture, noting among other things his incorporation of Icelandic newspapers and journals into some of his early books, his visual documentation of Icelandic architecture in *The Reykjavík Slides* (1973-75/1990-93), as well as his engagement with the notion of insularity and the "island" in his *Insel* (*Island*) series. See Sigurjónsdóttir, "New Maps for Networks," 189-208.

[47] I discuss the concept of the "concrete" as it relates to Fluxus history and practice in Chapter 2 of this work.

[48] See George Brecht, *Chance-Imagery* (New York: A Great Bear Pamphlet, 1966), 12.

Methods and Terminology

This dissertation examines the history of SÚM from 1965 to 1978 in the broader context of Iceland's political, economic, social and cultural history from the Early Modern period. More specifically, I examine SÚM members' translation of avant-garde and experimental practices into Iceland, their work, its framing and reception in relation to Icelandic nationalist discourse and debates on Icelandic culture from the nineteenth century to the postwar period. I take these debates and their terms to be produced by a longer history of the continuous definition of Icelandic identity trough processes of transculturation, the most significant of which involve Icelanders experience of political and economic subjugation under the Danish colonial Empire, the dehumanizing terms through which Icelandic culture was understood in the Early Modern period, and the eighteenth century reconceptualization of Icelandic identity through romantic critiques of modernity. In what follows I will briefly explain my methodological approach and use of key terms.

Cultural Nationalism

My analysis of nationalist discourse in Iceland from the nineteenth century to the postwar period, and my exploration of its impact on the framing and reception of SÚM work, focuses on nationalism as a cultural project. In this I follow British historian John Hutchinson's definition of cultural nationalism as a unique project separate from political nationalism. Whereas political nationalism is state-oriented and aims for a common humanity transcending cultural differences through the cultivation of reason, cultural nationalism, Hutchinson notes, is a response to "a crisis of identity and purpose that is rooted in the

modern world,"[49] and aims not at the formation of an independent nation state but at the "moral regeneration" of the national community.[50] Political nationalists define the nation on basis of law, and cultural nationalists on the basis of its unique history, culture and geographical profile.

In describing the project of cultural nationalism as rooted in a sense of shared memory and origin I do not mean to suggest that it is "organically" derived from a distinct and autonomous ethnic community. In fact, Icelandic society was from its foundation in the tenth century distinctly hybrid, formed out of the conjunction of people from a number of disparate geographical and cultural regions. Instead, like Hutchinson, I take cultural nationalism to be a constructive social project and the nation to be an "imagined community," in the sense described by Benedict Anderson.[51] I agree, however, with Hutchinson's critique of modernist theories of nationalism that suggest that the basis of such a construct is wholly arbitrary or simply idealistic. Relatedly, I agree with Hutchinson's rejection of theories that propose that cultural nationalism is simply a regressive response to modernity.

Despite its defensive character, cultural nationalism should not be understood, Hutchinson argues, as isolationist or traditionalist. The association of cultural nationalism with such a position is related to its frequent evocations of a mythical golden past, of ancient historical memories and mystical organic bonds between the community and the land on

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[49] John Hutchinson, *The Dynamics of Cultural Nationalism: The Gaelic Revival and the Creation of the Irish Nation State* (London: Routledge, 1987), 3.

[50] Ibid, 9.

[51] Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism,* Revised edition (London; New York: Verso, 1983).

which it resides. However, behind this veneer there is, Hutchinson argues, "a dynamic vision of the nation as a high civilization with a unique place in the development of humanity, and secondly, a corresponding drive to recreate this nation which, integrating the traditional and the modern on a higher level, will again rise to the forefront of world progress."[52] In other words, cultural nationalism – despite its evocations of the "premodern" and the "archaic" – is essentially a modernizing political movement.

The trouble arises in accounting for cultural nationalism's simultaneous opposition to universal models of development and its disavowal of isolationism and traditionalism. As Hutchinson shows, this can be explained by examining cultural nationalism as a phenomenon emerging out of transnational, and transcultural contact. As he notes, cultural nationalism frequently emerges out of contact between individuals from politically and socially "backwards" peripheral communities and transnational networks of secular intellectuals working within the metropolitan centers of Europe, who – through their own emerging recognition of cultural diversity – reject or criticize Eurocentric notions of cultural and historical development. As Hutchinson writes: "For, in looking to prestigious foreign centres for models of individual and collective purpose, they discovered in the writings of such scholars a critique of cosmopolitan urban culture, and their own communities transformed from the status of primitive barbarians to that of the progenitors of modern progress."[53] As I discuss, it was precisely out of such transcultural and transnational contact – through processes of transculturation – that, in the nineteenth century Icelandic nationalism emerged out of romantic critiques of modernity and of colonial practices.

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[52] Hutchinson, *The Dynamics of Cultural Nationalism*, 32.

[53] Ibid, 37.

As the reader will see, my research on nationalist discourse in Iceland in the postwar period supports Hutchinson's definition of cultural nationalism as a modernizing movement. This definition of cultural nationalism – and its evocations of the "premodern" – as a modernizing force is also significant for my critique of the use of the terms "romantic" and "poetic" in the discourse on SÚM. Finally, Hutchinson's insistence that cultural nationalism is "a recurring movement, re-emerging at times of crisis even in the advanced industrial societies" – and thus not simply a regressive stage in the development of a more mature political nationalism – allows me to consider the work of SÚM artists, its relation to nationalist discourse and cultural debates in the postwar period as a reaction to the political and cultural crisis created by Iceland's military occupation during WWII and by the continued presence of the U.S. military in Iceland in the postwar period.[54] Furthermore, it offers a framework of cultural development through which to understand the relationship between this postwar moment and the previous wave of cultural nationalism in the nineteenth century.

Finally, my research on nationalist discourse in the postwar period highlights the considerable degree to which Icelandic nationalists understood their critiques of U.S. involvement in Icelandic politics and culture as aligned with anti-colonial resistance and critiques of U.S. neocolonialism globally.[55] This should be understood, I argue, with

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[54] Ibid, 40.

[55] As Robert Young notes, postcolonial critique is anticipated by and emerges out of anti-colonial resistance, to which Marxism remains paramount. Furthermore, as Young notes anti-colonialism was, from the Boer War onwards, decidedly transnational, organized through a "decentered anti-colonial network… a revolutionary Black, Asian and Hispanic globalization, with its own dynamic counter-modernity, was constructed in order to fight global imperialism…" Robert Young, *Postcolonialism: An Historical Introduction* (Sussex, UK: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2016), 2.

reference to Iceland's longer history as a peripheral territory within the Danish colonial Empire. In this my research concurs with the work of anthropologist Kristín Loftsdóttir and political historian Eiríkur Bergman, both of whom emphasize the significance of Icelander's experience of subjugation and marginalization for the emergence of nationalism in the nineteenth century and its continued significance throughout the twentieth century.[56]

Colonialism in the North? The Ambiguous Subject Position of Icelanders

The global history of colonialism has tended to focus on the relationship between Western European colonizers and their colonized subjects in the so-called Third World countries of Asia, Africa and Latin America. As British postcolonial theorist and historian Robert Young notes in his historical introduction to the field of postcolonialism, published in 2016,[57] postcolonial cultural critique originates and is enunciated from the three continents of the South. Thus, Young concludes that "postcolonialism might well be better named 'tricontinentalism,' a term which exactly captures its internationalist political identifications,

[56] See Kristín Loftsdóttir, "Negotiating white Icelandic identity: multiculturalism and colonial identity formations," in *Social Identities, Journal for the Study of Race, Nation and Culture,* vol 17, no. 1 (2011), 11-25; Kristín Loftsdóttir, "Colonialism at the margins: politics of difference in Europe as seen through two Icelandic crises," in *Identities: Global Studies in Culture and Power,* vol. 19, no. 5 (Sept. 2012), 597-615; Kristín Loftsdóttir, "The Exotic North: Gender, Nation Branding and Post-colonialism in Iceland," in *NORA – Nordic Journal of Feminist and Gender Research,* vol. 23, no. 4 (2015), 246-260; Bergmann, *Nordic Nationalism and Right-Wing Populist Politics*, 93-124.

[57] As Young notes, the concept of postcolonialism "names a theoretical and political position which embodies an active concept of intervention… It combines the epistemological cultural innovation of the postcolonial moment with a political critique of the conditions of postcoloniality. In that sense, the 'post' of postcolonialism, or postcolonial critique, marks the historical moment of the theorized introduction of new tricontinental forms and strategies of critical analysis and practice." See Young, *Postcolonialism: An Historical Introduction*, 57-58.

as well as the source of its epistemologies."[58] And yet, as he notes, scholars have increasingly begun to articulate and warn against the risks that a simple division of the globe into North and South poses in passing over historical differences, and homogenizing both "the West" and the "three continents."

Accounting for the history of Iceland and its status within the Danish colonial Empire poses a specific challenge to such homogeneous distinction of the geographical North and South in relation to the distinction of colonizer and colonized. Located on the geographical and cultural margins of Europe, the subject position of Icelanders is deeply ambiguous. As Kristín Loftsdóttir notes, "Iceland's colonial experience was characterized by duality, in which the country was an object of colonialism, while actively participating in the racist discourses predominant in Europe at the time."[59] While Icelanders identified with the colonizer's discourse – placing themselves alongside the "civilized" nations of the world and in opposition to the "savage" nations of the South – in reality, "their own subject position varied and is in some instances seen as part of the civilized world but in others as colonized subjects."[60] As Gavin Lucas and Angelos Parigoris note, debates on the applicability of postcolonial theory to Icelandic history have tended to focus on economic and political definitions of colonialism, overlooking its cultural dimensions. Thus, many historians reject the notion that Iceland was a colony on the basis of its official designation as a dependency (Icel. *hjálenda*) rather than a colony (Icel. *nýlenda*), as well as by recourse to the relative autonomy of Icelandic officials from the Danish crown, the possible economic benefits

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[58] Ibid, 5.

[59] Loftsdóttir, "The Exotic North," 246.

[60] Loftsdóttir, "Negotiating white Icelandic identity," 12.

enjoyed by Icelanders as a dependency and the common ethnic and cultural heritage that linked Icelanders and Danes.[61] However, as Young's discussion of the historical complexities of colonialism demonstrates, such arguments do not suffice. Distinguishing between two major forms of colonialism, Young writes:

> French colonial theorists typically distinguish between colonization and domination, the British between dominions and dependencies; modern historians between settlement and exploitation colonies. This grim but straightforward distinction constitutes the fundamental difference within the practice of colonialism, namely between colonies that were predominantly established for the purpose of forms of settlement … and those directly (or indirectly) administered ones, generally situated in the tropics, that were established for economic exploitation without any significant settlement…[62]

In the broader context of global colonial practices, then, Iceland's designation as a dependency and the lack of Danish interest in establishing a colonial settlement in Iceland does not constitute a refutation of its colonized status.

Young differentiates colonialism from older forms of imperialism, noting that while imperialism was "driven by the grandiose projects of power" and traditionally concentrated on expansion within a single land mass, colonialism emerges out of the technological developments of the sixteenth century which allowed dramatic geographical expansion of populations and communication across oceans. Furthermore, as Young emphasizes, colonialism was an economically – rather than ideologically – driven project, functioning as

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[61] Gavin Lucas and Angelos Pariogoris, "Icelandic Archaeology and the Ambiguities of Colonialism," in *Scandinavian Colonialism and the Rise of Modernity: Small Time Agents in a Global Arena,* ed. Magdalena Naum and Jonas M. Nordin (New York, N.Y.: Springer, 2013), 91-92.
[62] Young, *Postcolonialism: An Historical Introduction*, 17.

an activity on the periphery of colonial empires and was at times, from the home government's perspective, hard to control.[63] Again, Iceland's status in relation to this distinction is somewhat ambiguous. On the one hand it is situated in geographical and cultural proximity to Denmark. On the other, its relationship to Denmark can be described, at least from the establishment of Danish trade monopoly in 1602, as founded on an unequal basis for the purpose of economic exploitation. The history of Iceland's relationship to Denmark might then be described as developing from an imperial to a colonial relation as the Danish Empire began to claim and develop overseas colonies throughout the globe in the seventeenth century, including ones in West Africa, the Caribbean and on the Indian subcontinent.[64]

The work of Kristín Loftsdóttir, Eiríkur Bergmann, and Lucas and Parigoris is part of the recent appearance of a larger body of work examining the history of "domestic" European colonial territories in the North – such as Finland, Iceland and Norway – and the historical power dynamics within and amongst the Nordic countries from a postcolonial perspective.[65] Several collections of essays have been published in recent years on the topic.[66] In his introduction to *Postcolonial Perspectives on the European High North,*

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[63] Ibid, 15-17.

[64] For further discussion of the geographical reach and historical development of the Danish colonial Empire see Lars Jensen, *Postcolonial Denmark: Nation Narration in a Crisis Ridden Europe* (London: Routledge, 2018).

[65] The term "Nordic countries" applies to the Scandinavian countries of Denmark, Norway and Sweden, as well as Finland and Iceland, and their associated territories; Svalbard, Greenland, the Faroe Islands and the Åland Islands).

[66] See e.g. Kristín Loftsdóttir and Lars Jensen, eds., *Whiteness and Postcolonialism in the Nordic Region: Exceptionalism, Migrant Others and National Identities* (London and New York: Routledge, 2012); Naum and Nordin, eds., *Scandinavian Colonialism and the Rise of Modernity*; Graham

Graham Huggan situates the arguments of Icelandic historians against the definition of Iceland as a colony in the context of Icelandic nationalism, as a product of the necessity to emphasize Icelanders' distinct identity, thus paradoxically supporting the erroneous view, still clung on to by many Danes, of their status as "benign" colonizers,[67] as well as the broader tendency of "Nordic exceptionalism," defined by him as a pattern of thought that has "allowed the Nordic countries to see themselves as peripheral to exploitative forms of European colonialism and not recognise their own contribution to them."[68] This tendency has been expanded on and critically confronted by Danish scholar Lars Jensen.

Jensen traces the historiographical tendency to minimize or overlook the importance of Danish colonial history in a global, European, as well as a national context to the diminished status of the Danish Empire in the nineteenth century, at the so-called height of colonialism globally.[69] As he points out, however, this overlooks the fact that even after

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Huggan and Lars Jensen, eds., *Postcolonial Perspectives on the European High North* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016).

[67] Graham Huggan, "Introduction: Unscrambling the Arctic," in *Postcolonial Perspectives on the European High North*, ed. Huggan and Jensen, 13.

[68] Ibid, 14.

[69] In the mid-nineteenth to early twentieth centuries, while large European empires such as Britain, France and the Netherlands were in the process of consolidating their presence in oversees colonies, Denmark began dispatching its colonies – which, although not as vast as the other European empires just mentioned, spread from the Arctic circle to the tropics – to other imperial powers. As Jensen notes, this historical fact has been used in Danish national historiography to "reach a largely unanimous verdict of the relative unimportance of Danish colonial history in a global, European – and national – context." In reaction to this, Jensen asks: "Why are the North Atlantic colonies not treated alongside the tropical colonies?" Jensen, *Postcolonial Denmark*, 56-57. Furthermore, while the process of decolonization begun with Indian independence in 1947 is often understood to have concluded "the list of colonies, dependent, trust and unincorporated territories, overseas departments,

WWI Denmark still held on to its colonial possessions in the North Atlantic. While conceding that differences between Danish colonial practices in Iceland, the Faroe Islands and Greenland on the one hand and the Caribbean on the other, are significant, Jensen nevertheless argues for the necessity of recognizing the significant "similarity between the ideas of colonial subjugation, the construction of a superior metropolitan culture versus an inferior colonial periphery, a progressive and advanced metropolitan self versus a backwards, or static, and primitive colonial other."[70] Similarly, Icelandic anthropologist Kristín Loftsdóttir stresses the significance of Icelanders' experience of subjugation and marginalization on their sense of nationhood and self,[71] linking the heavy emphasis placed on modernization in post-independent Iceland to Icelanders' reaction against the historical exoticization of Icelandic culture and the dehumanizing of Icelandic people – discursive practices which recent studies of Early Modern travel literature have shown to be historically extensive and long-running.[72]

My research on the SÚM group, its work and its framing and reception in relation to postwar nationalist discourse, demonstrates the significant impact of this historical construction of cultural difference on the self-identity and image of Icelanders in the

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and other such names signifying colonial status in some form still is surprisingly long," as Young notes, and includes the Danish dependency of Greenland, Iceland's closest neighbour. Young, *Postcolonialism: An Historical Introduction*, 3. For more on the history of Danish colonial practices in Greenland see Søren Rud, *Colonialism in Greenland: Tradition, Governance and Legacy* (Cham, Switzerland: Springer Verlag, 2017).

[70] Jensen, *Postcolonial Denmark*, 57.

[71] Loftsdóttir, "The Exotic North," 246-260; Loftsdóttir, "Colonialism at the margins," 597-615.

[72] See e.g. Sumarliði R. Ísleifsson, "Icelandic National Images in the 19th and 20th Centuries" and Waldemar Zacharasiewicz, "The Theory of Climate and the North in Anglophone Literatures," in *Images of the North: Histories - Identities – Ideas,* ed. Sverrir Jakobsson (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2009).

twentieth century. It supports Lucas's and Parigoris's insistence that the "politics of simultaneous exclusion and inclusion, the tension between cultural greatness and savagery, modernity and primitiveness, which ultimately translate into concurrent feelings of cultural superiority and economic and technological inferiority, have had a deep effect in Icelandic society."[73] It is precisely the historically ambiguous subject status of Icelanders that prepares the ground for SÚM artists' paradoxical framing of their work as simultaneously global and local in the postwar period. Moreover, as I will show, in the postwar period SÚM artists and Icelandic Leftist nationalists identified with the subject-position of anti-colonial activists,[74] and it is on this basis that a version of postcolonial critique can be applied to the study of Iceland's history and art.[75]

Finally, my analysis of nationalist resistance to U.S. influence in Iceland in the postwar period relies on the concept of neocolonialism, as a more subtle, and indirect version of the old system of colonialism. Young notes that the term indicates a shift from direct colonial control, often through military force, to the establishment of an indirect hegemony through cultural, ideological, economic and political influence.[76] This description can easily be applied to Iceland's relation to the U.S. in the postwar period, established as it was on the

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[73] Lucas and Parigoris, "Icelandic Archaeology and the Ambiguities of Colonialism," 97.

[74] Young identifies five major forms that anti-colonial resistance took: 1. Resistance to conquest, 2. Rebellions against European rule, 3. Movements of religious revivalism, 4. Nationalist constitutional moves towards decolonization, 5. Nationalist liberation struggles. See Young, *Postcolonialism: An Historical Introduction*, 163.

[75] As Young notes, postcolonial critique builds on the critiques of anti-colonial activists and tends to identify with their subject position. Ibid, 19

[76] Ibid, 45-46.

basis of the countries' uneven economic positions, and for the ultimate political and economic interest of the U.S.

Translation and Transculturation

As Young notes in his historical introduction to the field of postcolonialism, "anti-colonialism is often identified exclusively, too exclusively, with a provincial nationalism."[77] Contradicting this view, Young argues that "anti-colonialism was a diasporic production, a revolutionary mixture of the indigenous and the cosmopolitan, a complex constellation of situated local knowledges combined with radical, universal political principles, constructed and facilitated through international networks […]"[78] Similarly, as I have noted, Hutchinson emphasizes the emergence of cultural nationalism out of transnational networks of intellectuals and artists within the metropolitan centers of Europe.

In his previous book *Colonial Desire: Hybridity in Theory, Culture and Race* (1995), Young warns against the tendency of postcolonial criticism to construct "two antithetical groups, the colonizer and colonized, self and Other, with the second only knowable through a necessarily false representation, a Manichean division that threatens to reproduce the static, essentialist categories it seeks to undo."[79] Following the critique by Homi Bhabha of such totalizing aspects of Edward Said's argument in *Orientalism* (1978), much of what has been written within the field of postcolonialism has tended to emphasize the ambiguity of the relations between colonizers and colonized. Hybridity thus has been a useful concept to

[77] Young, *Postcolonialism: An Historical Introduction*, 2.

[78] Ibid.

[79] Robert Young, *Colonial Desire: Hybridity in Theory, Culture and Race* (London and New York: Routledge, 1995), 4.

articulate the ways in which both the identity of colonizer and colonized were transformed by colonial contact. And yet, as Young shows in *Colonial Desire,* the concept of hybridity also has a complex and troublesome genealogy, emerging out of a scientific discourse on horticultural cross-breeding to become influential in racist imperial and colonial discourse in negative accounts of the union of different human races.[80] In comparison, the concept of transculturation – which originates in the work of Cuban anthropologist Fernando Ortiz and was coined in his *Contrapunteo Cubano del Tabaco y el Azúcar* (*Cuban Counterpoint: Tobacco and Sugar,* 1940) as a substitute for the term "acculturation" widely used in American anthropology at the time – refers to an active, creative and dialectical process wherein, within a situation of transcultural contact, subordinated or marginal groups select and invent from elements transmitted from a dominant or metropolitan culture, with the result that some cultural characteristics of both groups may be lost while new elements emerge. Thus, transculturation describes a dynamic, dialectical process which undermines the homogenizing claims of globalization, by emphasizing and privileging the local rather than the universal.[81]

The concept of transculturation has had an important impact within the field of translation studies, helping to pave the way for a "cultural turn" in the 1990s, and the redefinition of translation as an ongoing, creative process within situations of uneven and

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[80] Ibid, 16.

[81] Art historian Julie F. Codell's introduction to a recently published volume on transculturation in British art gives a succinct overview of the origin and use of the term within several disciplines. See Julie F. Codell, "The Art of Transculturation," in *Transculturation in British Art, 1770-1930,* ed. Julie F. Codell (Oxon; New York: Taylor & Francis, 2016), 1-17.

asymmetrical relations of power.[82] In describing the object of my study as the process of SÚM's translation of avant-garde practices into Iceland in the postwar period, in other words, I do not mean to evoke a simple passage of knowledge or practices from a well-defined source – in this case, most importantly, European, American or Asian artists associated with Fluxus, including Dieter Roth – to an equally well-defined target, of SÚM. As I have already noted, my research demonstrates, to the contrary, the considerable degree to which Dieter Roth's own practice was transformed through his encounter with Iceland. Furthermore, my study highlights that the translation of avant-garde practices into Iceland through SÚM was a creative, dynamic, dialectical process, wherein Icelandic artists determined what they absorbed and how they used it, through critical comparison of elite and vernacular art forms, and through an engagement with suppressed aspects of Icelandic history.

Contemporary Art

Through exhibitions mounted at Gallery SÚM between 1969 and 1978 and in previous exhibitions of the work of SÚM artists from 1965, SÚM inaugurated what would come to be referred to in Icelandic as *nýlist,* or simply new art, a term that emerges with the establishment of the Department of New Art (Icel. Nýlistadeild) at the College of Arts and Crafts (Icel. Myndlista- og handíðaskóli Íslands, previously Handíðaskólinn, est. 1939) in

[82] See e.g. Norman Cheadle and Lucien Pelletier, eds., *Canadian Cultural Exchange (Échanges Culturels au Canada): Translation and Transculturation (Traduction et Transculturation)* (Ontario, Canada: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2007); Laura Lomas, "Translation and Transculturation in the New York – Hispanic Caribbean Borderlands," in *Small Axe: A Caribbean Journal of Criticism,* vol. 20, no. 3 (Nov. 2016), 3-51.

Reykjavík in 1975, by SÚM artists Hildur Hákonardóttir and Magnús Pálsson.[83] When the Living Art Museum (Icel. Nýlistasafnið) was founded the year of Gallery SÚM's closing, in 1978, at the initiative of artists associated with Gallery SÚM and its offspring Gallery Suðurgata 7, it adopted this term. However, while the museum retains its original Icelandic title, Nýlistasafnið, in recent decades the term *nýlist* has come to be understood as decidedly antiquated. It also has obvious disadvantages for a study of Icelandic art in the context of global artistic practices. For these reasons, I have opted to use the English term contemporary art, which corresponds to the Icelandic *samtímalist,* in general use today.[84]

My choice to frame SÚM practice in terms of the emergence of contemporary art in Iceland is motivated firstly, by my conviction that the dialogue with Icelandic national identity, history and culture, and its relation to modernity, initiated by SÚM in the 1960s has significantly shaped the practice of Icelandic artists to this day; a relation which the obsolete notion of *nýlist* would only obscure. Secondly, it is rooted in my concern to critically interrogate the notion of Icelandic art's "nativeness," as previously discussed. This is not to say that my employment of the term contemporary art in what follows indicates a belief in some universal condition which determines the character of artistic practice around the globe. In fact, I insist on the specificity of the local conditions and history of the emergence of contemporary art through the SÚM collective. In this, my analysis of the emergence of

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[83] The Icelandic College of Art and Crafts (Icel. Myndlista- og handíðaskóli Íslands, previously Handíðaskólinn, est. 1939) was incorporated into the Iceland Academy of the Arts (Icel. Listaháskóli Íslands,) upon the foundation of the latter in 1999. The name of the Iceland Academy of the Arts has recently been changed to the Iceland University of the Arts.

[84] The Icelandic *samtímalist* is composed of the words *samtími* and *list,* the latter of which is generally translated into English as *art.* The former, *samtími,* is itself a composite of *sami,* meaning same, and *tími,* meaning time, and is equivalent to the English *contemporary.*

contemporary art in Iceland supports recent theories of contemporary art that emphasize the growing importance of historical specificity and specialization for the development of the field of contemporary art history,[85] as well as theories of contemporary art that stress its development out of an increased awareness of the contemporaneous multiplicity of geographical sites of artistic production and discourse and of the multiplicity of temporal positions towards and within the linear conception of historical development central to the project of modernity.[86] Significantly, it is in the context of SÚM artists relation to artists, curators, critics and institutions globally that they come to highlight and confront their own distinct position within the global economy and art world of the postwar period, as well as its broader historical foundations.

Debates on the definition of contemporary art are often tinged with anxiety over the supposedly a-historical, or even anti-historical context of the presentation of much recent art, which the notion of the contemporary – understood as that which is of the present moment – seems, by definition, to support. My analysis of SÚM's history, practice and works refutes such characterizations. There is of course nothing new about these concerns, which have informed the discourse of art and its institutions since, at least, the nineteenth century. Nor is

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[85] See e.g. Miwon Kwon's reply to Hal Foster, "Questionnaire on 'The Contemporary,'" in *October,* vol. 130 (Fall 2009), 13-15, and Tomii, "International Contemporaneity."

[86] See e.g. Terry Smith, "Contemporary Art and Contemporaneity," in *Critical Inquiry,* vol. 32, no. 4 (Summer 2006), 681-707; Terry Smith, Okwui Enwezor and Nacy Condee, eds., *Antinomies of Art and Culture: Modernity, Postmodernity, Contemporaneity* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008); the responses of Okwui Enwezor, Chika Okeke-Agulu and T.J. Demos to Foster, "Questionnaire on 'The Contemporary'"; Hans Belting, Andrea Buddensieg and Peter Weibel, eds., *The Global Contemporary and the Rise of New Art Worlds* (Karlsruhe, Germany: ZKM / Center for Art and Media; Cambridge, MA; London, England: MIT Press, 2013).

there anything inherent in the notion of the "contemporary" which sets it apart from the "modern."[87] Nevertheless, the idea of contemporary art can also be described as fundamentally antagonistic to the periodizing generalizations of modernity.

As Miwon Kwon has argued, the category of contemporary art history problematizes the traditional distinctions of art history as a discipline. The discipline of art history has commonly been organized in a twofold manner – on the one hand chronologically and on the other geographically – in a system wherein the practices and works of artists working within the perimeters of the "West" are categorized into various periods or movements and situated within a linear progression of historical development, while "non-Western" artistic practices are identified by geographical or cultural regions, often encompassing a multiplicity of distinct cultures and broad historical periods under general headings such as Latin-American, African or Asian art. Significantly, this customary split is implicitly challenged by the category of contemporary art which insists on the contemporaneity of artistic practices throughout the globe.[88]

In this, Kwon perceptively notes that "the horizon of contemporary art history is in fact the past, not the present. The field against or on which it operates is what we think we already know."[89] Chief among these, I would suggest, is the concept of modernity. Here, I take the concept of modernity to indicate simultaneously a social formation, a global world order and a powerful but parochial identity discourse, rooted in the economic and political

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[87] See e.g. Terry Smith, "Introduction: The Contemporaneity Question," in *Antinomies of Art and Culture,* 2-19; Jaleh Mansoor's reply to Foster, "Questionnaire on 'The Contemporary,'" 104-106.
[88] See *October,* vol. 130, 13.
[89] Ibid, 14.

expansion of European empires through colonial-capitalist exploitation from around the fifteenth century.

Scholars working within the fields of the so-called "premodern" period of the Middle Ages or the "early modern" period of the Renaissance have recognized the profound division which the notion of modernity introduces not only within time but equally within place, as temporal notions of "backwardness" are projected onto territorial entities. As Jennifer Summit and David Wallace note, in their introduction to a 2007 edition of the *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* dedicated to the question of periodization, "[t]he temporal/territorial scheme comes loaded with its own teleology, making resistance to Western domination look like a struggle against progress itself."[90] It is precisely in these terms, and in the context of the overwhelming authority of a universalizing narrative of modernity – defined as a progressive development *out of* nature driven by ever increasing "rationalization" and technological development – that SÚM artists' focus on the relation of human beings to nature, and their references to and mobilization of so-called "premodern," "local" Icelandic practices and beliefs in the postwar period comes to be tinged with notions of "naivete" or "nostalgia" and interpreted as reflective of Iceland's geographical remoteness from the urban centers of the global capitalist economy and modern "civilization."

In what follows I identify the mutual distinction of nature/culture – and of the closely related conceptual pair of the human/nonhuman – as central to the discourse and practice of modernity. While important components of the epistemological and political foundations of

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[90] Jennifer Summit and David Wallace, "Rethinking Periodization," in *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies,* vol. 37, no. 3 (Fall 2007), 447-451.

modernity – particularly the central concept of the subject and its opposite, the object – have been critiqued by so-called post-modern, post-structuralist theorists and philosophers, the crucial role of the conceptual distinction of nature/culture and the human/nonhuman in the formation of modernity has until fairly recently not received the same amount of critical attention. In recent years, however – with the proliferation of work produced under the banners of post-humanism, actor-network-theory, affect theory, animal studies, new materialism, new media theory, and some species of speculative realism – the assumption of the continued and universal relevance of these conceptual categories has been increasingly recognized as false, and as bound to a provincial European discourse of modernity shaped by histories of modern colonialism.[91] In their critical questioning of the terms of nature and culture and of the human and the nonhuman I find the work of SÚM artists truly contemporary, in the sense of being relevant to the concerns of *our* present moment.

While my analysis of SÚM work is informed, in part, by the important contributions of work produced under the aforementioned theoretical banners I am not persuaded by

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[91] See e.g. Bruno Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993); Philippe Descola and Gísli Pálsson, eds., *Nature and Society: Anthropological Perspectives.* (London, UK: Routledge, 1996); Brian Massumi, *Parables for the Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation* (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2002); Philippe Descola, *Beyond Nature and Culture* (Chicago & London: The University of Chicago Press, 2005); Karen Barad, *Meeting the universe halfway: quantum physics and the entanglement of matter and meaning* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007); Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* (Durham & London, Duke University Pres, 2010); Cary Wolfe, *What is Posthumanism?* (Minneapolis, US & London, UK: University of Minnesota Press, 2010); Rosi Braidotti, *Posthuman* (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2013); Richard Grusin, ed., *The Nonhuman Turn.* (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 2015); Mark S. Jackson, ed., *Coloniality, ontology, and the question of the posthuman* (London: Routledge, 2018).

suggestions to simply leave behind the concepts of nature and culture for the adoption of new terms, such as assemblages, for the simple reason that I consider the terms nature and culture as too ingrained and implicit in so much of both popular and philosophical or scholarly thought. Particularly, my study highlights the complicity of these terms in the dichotomy of the conceptual/material – and the related distinction of cognition/sensation, or intellect/emotion – and the significant influence of these conceptual distinctions on both the positioning and reception of SÚM work, and Icelandic art and culture more broadly, within and outside of Iceland. It is only by critically examining these terms, their origin, their applications and implications within a global perspective that we can rid them of their power and their "naturalness."

Organization and Scope of the Study

The year 1978 marks not only the last exhibition presented at Gallery SÚM but also SÚM's institutionalization through the founding of the Living Art Museum in Reykjavík. Significantly, the Living Art Museum has insured the continued impact of SÚM work on young Icelandic artists, and in more recent years, its canonization within the history of artistic practice in Iceland. The important impact of SÚM affiliate Magnús Pálsson on generations of Icelandic artists emerging out of the program of the Department of New Art in the late 1970s and early 1980s has also come to be increasingly recognized. Magnús's teaching methods and philosophy have been shown to have been shaped to a considerable degree by the principles of Fluxus, and specifically by artist Robert Filliou's *Teaching and Learning as Performing Arts* (1970).[92] During his years of teaching at the Icelandic College

[92] See Sigurjónsdóttir, "New Maps for Networks," 189-208.

of Arts, between 1975 and 1981, Magnús invited Fluxus artists Phillip Corner, Robert Filliou, Allison Knowles and Dick Higgins to the college as visiting lecturers, thus exposing subsequent generations of Icelandic artists to Fluxus art and to "the Fluxus Attitude," as Owen Smith has called it.[93] Several of Magnús's students at the Department of New Art were among the founders of Gallery Suðurgata 7 and Gallery Lóa (1976-1978), founded in Amsterdam by Helgi Þorgils Friðjónsson, Kees Visser and Rúrí (b. Þuríður Fannberg).

An analysis of the impact of Magnús's teaching methods on the Department of New Art and its connection to artist-run spaces in Iceland and the Netherlands has been inaugurated by Æsa Sigurjónsdóttir.[94] Yet, much work remains to be done in analyzing the specific terms of the cultural and artistic translations of postformalist experimental artistic practices into Icelandic art from the postwar period onwards. This dissertation contributes to that project, shedding significant light on the development of contemporary art in Iceland in the 1960s and seventies.

Chapter 1, "Nature and Nationalism: Landscape Painting and SÚM" highlights the considerable degree to which SÚM's translation of avant-garde practices into Iceland is configured through their critical, but complicated, confrontation with the Icelandic tradition of landscape painting and the concomitant ideology of romantic nationalism. Here I examine SÚM's inaugural exhibition, *SÚM I* in 1965, its presentation and reception, in the context of postwar debates about Icelandic culture and national identity brought on largely by the

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[93] See Owen Smith, *Fluxus: The History of an Attitude* (San Diego: San Diego State University Press, 1998).

[94] See Æsa Sigurjónsdóttir, "Magnús Pálsson et le department New Art à Reykjavík, 1975-1984: 'Teaching: The Maddest Artform,'" in *Transmettre l'art. Figures et méthodes – Quelle histoire?,* eds. Christophe Kihm and Valérie Mavridorakis (Dijon: Les presse du reel, 2014).

country's occupation during WWII and the continued presence of an American military force in Iceland in the 1960s. I also discuss SÚM artists' critical and creative reaction to nationalist discourse and the dominance of landscape painting in the years following *SÚM I.* In order to clarify the logic of the discursive and institutional framework of Icelandic art, and the reception of SÚM, I discuss the significance of Johann Gottfried Herder's philosophy of language – highlighting specifically its tacit critique of colonialism – for the development of Icelandic cultural nationalism in the nineteenth century. In this, I point to an important paradox at the heart of the project of cultural nationalism, which came to shape the development of contemporary art through SÚM.

In Chapter 2, "SÚM, Dieter Roth and Fluxus," I turn my attention to SÚM's relation to Dieter Roth and Fluxus. I highlight the substantial impact that Roth's confrontation with Iceland and Icelandic culture had on the development of his practice, most significantly his sustained and critical interruption of the traditional limits of the spheres of culture and nature post-1960. My examination of Roth's position within and in relation to Fluxus reveals the considerable overlap between his practice and Fluxus tactics and precepts, an overlap which can be understood through Fluxus's reconceptualization of the concept of the "concrete." I argue that, through his incorporation of biodegradable materials, Dieter Roth's work extends Fluxus' critiques of the reification and dematerialization of the artwork. Finally, I consider the translation of Fluxus formats and practices into Icelandic art through SÚM and conclude that this was significantly mediated by Dieter Roth's materialist take on the reconceptualization of the art object.

Chapter 3, "Romantic Conceptualism, or the Rematerialization of the Artwork," discusses the emergence of conceptual practices within SÚM around 1970, focusing on the

work of Sigurður Guðmundsson, Kristján Guðmundsson and Hreinn Friðfinnsson. As I demonstrate, the work of these artists stands in explicit opposition to the philosophical premises of much European and American conceptual art, particularly as the latter has been understood as affirmatively bound to a (post-)structuralist vision of the world as a sign system. In opposition to Lucy Lippard's and John Chandler's controversial theory of the dematerialization of the art object within conceptual art, I propose that the work of Sigurður, Kristján and Hreinn can better be understood in terms of a rematerialization of the artwork, in that their work highlights the materiality of language and its rootedness in sensual perception as well as the dynamic and agentive nature of all matter. I examine the work of these artists in relation to the legacy of romantic philosophy in the discourse on art in Iceland as well as the impact of Fluxus' resistance to the dematerialization of art.

Finally, Chapter 4, "Folk Culture and SÚM: Nationalism, Anti-Colonialism, and the Avant-Garde," focuses on SÚM's growing engagement with autochthonous Icelandic beliefs and vernacular culture in the 1970s. I propose that this can be understood in the context of the broader re-evaluation of Icelandic folk culture within Icelandic postwar nationalism and its alignment with anti-colonial resistance movements globally, and as a reaction against the deceptive notion of conceptual art's "international" character. Finally, the apparent contradiction between SÚM's aspirations to relevance and participation in the supposedly "globalized" modern artworld of the 1970s and their engagement with "archaic" cultural practices and beliefs can be resolved, I argue, in light of their translation of avant-garde practices into Iceland, which came to focus specifically on a critical reconfiguration of the boundaries of culture and nature, and of the human and the nonhuman.

Note on Icelandic Names

Most Icelanders use patronymics and not family names. Because of this, Icelanders always refer to each other, regardless of status or familiarity, on a first name basis. This dissertation follows that tradition and refers to Icelandic artists, critics, commentators and scholars by their first names when shortened versions are required.

Chapter 1. Nature and Nationalism: Landscape Painting and SÚM

On 12 June 1965, four young men opened an exhibition in Ásmundarsalur, an exhibition hall owned by the Icelandic Confederation of Labour (Icel. Alþýðusamband Íslands, ASÍ, est. 1916), and at Café Mokka, a popular gathering place for artists in Reykjavík, Iceland's capital.[95] The participating artists were Jón Gunnar Árnason, Hreinn Friðfinnsson, Sigurjón Jóhannsson and Haukur Dór Sturluson. The event marked the formation of SÚM, a loose configuration of artists that would come to have a significant influence on the development of Icelandic art in the following decade.[96] The name of the group was taken by many to be an abbreviation of the Association of Young Artists (Icel. Samband ungra mynlistarmanna) and understood as a critical response to the official Society of Icelandic Visual Artists (Icel. Félag íslenskra myndlistarmanna; FÍM, est. 1928), a group that was dominated by abstract

[95] Art exhibition in Ásmundarsalur and Café Mokka, June 12 – 20, 1965 (Icel. Myndlistarsýning í Ásmundarsal og Mokkakaffi, 12. – 20. júní 1965). 1965. Document listing works exhibited at *SÚM I,* 1965. Gallerie SÚM Papers, Box 3/5, Folder K. The Archive of Artist-Run Initiatives. The Living Art Museum, Reykjavík, Iceland.

[96] In an article published on the occasion of the first retrospective of the SÚM group, held at the Reykjavík Art Museum in 1989, the author and SÚM member Einar Guðmundsson recounts that Jón Gunnar Árnason had noted in his diary from this time that SÚM was established at exactly 11.35pm on 28 June 1965 and that only two of the founding members – Jón Gunnar himself and Sigurjón Jóhannsson – were present at the time, although Hreinn Friðfinnson and Haukur Dór Sturluson were considered founding members as well. Einar Guðmundsson, "Barist gegn afturhaldi og tregðu," in *Lesbók Morgunblaðsins,* March 11, 1989, 8, accessed May 2015, http://timarit.is/view_page_init.jsp?issId=242399&pageId=3307442&lang=is&q=Barist%20gegn%20S%DAM.

artists.[97] SÚM artists, however, refuted this, recounting instead a dadaesque story of accidental origin.[98] The indirect evocation of the historical avant-garde must, of course, be understood in light of its – and particularly dada's – re-discovery by young artists in Europe and the United States in the 1950s and sixties, reverberations of which reached Iceland in the early 1960s. With SÚM there emerged, for the first time, a generation of Icelandic artists whose artistic practices closely paralleled that of experimental artists globally.

The original SÚM foursome was soon joined by a number of young artists, including visual artists, poets and composers, eager to break away from the modernist abstraction that ruled the small Icelandic art scene in the postwar period.[99] Lacking a venue to exhibit their work, until the establishment of Gallery SÚM in 1969, the collective presented only one exhibition under the official banner of SÚM prior to that year.[100] However, the work of

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[97] See Halldór B. Runólfsson, "SÚM – The Flux in Iceland," in *A Cultural History of the Avant-Garde in the Nordic Countries 1950-1975,* ed. Tania Ørum and Jesper Olsson (Leiden; Boston: Brill Rodopi, 2016), 311-323.

[98] In 1970 Jón Gunnar Árnason gave an interview to the weekly journal *Vikan.* Asked about the meaning of the name SÚM, he answered that it was meaningless, and explained that they had randomly found the term while flipping through a historical survey book by Icelander Ásgeir Hjartarsson. There they came upon a chapter on the ancient nation of Sumer (Icel. Súmerar), one of the first civilizations on earth. To simplify the term, and make it more adaptable, they decided to shorten it to SÚM. See Dagur Þorleifsson, "Afskiptaleysi er glæpur. Rætt við Jón Gunnar Árnason," in *Vikan,* May 14, 1970, 26-27 and 41 and 43-44, accessed May 2015, http://timarit.is/view_page_init.jsp?issId=298900&pageId=4462932&lang=is&q=Afskiptaleysi%20er%20gl%E6pur.

[99] See Members of SÚM 1971. 1971. Gallerie SÚM Papers, Unfiled [Icel. óskráð]. The Archive of Artist-Run Initiatives. The Living Art Museum, Reykjavík, Iceland.

[100] In the fall of 1967, SÚM presented a solo-exhibition of works by Róska (Ragnhildur Óskarsdóttir), the first artist to join the group after *SÚM I,* in the summer of 1967. The exhibition was held in a building owned by the Reykjavík Junior College (Menntaskólinn í Reykjavík), and opened two days

individual members was presented in two solo-exhibitions and in a group exhibition of work by young Icelandic artists, the latter organized by the Society of Icelandic Visual Artists in 1967.[101] In addition, SÚM artists presented the outcome of their artistic experimentations in a

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prior to the first outdoor-sculpture-exhibit. Presented at the event were drawings and paintings Róska had created in the last three years – during her studies at the Accademie di Belle Arti in Rome. A mixture of dream-like, surrealist and ironic imagery – at times drawing on popular culture as well as blatantly subversive political subject matter – Róska's paintings and drawings were rendered in an expressive style of free brushwork, sinuous or rough line and intense, non-naturalistic color, creating a sense of anxiety and dread coupled with dark humor. See Laufey Helgadóttir, "Póesía og pólitík" in *Íslensk listasaga frá síðari hluta 19. aldar til upphafs 21. aldar,* vol. IV, ed. Kvaran, 59-61; Benedikt Hjartarson, "'A Furious Girl from Rome' – Róska and the Mythography of Avant-Garde Bohemianism," in *A Cultural History of the Avant-Garde in the Nordic Countries 1950-1975,* ed. Ørum and Olsson, 809-811.

[101] The exhibition, titled *Young Artists 1967* (Icel. *Ungir myndlistarmenn 1967)* was held at a newly erected indoors sporting arena in Reykjavík, and presented about sixty works by fourteen young artists, aged twenty to twenty-eight. SÚM artists Jón Gunnar Árnason and Sigurjón Jóhannsson were both on the exhibition committee, along with artists Jóhann Eyfells and Steinþór Sigurðsson. SÚM artist Hreinn Friðfinnsson exhibited three works, made from various materials, including rope, nails, mirrors and corrugated iron, two of which were purchased by the National Gallery of Iceland and the Icelandic Confederation of Labour Art Museum (Listasafn Alþýðusambands Íslands, est. 1961). SÚM members Kristján Guðmundsson and Þórður Ben Sveinsson exhibited a joint work, titled *Royal system (málverk í þremur víddum)* (*Royal system (painting in three dimensions),* 1967); an assemblage composed of two framed red squares fastened to a wall, to which were attached two hoses, which hung down and combined into one to slither around the exhibition hall, finally ending in a red box kept at the reception desk, with a small figure of a lion on top. See "Verk 14 ungra myndlistarmanna í Laugardalshöllinni," in *Þjóðviljinn,* June 17, 1967, 16, accessed June 2015, http://timarit.is/view_page_init.jsp?issId=224846&pageId=2904870&lang=is&q=verk; Þráinn, "'Jú, víst er hægt að lifa á myndlist, - ef maður er nógu lélegur,'" in *Morgunblaðið,* June 28, 1967, 10 and 20, accessed June 2015, http://timarit.is/view_page_init.jsp?issId=126795&pageId=1816146&lang=is&q=%E1%20a%F0%20er%20a%F0%20myndlist%20er%20a%F0; "Listasafn alþýðu kaupir verk ungra myndlistarmanna," in *Þjóðviljinn,* June 30, 1967, 10, accessed June 2015,

series of outdoor sculpture exhibitions organized by the Reykjavík School of Visual Art (Icel. Myndlistaskólinn í Reykjavík, est. 1947) between 1967 and 1972.

In many ways, the development of artistic practice within SÚM in the years immediately following its founding parallels that of contemporary art globally in the postwar period, in the practice of artists associated with Nouveau Réalisme, Happenings, Fluxus, Arte Povera and pop art; extending from the incorporation of found readymade material into the formal frames of painting and sculpture to the abandonment of traditional paradigms of art in favor of the creation and presentation of holistic environments, performative engagement with everyday objects, and the extension of the logic of the Duchampian readymade to frame vast experiences under the rubric of art. However, significantly, SÚM's challenge to the definition of the art object is also uniquely configured through the artists' critical, but complicated, and often highly humorous, confrontation with the Icelandic tradition of landscape painting.

This is exemplified by SÚM affiliate Magnús Pálsson's "landscape hats" (Icel. landslagshattar), presented at an exhibition of "miniature objects" (Icel. smáhlutir) organized by Gallery SÚM on 4 December 1971 [Figure 1.1]. Demonstrative of SÚM artists' interest in democratizing art, the exhibition presented small art "objects" by nineteen artists – including paintings, drawings, ceramics, plaster sculptures, reliefs, knitted objects, textile, and text-based works – each of which was no larger than thirty cm^2, and all of which were offered to

http://timarit.is/view_page_init.jsp?issId=218942&pageId=2813789&lang=is&q=Listasafn%20al%FE%FD%F0u%20kaupir%20verk%20ungra%20Listasafn%20al%FE%FD%F0u.

the public for sale at a modest prize.[102] Magnús Pálsson's landscape hats – likely composed of plaster, the primary material of Magnús's artistic production at the time – can be described as an ironic conflation of bourgeois artistic tradition and fashion, translating typical landscape motifs into a clothing item often understood as a sign of bourgeois respectability.[103] In their lack of refinement and haphazard form Magnús's landscape hats exemplify SÚM artists' rejection of the aesthetic object as a product of artistic skill and "inspiration" and their adoption of the experimental practices of post-formalist art, in particular the increased emphasis on artistic process and events. Art's transcendence is negated in the transformation of painting into a semi-functional, yet thoroughly worthless object; art is transformed into fashion, which in its "murderous, meaningless caprices" epitomizes the cycles of capitalist accumulation.[104]

In theorizing the relationship between the historical and the postwar neo-avant-gardes, art historians have noted an increased focus within the latter on the role of institutions, systems and structures of power in framing artistic conventions.[105] That SÚM

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[102] See "Smámunasýning SÚM," in *Morgunblaðið,* Dec. 4, 1971, 10, accessed September 2015, http://timarit.is/view_page_init.jsp?issId=114964&pageId=1427040&lang=is&q=Sm%E1munas%FDning%20S%DAM%20S%DAM.

[103] "Súmmarar með 'jólabasar,'" in *Vísir,* Dec. 3, 1971, 6, accessed September 2015, http://timarit.is/view_page_init.jsp?issId=237869&pageId=3240952&lang=is&q=J%F3labasar%20S%DAM.

[104] Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy,* Vol. I. The Process of Capitalist Production. Trans. from the third German edition by Samuel Moore and Edward B. Aveling, and ed. by Friedrich Engels (Chicago: Charles H. Kerr & Company, 1906), 525.

[105] I am thinking specifically of the writing of Hal Foster and Benjamin Buchloh. In an effort to distinguish the projects of the historical and neo-avant-gardes and to negate Peter Bürger's description of the neo-avant-garde as an uncritical repetition of the historical avant-garde, in the essay "What's Neo about the Neo-Avant-Garde?," published in *October* in 1994, Foster focuses on the

artists' translation of avant-garde practices into Icelandic art in the late 1960s and early 1970s should focus on a critical confrontation with the outdated conventions of landscape painting can be explained firstly, by the lack of avant-garde activity in Iceland in the early twentieth century, and secondly, by the relatively small stature of the culture industry in Iceland in the postwar period. Both of these factors – the continued influence of the idioms of landscape painting along with its concomitant romantic ideological framework and the impoverished institutional framework for art in Iceland – can, in turn, only be understood within the context of Iceland's belated modernization in the twentieth century, and its relationship to the country's longer history as a peripheral territory within the Danish colonial empire.

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distinction between artistic conventions and institutions: "Obviously convention and institution cannot be separated, but they are not identical. To collapse convention *into* institution produces a type of determinism; to read institution *as* convention produces a type of formalism. The institution of art *enframes* conventions, but it does not *constitute* them, not entirely. However heuristic, this difference does help to distinguish the emphases of historical and neo-avant-gardes: if the first focuses on the conventional, the second concentrates on the institutional." See Hal Foster, "What's Neo about the Neo-Avant-Garde?," in *October,* vol. 70, The Duchamp Effect (Autumn, 1994), 19. Foster differentiates between a first and second moment of neo-avant-garde practice, tying the former to the work of American artists Robert Rauschenberg and Allan Kaprow in the 1950s, and the latter to the work of American Michael Asher and French artist Daniel Buren in the 1960s. For Foster, the first neo-avant-garde is less critical, recovering the historical avant-garde "*less to transform the institution of art than to transform the avant-garde into an institution.*" Conversely, it is in the second neo-avant-garde of the 1960s that the project of the historical avant-garde is properly grasped, enacted and extended. Ibid, 22. Buchloh takes a similar position in privileging the more explicitly political work of European conceptual artists (particularly Marcel Broodthaers, Daniel Buren and Hans Haacke) after 1966. See Benjamin H.D. Buchloh, "Conceptual Art 1962-1969: From the Aesthetic of Administration to the Critique of Institutions," in *October,* vol. 55 (Winter 1990), 105-143.

In what follows, I argue that in challenging the artistic tradition of landscape painting, SÚM artists initiated a critical confrontation with the nationalist discourse that framed it, and which had shaped Icelandic self-identity, cultural practice and discourse since the turn of the twentieth century, at the core of which was the concept and ideal of nature. As I demonstrate, however, this was complicated by the affiliation of their own work with nationalist critiques of American political and cultural influence in Iceland in the postwar period. Examining the philosophical foundations of Icelandic cultural nationalism in the work of the eighteenth-century German philosopher Johann Gottfried Herder (1744-1803), I point to a crucial paradox at the heart of the project of Icelandic cultural nationalism, which is uniquely brought to the forefront in the emergence of landscape painting; namely, Herder's definition of nature as the both the opposite and origin of culture. It is this antinomy, I hope to show in the following chapters, that uniquely shaped the emergence of contemporary art in Iceland through SÚM from its establishment in 1965 to its dissolution in 1978.

Landscape Painting: The Paradoxical Logic of the Discourse of Art and Nationalism in Iceland

The rise of landscape painting throughout Europe in the nineteenth century is, as a number of scholars have argued, intimately tied to a widespread transformation in the conceptualization and view of nature following from rapid urbanization in the wake of the Industrial Revolution. Furthermore, it is connected to the growth of nationalism and the concomitant fall of large multi-ethnic empires, which called for a renewed articulation of people's relation

to place.[106] Although urbanization and industrialization were practically nonexistent in Iceland up until the turn of the twentieth century, the development of an Icelandic nationalist discourse in the nineteenth century, and of the practice of landscape painting, in the early twentieth century, is nevertheless informed by this dialectic.

The seeds of an Icelandic nationalist discourse were planted by Icelandic students in Copenhagen around 1830. Similarly, landscape painting was introduced by artists who had studied in the urban nuclei of Europe, primarily in Copenhagen, Iceland's capital until Home Rule (Icel. Heimastjórn) was established in 1904. Both, then, relied on the participation of Icelandic artists and scholars in transnational networks of cultural creators, as well as the movement of philosophical theories and cultural trends across national borders, in what Dutch cultural historian Joep Leerssen has described as "viral nationalism."[107] Furthermore, the development of landscape painting in Iceland both relied on, and in turn fostered, a radical transformation of the image of the country's natural environment and of the Icelandic people. This transformation was reflective of fundamental changes in the world's economic power relations which would have a profound impact on Icelanders' self-image. More specifically, the emergence of nationalist thought and landscape painting in Iceland built on Herder's theory of the natural origins of language and his historicization of both organic nature and human mental life.[108] This allowed the "under-developed" Icelandic society and

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[106] See e.g. W.T.J. Mitchell, ed., *Landscape and Power* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002); Denis E. Cosgrove, "Modernity, Community and the Landscape Idea," in *Journal of Material Culture,* vol. 11, no. 1-2 (2006), 49-66.

[107] Joep Leerssen, "Viral nationalism: romantic intellectuals on the move in nineteenth-century Europe," in *Nations and Nationalism,* vol. 17, no. 2 (2011), 257-271.

[108] As philosopher Michael N. Forster has argued, "Herder's most intrinsically important achievement in the philosophy of history arguably lies in what might be called his *historization* of phenomena:

culture to be understood in positive terms, as preserving the historical remnants of an original pan-Nordic – and more broadly pan-Germanic – culture. Nevertheless, and paradoxically as I highlight, Herder's teleological conception of history as the progressive realization of "humanity" and "reason" out of nature also establishes a hierarchy of cultures, allowing Icelandic culture to be perceived as historically and intellectually stagnant.[109] At the heart of the matter is this distinction and relation between culture and nature, the human and the nonhuman.

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roughly, his recognition that even phenomena that had previously been believed to be either eternal or else the products of divine acts of creation are in fact the naturally generated results of historical transformations." See Michael N. Forster, *Herder's Philosophy* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2018), 240. As Forster notes, Herder posits a "qualitative continuity" between animals and humans, a notion which may, in fact, have contributed significantly to the emergence of Darwin's theory of evolution. Furthermore, Herder theory of "radical mental differences" between different historical periods formed the basis of his "genetic method" (first presented in the *Attempt at a History of Lyric Poetry* [1764] and the *Fragments* [1767-8]), which as Forster notes, has been immensely influential, being taken over first by Hegel and then Nietzsche, and later Foucault. Ibid, 251-253.

[109] Although Herder's *Ideas for the Philosophy of History of Humanity* (1784-91), posits such a teleology of the steady realization of "humanity" and "reason," Forster argues that Herder still harbored "grave doubts just below the surface." As evidence of this Forster notes the "ironically self-deprecating title" of Herder's *This Too a Philosophy of History for the Formation of Humanity* (1774), its vacillation between incompatible models of history's direction and Herder's unpersuasive attempt to rebut the "skeptical" view of history's lack of meaning; also his statement in his *Theological Letters* of 1780-81 that history is "a textbook of the nullity of all human things," and his contradictory statements in the *Ideas.* In the end, Froster argues, the mature Herder does not "rest his case on a *general* skepticism." "On the contrary, he insists, much more plausibly, that history *is* governed by efficient causation and that moreover we should try to discover as far as possible the specific ways in which it is so. But he remains highly skeptical about the *extent* to which such an undertaking can be successful…" Forster, *Herder's Philosophy*, 244-246.

The North Re-Imagined

As recent studies by scholars working at the interface of comparative literature and postcolonial studies have shown, travel literature from the medieval and Early Modern periods and well into the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries typically describes the Icelandic population in fairly dehumanizing terms, as brutal, slovenly, and immoral "barbarians."[110] More generally, during these periods, the populations inhabiting the far northern regions of the planet were commonly described as "primitive," or even subhuman. For instance, as historian Sumarliði R. Ísleifsson notes, it was widely believed that northern populations communicated not through human language but "by emulating the sounds of animals."[111] In an analysis of the images of Iceland and Greenland during the medieval and Early Modern period, Sumarliði provides several examples of the tendency to conflate the Icelandic people with animals, including the Englishman Andrew Borde's account from the mid-sixteenth century, which states that Icelanders are "beastly creatures unmanered and untaughte. They have houses but yet doth lye in caves altogether like swine […]."[112] In addition, the written accounts of travelers to Iceland from these periods repeatedly stress the native population's immorality, particularly in sexual practices, their barbaric appearance and living standards,

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[110] See e.g. Sumarliði R. Ísleifsson, ed., *Iceland and Images of the North* (Québec, Canada: Presses de l'Université du Québec, 2011); Sverrir Jakobsson, *Images of the North: Histories - Identities – Ideas* (Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, 2009).

[111] Sumarliði R. Ísleifsson, "Introduction: Imaginations of National Identity and the North," in *Iceland and Images of the North,* ed. Sumarliði R. Ísleifsson, 3-22.

[112] Andrew Boorde, *The Boke of the Introduction of Knowledge* [etc.] (London: Trübner for the Early English Text Society, 1870). Quoted from Sumarliði R. Ísleifsson, "Islands on the Edge: Medieval and Early Modern National Images of Iceland and Greenland," in *Iceland and Images of the North,* ed. Sumarliði R. Ísleifsson, 46-47.

and their heathen practices of "witchcraft."[113] Such attitudes were rooted in ancient notions of the negative effect of a northerly latitude on the intellect and imagination, believed to suppress intellectual agility,[114] as well as in a Judeo-Christian religious tradition of associating the North with the demonic.[115]

In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the image of Icelanders as animal-like "savages" was gradually replaced by the fantasy of Iceland as the Hellas of the North, home to a noble, historical Nordic culture.[116] Crucially, the foundation of this more positive image was found in the Icelandic Sagas, a collection of medieval prose describing events in the history of Icelanders during the Viking age. However, this change must also be understood in relation to the growing economic and political power of the North since the late Middle Ages, and particularly in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries,[117] a development which

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[113] See Ísleifsson, "Introduction: Imaginations of National Identity and the North," 3-22; Zacharasiewicz, "The Theory of Climate and the North in Anglophone Literatures."

[114] See Zacharasiewicz, "The Theory of Climate and the North in Anglophone Literatures."

[115] See Ísleifsson, "Introduction: Imaginations of National Identity and the North."

[116] As Sumarliði R. Ísleifsson has noted, several books were written on this concept of Iceland's past as the equivalent of ancient Greek culture, e.g. *Aus Hellas, Rom und Thule, Cultur- und Literaturbilder* by Austrian Joseph Calasanz Poestion (1882), *Island und Hellas* by August Boltz from 1892. See Ísleifsson, "Icelandic National Images in the 19th and 20th Centuries."

[117] In his account of the relationship between state formation and capital accumulation in the "long twentieth century" (since the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries), Italian political economist Giovanni Arrighi describes the rise of the French and British empires from the seventeenth to the nineteenth centuries as dependent on a synthesis of capitalism and territorialism which allowed these empires to radically restructure the political geography of world commerce, through "three major and closely interrelated components: settler colonialism, capitalist slavery, and economic nationalism." See Giovanni Arrighi, *The Long Twentieth Century: Money, Power, and the Origin of Our Times* (London; New York: Verso, 2010 (1994)), 50.

was ideologically supported by the spread of the ideas of the Enlightenment, as Sumarliði Ísleifsson notes.[118] Further strengthening the ideological transformation of the North – if somewhat paradoxically – was the romantic critique of the effects of modern industrial capitalism on human societies and individuals. In the context of this critique the far North came to be seen as a place of purity, freedom, and originality – a utopia preserving the last remnants of an ancient civilization unspoiled by modernity and the unforgiving, harsh natural forces of Iceland came to be understood as a source of moral superiority rather than inferiority.[119]

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[118] For instance, as Sumarliði R. Ísleifsson notes, Baron de Montesquieu – among the Enlightenment's most prominent political philosophers – claimed the North as the place of origin of freedom itself. See Ísleifsson, "Introduction: Imaginations of National Identity and the North," 14.

[119] The transformation of Iceland's image and its connection to a romantic critique of capitalism is exemplified by the writing of the British poet, designer and activist William Morris, who visited Iceland in 1871 and 1873, recording his travels in journals later published. Morris's biographers have repeatedly emphasized the deep impact Iceland and its culture had on Morris, specifically on what British politician and journalist Robin Page Arnot called his "ascent into politics." See Robin Page Arnot, *William Morris: A Vindication* (London: Martin Lawrence, 1934). E.P. Thompson, for instance, describes Morris's introduction to the Icelandic Sagas and his journeys to the island as provoking his turn away from the self-indulgent individualism of the Romantic movement. See E.P. Thompson, *William Morris: Romantic to revolutionary* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1977), 182-186. And as Michell Weinroth notes, the stark Icelandic landscape and the perceived strength and morality of its population served for Morris as a "tonic for his distress and discontent with the overwhelming ambience of social ills in Victorian Britain," and an aesthetic contrast to the excess of Victorian capitalist bourgeois society. Michelle Weinroth, *Reclaiming William Morris: Englishness, Sublimity, and the Rhetoric of Dissent* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1996), 128. At the center of Icelanders' moral superiority – as perceived by Morris – and the source of their courage and freedom of thought, was their ongoing battle with the unforgiving natural environment of the island. Of course, Morris's perception of Iceland as untouched by the class strife that defined British society was an idealization. In fact, Icelandic society was dominated by a small land-owning section

Landscape Painting, Cultural Nationalism and the Ethical Revival of Icelanders

Evidence of the romantic movement's impact on Icelandic public discourse is first discernible in the writing of the editors of *Fjölnir* (Old Norse legendary king and son of the Norse god Freyr), an annual journal dedicated to the aesthetic enlightenment of Icelanders, founded in Copenhagen in 1835.[120] Informed by the ideas of the German poet Friedrich von Schiller and the Danish aesthete Johan Ludvig Heiberg, the *Fjölnir* group considered aesthetic sensibility closely related to ethical development.[121] As the editors explained, their intent was to "awaken the feeling for beauty, which some consider to be a bit slow with us Icelanders,"[122] a statement which gains considerable weight in light of the characterization of Icelanders throughout the previous centuries.

The aesthetic enlightenment of the Icelandic population was, according to the editors of *Fjölnir*, to be achieved through a two-fold project: first, through the preservation of the Icelandic language and the old medieval Icelandic Sagas, and secondly, through a careful scientific and aesthetic examination of Icelandic nature.[123] *Fjölnir'*s call for the preservation

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of the population, with the majority of people working as tenant farmers and living under severe social conditions, a condition which played a significant role in the emigration of a large number of the Icelandic population to North America from around 1870, the time of Morris's visits to Iceland. See Sigurður Gylfi Magnússon, *Wasteland with Words. A Social History of Iceland* (London: Reaktion Books, 2010), 18-32.

[120] The founders of *Fjölnir* were poet Jónas Hallgrímsson, theologist Tómas Sæmundsson, philologist Konráð Gíslason and lawyer Brynjólfur Pétursson.

[121] See Þórir Óskarsson, "From Romanticism to Realism," in *A History of Icelandic Literature,* ed. Daisy Neijmann (Lincoln, Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 2007), 265-267.

[122] Tómas Sæmundsson, "Ávarp," in *Fjölnir,* vol. 1 (1835), 12, accessed September 2016, http://timarit.is/view_page_init.jsp?issId=135095&pageId=2012586&lang=is&q=FJ%D6LNIR.

[123] See Óskarsson, "From Romanticism to Realism," 251-307.

and purification of the Icelandic language from foreign – mostly Danish – influence, gave rise to a linguistic purism movement which continues to effect linguistic policies in Iceland to this day.[124] In the twentieth century it also sparked a battle for the return of medieval Icelandic manuscripts that had been sent to Copenhagen since the seventeenth century, which culminated in the official ceremonial return of *Flateyjarbók* (*Codex Flateyensis*) and *Konungsbók Eddukvæða* (*Codex Regius*) to Icelanders in April 1971.[125] Finally, in the early twentieth century, *Fjölnir*'s call for the continued ethical development of the Icelandic nation through an aesthetic exploration of the island's nature provided the ideological ground for Icelandic landscape painting. In keeping with this, landscape painters were, in the early twentieth century, tasked with awakening in the Icelandic people an aesthetic sensitivity towards and appreciation of their own immediate natural environment, which was believed in turn to increase Icelanders' self-awareness and dignity.

The effects of the ideological transformation of the North described above are first discernable in Icelandic cultural production in romantic poetry of the early nineteenth century. For instance, in the patriotic nature poems of Bjarni Thorarensen, uninhabited and uncultivated "wild" nature and often life-threatening natural forces, previously understood as a source of horror and evil, are eulogized as guardian angels protecting the nation from the

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[124] Ibid.

[125] The return of *Flateyjarbók* and *Konungsbók Eddukvæða* in 1971 was met by chanting crowds of Icelandic students singing "Allt sem við viljum er handritin heim," or "All we want are the manuscripts home," to John Lennon's anti-war anthem "Give Peace a Chance," thus mixing "the youthful international movement of the late 1960s and the more serious mood of Icelandic nationalism," as anthropologist Gísli Pálsson has noted. Gísli Pálsson, *The Textual Life of Savants: Ethnography, Iceland, and the Linguistic Turn* (Chur, Switzerland: Harwood Academic Publishing, 1995), 14-15.

weaknesses of countries of a more southernly latitude.[126] Within the visual fields, the transformation of the view of Icelandic nature was initially marked in commercial photography, as photographers turned their lens towards the Icelandic landscape, creating memorabilia intended for the emerging tourism business at the end of the nineteenth century.[127] However, in the late nineteenth century, the plains of Þingvellir – the site of the ancient outdoor assembly Alþingi (Althing, est. around 930 AD) – attracted the attention of foreign artists such as the Danish painters Frederik Theodor Kloss and August Schiött, and the English painter W.G. Collingwood.[128] Probably the first Icelander to paint the site was Þóra (Pétursdóttir) Thoroddsen.[129] Þóra had studied at the Painting School for Women (D. Tegneskolen for Kvinder), a private art school in Copenhagen run by one of Denmark's prominent landscape painters and ardent proponent of romantic nationalism, Vilhelm Kyhn (Peter Vilhelm Carl Kyhn). Among the first works Þóra created after her return to Iceland in 1875 were studies of Þingvellir. But in addition to her own artistic practice, Þóra devoted herself to training numerous Icelandic women of the emerging local bourgeoisie in the art of

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[126] Óskarsson, "From Romanticism to Realism," 251-307.

[127] See Æsa Sigurjónsdóttir, "Jóhannes S. Kjarval," in *Íslensk listasaga frá síðari hluta 19. aldar til upphafs 21. aldar,* vol. II, ed. Kvaran, 53.

[128] See Júlíana Gottskálksdóttir, "Listvakning á 19. öld" and "Þórarinn B. Þorláksson og Ásgrímur Jónsson," in *Íslensk listasaga frá síðari hluta 19. aldar til upphafs 21. aldar*, vol. I, ed. Kvaran, 27 and 83; Karen Oslund, *Iceland Imagined: Nature, Culture and Storytelling in the North Atlantic* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2011), 55-56.

[129] Þóra was the daughter of Pétur Pétursson, the bishop of Iceland's Evangelical Lutheran Church and one of the country's most powerful men in the nineteenth century. One of her tutors was the Cambridge Librarian Eiríkur Magnússon, William Morris's colleague and companion on his first trip to Iceland in 1871 as well as in 1873. See Gottskálksdóttir, "Listvakning á 19. öld," 27.

drawing.[130] Her only male student – and, not surprisingly, the only one to pursue a professional career in the arts – Þórarinn B. Þorláksson presented the result of his own artistic exploration of the landscape of Þingvellir to the public in 1900, at the first public exhibition of works of art by an Icelandic artist presented in Iceland.[131]

On display at Þórarinn's exhibition in Reykjavík in 1900 were works the artist had made during his years of study in Denmark as well as several paintings created *en plein air* of the plains of Þingvellir [Figure 1.2].[132] Some years later, in 1906, he travelled into the highlands of Iceland, north of Eyjafjallajökull, making sketches for works that he later completed in his studio [Figure 1.3]. Þórarinn's travels around Iceland's largely unspoiled highlands would come to inspire further artistic exploration of the Icelandic landscape in the next decade. Just one year later in 1907, Ásgrímur Jónsson – a recent graduate from the Danish Royal Academy of Art – travelled around the eastern fjords of Iceland and into the highlands, painting small watercolors and making preparatory sketches for larger oil paintings [Figure 1.4].[133] Jóhannes S. Kjarval, one of Iceland's best known and most beloved artists, later took up the practice, traveling all around the island to paint, weaving aspects of

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[130] For a discussion of Icelandic women's significant albeit often hidden role in the establishment of an Icelandic art, see Hrafnhildur Schram, *Huldukonur í íslenskri myndlist* (Reykjavík: Mál og menning, 2005).

[131] "Myndasýning," in *Ísafold,* Dec. 19, 1900, 311, accessed September 2016, http://timarit.is/view_page_init.jsp?issId=276282&pageId=3952254&lang=is&q=Myndas%FDning.

[132] Upon his return to Iceland in 1900, Þórarinn had completed three years of study at the Danish Royal Academy of Art in Copenhagen and one at a private art school run by the Danish landscape painter Harald Foss. See Gottskálksdóttir, "Þórarinn B. Þorláksson og Ásgrímur Jónsson," 76-87.

[133] Both Ásgrímur and Þórarinn would continue their practice of travelling around the island to paint the landscape from direct experience or to gather inspiration for larger works created in the studio. See Ibid, 76-118.

the visual language of expressionism and cubism,[134] as well as a highly personal symbolism into his unique paintings of the Icelandic landscape [Figure 1.5], including some of his best-known depictions of Þingvellir.[135]

Fjölnir's call for an ethical revival of the Icelandic people through scientific and aesthetic exploration of the island's natural environment exemplifies the project of cultural nationalism, as defined by John Hutchinson, and discussed in the introduction of this dissertation. The rise of cultural nationalism globally is often associated with the spread of the theories of Johann Gottfried Herder's emphasis on the role of language in the formation of nations or peoples (G. *Volk*) and his theory of the natural origin of language had a significant impact on Icelandic nationalism in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and provided the ideological ground of landscape painting in the twentieth century. However, as I will argue in the following, Herder's theories and the project of cultural nationalism are compromised by a central paradox in his definition of culture, a paradox which is brought to the fore in the practice and discourse of landscape painting.

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[134] See Kristín Guðnadóttir, "Jóhannes Kjarval's Appropriation of Progressive Attitudes in Painting Between 1917 and 1920," in *A Cultural History of the Avant-Garde in the Nordic Countries 1900-1925,* eds. Hubert van den Berg et al., 491-498; Ólafur Kvaran, "Jóhannes S. Kjarval," in *Íslensk listasaga frá síðari hluta 19. aldar til upphafs 21. aldar,* vol. I, ed. Kvaran, 150-152; Sigurjónsdóttir, "Jóhannes S. Kjarval," 53-84.

[135] Significantly Ásgrímur Jónsson and Jóhannes S. Kjarval both made several works based on or referencing Icelandic folk stories and beliefs.

Herder's Theory of Language

Significantly, Herder's theory of language was formed as part of, and motivated by, an ongoing philosophical debate on the distinction and boundary between humans and animals in the eighteenth century.[136] In his first major philosophical work, *Treatise on the Origin of Language* (1772), Herder rejected the notion of a metaphysical and divine origin of language, postulating instead a naturalistic account of the origin and development of language. All language – human and nonhuman – Herder suggested, arises out of an active sensorial engagement with the immediate natural environment. However, while he believed that humans shared with animals a natural language of feeling allowing for the vocalization of sensations that arise through this interaction, he argued that human beings were qualitatively different from animals in that they have an innate further capacity for reason and language, the former being dependent on and bounded by the latter.[137] Thus, Herder

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[136] For detailed discussion of these debates and Herder's position in regard to them see John H. Zammito, "Herder between Reimarus and Tetens: The Problem of an Animal-Human Boundary," in *Herder: philosophy and anthropology,* ed. Anik Waldow and Nigel DeSouza (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2017), 127-147; and Michael N. Forster, "Gods, Animals, and Artists: Some Problem Cases in Herder's Philosophy of Language," in *Inquiry,* vol. 46, no. 1 (2003), 65-96.

[137] As John K. Noyes notes, the concept of *Besonnenheit* or "awareness" or "mindfulness" was crucial to Herder's distinction of humans from animals: "Condillac speaks of animals as if they were human, while Rousseau speaks of humans as if they were animals. Herder's response is that, where animals react instinctively to stimuli, the "whole disposition" of human nature is "awareness," or what he calls *Besonnenheit.* This term is introduced, Noyes writes, "in order to escape the confusions with specific forces of reason etc.' *Besonnenheit* is usually translated as 'reflection,' which is slightly misleading, since that could imply the forces of reason Herder wishes to unsettle. Michael Mack's 'mindfulness' is probably better. *Besonnenheit* means awareness of the sensual world, reflective awareness, consciousness, 'the mind's dependence on the senses.' […] Taken literally, *Besonnenheit* names the condition of having thought about stimuli. This is an innate condition of the human

believed, all human beings have an innate capacity for logical thought.[138] But, since human language, like animal language, mirrors the immediate natural environment out of which it arises, there is no universal language nor logic, each language and culture being instead uniquely shaped by the landscape and ecosystem of the people speaking it. Reason exists in the plural, a condition which arises out of the multiplicity of human languages and their relation to diverse natural environments.[139] In direct opposition, then, to the proposition of his former instructor at the University of Königsberg, Immanuel Kant, of *a priori* conditions of reason, Herder insisted that conceptual frameworks are, in themselves, formed through experience, and thus contingent on environmental factors.[140]

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organism, and it sets it apart from the animal organism." John K. Noyes, *Herder: Aesthetics against Imperialism* (Toronto, Canada: University of Toronto Press, 2015), 141.

[138] In the *Treatise on the Origin of Language,* published in 1772, Herder writes: "If, that is to say, reason is no compartmentalized, separately effective force but an orientation of all forces that is distinctive to his species, *then the human being must have it in the first condition in which he is a human being.* This awareness must reveal itself in the first thought of the child, just as in the case of the insect [it had to be evident] that it was an insect." See Johann Gottfried von Herder, "Treatise on the Origin of Language (1772)," in *Herder: Philosophical Writings,* translated and edited by Michael N. Forster (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 85.

[139] For a discussion of Herder's position on the multiplicity of language and reason see Noyes's chapter "From the Location of Language to the Multiplicity of Reason," in *Herder: Aesthetics against Imperialism.*

[140] Political historian Alan Patten articulates this difference in the following manner: "Whereas Kant famously sought to equip human experience with a conceptual framework derived from a priori conditions of possible judgement, Herder insisted that the conceptual frameworks in which people formulated their thoughts are themselves formed through experience. The application of certain concepts and categories in thought is not a universal function of reason, nor an 'innate' part of the mind's apparatus, but a contingent 'accumulation or product of the impressions that are received'…" Alan Patten, "'The Most Natural State': Herder and Nationalism," in *History of Political Thought,* vol. XXXI, no. 4 (Winter 2010), 663.

As philosopher Michael N. Forster has recently argued, Herder's writing laid the philosophical foundation of both modern linguistics and cultural anthropology. The principle that human thought is dependent on and bounded by language led Herder to emphasize the importance of comparison and interpretation of languages for the discovery of differences in human modes of thought and psychology. Importantly, Herder also afforded non-linguistic art a capacity for expression of thoughts and meanings, which ultimately are grounded in language. In opposition to Enlightenment philosopher-historians like Hume and Voltaire, Herder posited that "radical mental differences occur between different historical periods,"[141] and that these differences are perceivable through comparison and interpretation of non-linguistic works of art. These philosophical insights, and Herder's historicization of aesthetics, Forster argues, played a crucial role in the refinement of art history as a discipline. Finally, Herder's theory of the natural origin of language laid the ground for his philosophy of history, and his conception of history as a progressive realization of "humanity" and "reason," which, as Forster notes, "anticipated and strongly influenced Hegel's philosophy of history."[142]

John K. Noyes has argued that Herder formulated his philosophical theories as a direct reaction to, and critique of, the great expansion of the capitalist world economy and the related expansion of the European world in the second half of the eighteenth century through the practices of colonialism.[143] Taking a similar position, philosopher Sonia Sikka sees Herder's rejection of the universalism of Enlightenment philosophy as aimed,

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[141] Forster, *Herder's Philosophy*, 242.

[142] Ibid, 239.

[143] See Noyes, *Herder: Aesthetics against Imperialism*, 3-22.

ultimately, at the economic, political and cultural imperialism which he saw as providing the real motivation behind the empty rhetoric of universal brotherhood propagated by Enlightenment thinkers. Nevertheless, as Sikka stresses, "Herder's thesis of 'incommensurability' is integrated with a version of universalism, one that is sometimes even questionably condescending [...]"[144] As an example, one might point to Herder's comments on the languages of the so-called "savage" peoples the Americas and of Europe whose language he described as "half-articulated and unwritable,"[145] being closer to nature and more like the expression of animals. Meanwhile, he also pronounced these "savage" languages as more "original," and more "living" than the languages of more culturally developed peoples.[146]

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[144] See Sonia Sikka, "Enlightened relativism: The case of Herder," in *Philosophy and Social Criticism,* vol. 31, no. 3 (2005), 312.

[145] In the "Treatise on the Origin of Language" Herder compares the language of European "savages" to that of the Iroquoian-speaking Native American Huron's – or the Wendat as they called themselves – as well as the languages of the indigenous populations of Peru, and the Thai language, referred to by Herder as Siamese. He notes: "And what need have we of peoples from such remote ends of the earth? Our small residue of savages in Europe, Estonians and Lapps etc., often have sounds that are just as half-articulated and unwritable as Hurons and Peruvians. Russians and Poles, long as their languages have been written and formed by writing, still aspirate in such a way that the true sound of their languages' organizations cannot be depicted by means of letters." He goes on, and concludes, in the next paragraph: "So the fact is false, and the inference even more false; it does not lead to a divine origin but, quite the opposite, to an animal origin." Herder, "Treatise on the Origin of Language (1772)," 70-71.

[146] For instance, in his first major work on the philosophy of language, "Fragments on Recent German Literature," Herder writes: "The oldest languages had much *living expression,* as the remains of ancient and original languages… These languages, formed immediately according to living nature, and not like more modern languages according to arbitrary, dead ideas, not only had an emphatic stride for the ear, but were also capable, with the easiest application, of rushing with the whirlwind,

In Noyes's opinion, Herder's extensive study of the latest scientific discoveries and economic developments ultimately led him to a position of cultural diversity and world community rather than primitivism.[147] Nevertheless, Herder's writings, especially his description of "primitive" languages as more "original," and "living" than the languages of more culturally developed peoples, would inspire his successors – most crucially the Prussian philosopher Johann Gottlieb Fichte – to stress the superiority of "authentic," "living" and "organic" languages to "derived" languages, promoting a belief in the moral

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of resounding in battle, of raging with the sea, of roaring with the river, of cracking with the collapsing rock, and of speaking with the animals." Johann Gottfried Herder, "Fragments on Recent German Literature (1767-8 [excerpts on language])," in *Herder: Philosophical Writings,* ed. Forster, 61. And in the "Treatise on the Origin of Language" he argues that: "*In all original languages remains of these natural sounds still resound* – only, to be sure, they are not the main threads of human language. They are not the actual roots, but the juices which enliven the roots of language. In a refined, late-invented metaphysical language, which is a degeneration, perhaps at the fourth degree, from the original savage mother [tongue] of the human species, and which after long millenia of degermation has itself in turn for centuries of its life been refined, civilized, and humanized – such a language, the child of reason and society, can know little or nothing any more about the childhood of its first mother." Herder, "Treatise on the Origin of Language (1772)," 68.

[147] In discussing Herder's interest in and research of German folk songs (G. *Volkslied*), Noyes comments that "Herder's lesson from the German *Volkslied* was not one of primitivism, but of cultural diversity and world community…" Noyes, *Herder: Aesthetics Against Imperialism*, 136. Further on, comparing Herder's theories of language to that of English philosopher John Locke, Noyes notes that in opposition to Locke's notion of "progression from a primitive sensualism to a civilized capacity for abstraction" Herder's writing posits a theory of language as fundamentally embodied and located. Ibid, 139-155.

superiority of people whose language displayed a certain "purity," being unspoiled by contact with and translation from other languages.[148]

As Mark Antliff and Patricia Leighten argue, in their assessment of the terms "primitive" and "primitivism" as they relate to art history, the notion of the primitive can be defined, above all, as an "ideological construct of colonial conquest and exploitation."[149] Further, they note, "the ideological import of the 'primitive' and of primitivism can be best grasped from the standpoint of a related set of oppositions mapped out in terms of time/space, gender, race, and class."[150] In short, the primitive is understood, in a logical opposition to the "civilized," as historically stagnant, feminized, racialized, and economically and industrially underdeveloped. Importantly, these characteristics of the primitive are closely associated to their supposed closeness to nature, and the concomitant notion of their lack of humanity – a conception which provided ideological justification for colonial practices of subjugation and violence.

The idea of the primitive and its association with nature, then, rests logically on the definition of civilization as a development *out of* nature. While Herder rejects the Eurocentric notion of the universality of reason, he nevertheless continues to uphold the notion of an essential difference between humans and animals, which he locates in human beings'

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[148] Guðmundur Hálfdanarson, "From Linguistic Patriotism to Cultural Nationalism: Language and Identity in Iceland," in *Languages and identities in historical perspective,* edited by Ann Katherine Isaacs. Pisa: Edizioni Plus, 2005, 55-66.

[149] Mark Antliff and Patricia Leighten, "Primitive," in *Critical Terms for Art History,* eds. Robert S. Nelson and Richard Shiff (Chicago; London: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 170.

[150] Ibid.

universal conceptual capacity for rational thought, leading his philosophy to be plagued by contradictions.[151]

Landscape Painting, the Reification of Nature and the Paradox of Cultural Nationalism

Herder's refusal of the universality of reason, and his theory of the ecological basis of the diversity of human languages and culture, became, in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, crucial for the justification of an original Icelandic national identity and culture. This placed nature at the center of the construction of Icelandic art and national identity. However, paradoxically, according to Herder's theory, the psychological characteristics of this "organic" nation could only be recognized in its cultural products, understood as a marker of its distance from nature. This antinomy is exemplified by the practice of landscape painting and its association with nationalist thought.

As landscape geographer Kenneth R. Olwig notes, the modern visual conception of landscape as natural scenery – as a prospect seen from a specific standpoint – emerged in England toward the end of the sixteenth century.[152] Crucially, this coincides with the development of techniques of perspectival representation in the theater and the arts, as well as the emergence of mediums of land

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[151] Noyes describes this paradox as the "antinomy of universal reason." See Noyes, *Herder: Aesthetics Against Imperialism*, 301.

[152] See Kenneth R. Olwig, "Nationalist heritage, sublime affect and the anomalous Icelandic landscape concept," in *Norsk Geografisk Tidsskrift – Norwegian Journal of Geography,* vol. 69, no. 5 (2015), 279. Olwig quotes the Chinese-American geographer Yi-Fu Tuan's 1974 study of the history of environmental perceptions, in which Tuan shows that the modern idea of landscape as scenery has its origins partially in theater. See Yi-fu Tuan, *Topophilia: A Study of Environmental Perception, Attitudes, and Values* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1974).

surveying and mapping.[153] As art historians have noted, schools of landscape painting first became distinguished in regions of Europe where map-making, engraving and printing became major industries by 1500, supporting the European "explorations" of the globe for colonial profit.[154] Art historian W. J. T. Mitchell has examined landscape visions' complicity with colonial exploitation, describing it as "the 'dreamwork' of imperialism."[155] The historical process of the reification of nature which the modern visual concept of landscape involves – bound as it is to colonial practices and the rise of capitalism – has been examined by Olwig through an older conception of landscape, captured in the Old Norse *landskapr* to indicate "a polity concerned with law and justice with regard to the administration of an assemblage of farms, fields and other resources."[156] In this older concept, landscape is understood as profoundly social and imbued with cultural and political meaning. In a recent essay, Olwig explores this conception of landscape as assemblage in relation to the associated Old Norse and Old High German word *thing* (Icel. *þing*) as a judicial assembly:

> An important key to understanding the character and consequence of the reification of the meaning of "thing" is to be found in the relationship between "thing and its linguistic "conjoined twin" – "landscape." Thing has thus undergone a process by which *things* went from being substantive, judicially founded meetings in which knowing people assembled (as in parliaments) to discuss, and thereby constitute matters of common concern, or common *things that matter,* to becoming physical objects, or *things as*

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[153] See Denis E. Cosgrove, *Social Formation and Symbolic Lansdcape* (London: Croom Helm, 1984); Denis E. Cosgrove, *Geography and Vision. Seeing, Imagining and Representing the World* (London & New York: I.B. Tauris, 2008); Olwig, "Nationalist heritage, sublime affect and the anomalous Icelandic landscape concept," 280.

[154] See Svetlana Alpers, *The Art of Describing: Dutch Art in the Seventeenth Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983); Walter S. Gibson, '*Mirror of the Earth.' The World Landscape in Sixteenth-Century Flemish Painting* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1989).

[155] Mitchell, *Landscape and Power*, 10.

[156] Olwig, "Nationalist heritage," 280.

> *matter.* At the same time a parallel and intertwined reification of the substantive meaning of landscape occurred, by which it went from being a political community, or *res publica,* constituted by the meeting of common *thing* assemblies… to becoming a spatial assemblage of physical *things as matter.*[157]

The reification of landscape is thus bound to an associated reification of the meaning of "things," wherein both are transformed from social and discursive assemblages into inert, and mute physical objects. The association between landscape and thing – and the paradox of romantic landscape paintings' relation to the rise of European colonial empirical powers – is uniquely brought to the fore in the Icelandic tradition of landscape painting, and its historical focus on the planes of *Þingvellir* (Thing Fields), the site of the ancient outdoor assembly Alþingi (Althing, est. around 930 AD).

In the framework of Herder's philosophy and that of his successors, medieval Icelandic literature and the uniqueness of the Icelandic language could be viewed as proof of Icelanders' distinct identity as well as their elevation above a state of nature, something which had, in fact, been denied them in earlier periods. And in the early twentieth century Herder's theories provided the ideological ground for Icelandic landscape painting, making it one of the most important emblems of Icelandic national identity. The practice of landscape painting, initiated by Þórarinn B. Þorláksson in 1900, would continue to dominate Icelandic art throughout the early twentieth century, whereas abstract painting did not gain a foothold until after the second world war. As I will argue, however, the romantic rhetoric developed by Icelandic nationalists in the nineteenth century continued to have a profound influence on the discourse of art in Iceland throughout the postwar period, forcing both abstract artists and

[157] Kenneth R. Olwig, "Heidegger, Latour and the Reification of Things: The Inversion and Spatial Enclosure of the Substantive Landscape of Things – the Lake District Case." *Geografiska Annaler,* Series B, Human Geography, vol. 95, no. 3 (2013): 251-273. Original emphasis.

the younger generation of artists associated with SÚM to confront the question of how to be both modern and Icelandic, while simultaneously grappling with the effects of older notions of primitiveness as they sought to carve out a place for themselves in avant-garde networks and the wider international institutions of art.

The "Naturalization" of Abstract Art

In the second volume of the first survey of Icelandic art, published in 1973, art historian Björn Th. Björnsson likened the effect of painter Svavar Guðnason's exhibition in Reykjavík in August 1945 to that of a meteor hitting the small city.[158] Svavar had spent the war years in Copenhagen, briefly studying at the Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts before rejecting the staid atmosphere of the academy to join a Surrealist collective made up of young Nordic artists called Linien, active between 1934 and 1939.[159] Remaining in Denmark during the Nazi occupation of 1940-1945, Svavar became a member of the avant-garde group Helhesten (the Hell-Horse, 1941-1944) and contributed to the group's eponymous journal, alongside fellow Icelander Sigurjón Ólafsson.[160] His 1945 exhibition in Reykjavík – which opened

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[158] Björnsson, *Íslensk myndlist á 19. og 20. öld,* vol. II, 290.

[159] Svavar Guðnason's initiation into Linien happened in Paris in 1937. Svavar had received a grant from the Icelandic government with the intent to travel to Paris to attend Fernand Léger's academy there. However, his stay at the school proved short-lived, and he described himself as having been no more than an observer there for a few weeks. See Jón Proppé, "Nýja myndlistin: Hvaðan kom Svavar?," in *Íslensk listasaga frá síðari hluta 19. aldar til upphafs 21. aldar,* vol. III, ed. Kvaran, 30-32.

[160] Often overlooked, this Danish avant-garde art group was an important predecessor of the international CoBrA group est. 1948. Formed and operating in Copenhagen during the city's occupation by the Nazis, Helhesten appropriated stylistic traits from German expressionism, dada and surrealism, reformulating the tactics of these groups into countercultural strategies that challenged the

only three months after the official release of Denmark and one year after the official founding of the Republic of Iceland – presented thirty-six oil paintings, alongside a few smaller watercolors. Among them, the painting *Jónsmessudraumur* (*Midsummer Night's Dream*) from 1941 [Figure 1.6], exemplifies the vivid colors, swirling line and expressionist brushstrokes of Svavar's work at this time, and the Surrealist propensity for mythology adopted by Helhesten and later CoBrA.[161]

For the authors of the recent updated survey of the history of Icelandic art, published by the National Gallery of Iceland in 2011, Svavar Guðnason's 1945 exhibition marks the beginning of the rise of abstract painting in Icelandic art and public discourse on art. As they concede, though, an initial encounter with abstract painting had, in fact, occurred two

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Nazi racist propaganda, through a reformulation of Norse mythology and folklore and the use of purposefully unskilled, naïve looking, brightly coloured abstract works. Through an emphasis on subjectivity, indeterminacy and a fundamental anti-essentialism these artists rejected the Nazi obsession with purity, historical continuity and order. See Kerry Greaves, "Mobilizing the Collective: Helhesten and the Danish Avant-Garde, 1934-1946" (PhD Diss., The City University of New York, 2015), ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global. As Hubert van den Bergen has noted, the revival of Old Norse and Nordic art and literature became, in the early twentieth century, part of the widespread avant-garde search for aesthetic renewal through primitivism, serving as a major inspiration for the work of a number of German and Slavic expressionists. Meanwhile, primitivist appeals to ancient Nordic folklore, mythology and artefacts are virtually absent from the Nordic avant-garde in the early twentieth century. See Hubert Van den Berg, "The Early Twentieth Century Avant-Garde and the Nordic Countries. An Introductory *Tour d'Horizon,*" in *A Cultural History of the Avant-Garde in the Nordic Countries 1900-1925,* eds. Hubert van den Berg et al., 23-27.

[161] Svavar Guðnason's *Midsummers Night Dream* (1941) was exhibited in Helhesten's exhibition at Dyrehaven (Deer Park), a popular recreational destination for working class Copenhageners, in early summer of 1941; an exhibition which Kerry Greaves describes as "the first truly avant-garde exhibition in Denmark to attempt to merge art and life." Greaves, "Mobilizing the Collective: Helhesten and the Danish Avant-Garde, 1934-1946," 195.

decades prior, when painter Finnur Jónsson presented his work at Café Rosenberg in Reykjavík in November of 1925 [Figure 1.7].[162] However, Finnur – who had studied under Oskar Kokoscha at the Dresden Academy of Fine Arts in the 1920s and exhibited eight works at Galerie Der Sturm in the spring of 1925 – abandoned the expressionist style soon after his return to Iceland, a decision probably influenced both by the rupture of his connection to the European avant-garde as the situation on the continent became increasingly dire, the waning of avant-garde activity in Europe in the late 1920s, and by the lack of understanding in Iceland of the ideological, artistic and social underpinnings of abstract and expressionist art at the time.[163] Iceland, a traditionally agricultural society, simply lacked the social basis of European experimental avant-garde art in the early twentieth century.

Within the field of literature, too, there was little in the way of avant-garde activity in the early twentieth century, as literary and cultural historian Benedikt Hjartarson has noted, and the historical European avant-garde movements of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries seem to have mostly bypassed the Icelandic public.[164] Nevertheless, Benedikt argues that the idea of the avant-garde would come to play a central role in the constitution

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[162] "Málverkasýningu," in *Morgunblaðið,* Nov. 19, 1925, 1, accessed August 2015, http://timarit.is/view_page_init.jsp?issId=119234&pageId=1577304&lang=is&q=M%E1lverkas%FDningu.

[163] As Benedikt Hjartarson and Hubert van den Berg point out, with the exception of an institutionalized form of constructivism and the emergence of surrealism in France and Belgium, the late 1920s saw the collapse, evaporation or ceasing of most avant-garde initiatives, projects and journals that had emerged in the 1910s or early 1920s. See Hubert van den Berg and Benedikt Hjartarson, "Icelandic Artists in the Network of the European Avant-Garde – the Cases of Jón Stefánsson and Finnur Jónsson," in *A Cultural History of the Avant-Garde in the Nordic Countries 1900-1925,* ed. Van den Berg et al, 229-246.

[164] Hjartarson, "The Early Avant-Garde in Iceland," 615-625.

of modern Icelandic culture and national identity in the first half of the twentieth century. As he notes, debates on the avant-garde were dominated by two contradictory positions:

> The avant-garde was seen in different terms in this context: on the one hand, it was believed to be symptomatic of a degenerate and international modern civilization, along with jazz, cinema, industrialism, specialization and political anarchy; on the other hand, it was greeted as part of a revolutionary current that was to be welcomed in the fight against political stagnation and the influence of capitalist mass culture.[165]

While the latter position was adopted by abstract artists in the 1940s and fifties, and by artists associated with SÚM in the 1960s and seventies, the former position would significantly color the reception of both abstract art and contemporary art practices. Nevertheless, as I highlight in the following, both were articulated from within the framework of nationalist thought developed in the nineteenth century and rooted in Herder's philosophy.

As art historian Serge Guilbaut has shown in his important study of the ideological and political context of the rise of Abstract Expressionism in the United States, the acceptance of abstract art in the U.S. relied on the gradual divorce of abstract art from Leftist politics; a process which Guilbaut refers to as the "de-Marxization" of the American intelligentsia.[166] A similar process can be discerned in the discourse of art in Iceland in the 1950s. But if the acceptance of abstract art in the U.S. relied on its adaptation to liberal

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[165] Benedikt Hjartarson, "International Nationalism: Reflections on the Emergence of Anti-Avant-Gardism in Iceland," in *Transnationality, Internationalism and Nationhood: European Avant-Garde in the First Half of the Twentieth Century,* eds. Hubert F. Van den Berg and Lidia Gluchowska (Leuven, Belgium; Paris, France; Walpole, MA: Peeters, 2013), 77.

[166] See Serge Guilbaut, *How New York Stole the Idea of Modern Art,* trans. Arthur Goldhammer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983).

political ideology, in Iceland it depended primarily on the circumscription of abstract art by the logic of nationalism and the centrality of nature to Icelandic national identity, a process which might be labelled the "naturalization" of abstract art.

Nationalism and the Reception of Abstract Art

In its rejection of mimetic renditions of the natural world and its search for universal forms, abstract art was understood by many as fundamentally unpatriotic and met strong opposition from conservative nationalists in the early-twentieth century. Arguably the most vocal and powerful opponent of abstract art was Jónas Jónsson from Hrifla, the head of the Education Council (Icel. Menntamálaráð, est. 1928) and leader of the Progressive Party (Icel. Framsóknarflokkurinn) between 1934 and 1944. In 1942, Jónas organized an exhibition showcasing what he deemed unpatriotic art; an event which unmistakably recalled the infamous exhibition of "degenerate" art, *Entartete Kunst,* organized by Adolf Ziegler and the Nazi Party in Munich in 1937.[167]

As Benedikt Hjartarson points out, the rhetoric promoted by Jónas from Hrifla and other conservative nationalists in the 1940s and fifties built on older cultural debates about the avant-garde and its potential role in shaping national culture. Ideas of avant-garde art's "pathologial and neurological symptoms" believed to be deeply contagious and a threat to the very idea of culture – propagated, for instance, by Danish bacteriologist Carl Julius Salomonsen – reached Iceland in the early twentieth century and had a significant impact on

[167] See Æsa Sigurjónsdóttir, "Þjóðlegar myndir og óþjóðlegar," in *Íslensk listasaga frá síðari hluta 19. aldar til upphafs 21. aldar*, vol. II, ed. Kvaran, 13-17.

Icelandic art discourse throughout the early century.[168] Further, the purported degenerative nature of abstract art was often understood by conservative commentators such as Jónas from Hrifla as intimately tied to communist political views, which were perceived as threatening to national identity.[169]

Meanwhile, however, foreign critics tended to see Icelandic art – abstract or otherwise – as rooted in the unique Icelandic landscape and the harsh natural environment of the island, as well as in the nation's "youth," a euphemism for its "primitive" state. For instance, in the 1940s and fifties Danish critics repeatedly tied the color palette and brushstrokes of Svavar Guðnason's work to the violent forces of Icelandic nature.[170] In 1951 the National Gallery of Iceland – then the State Gallery of Iceland – organized the first survey of Icelandic art abroad, presented in Oslo, Norway. Responding to the exhibition, one Norwegian critic wrote:

> … a hint of the atmosphere of the cold and isolated island in the far north is perceivable in the exhibition halls. The colors of the works are sometimes dark and melancholy, gray and cold, but at others burning hot as a volcanic eruption. One senses the solemnity of the isolated souls. *Their formal vocabulary is pastoral and homemade, and has a likeable and naïve appearance, but the expression is not fully matured*. [...] What the *young* Icelandic "abstract" painters

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[168] See Hjartarson, "The Early Avant-Garde in Iceland," 617.

[169] See e.g. Guðmundur G. Hagalín, "Leikmannsþankar um list II. Náttúrukommúnistar og abstraktmálarar," in *Alþýðublaðið,* Oct. 31, 1947, 3, accessed August 2016, http://timarit.is/view_page_init.jsp?issId=65169&pageId=1078271&lang=is&q=Leikmanns%FEankar%20um%20list%20II; M. "List og kommúnismi," in *Morgunblaðið,* Sept. 16, 1953, 7, accessed August 2016, http://timarit.is/view_page_init.jsp?issId=116928&pageId=1491613&lang=is&q=Komm%FAnismi%20og%20komm%FAnismi%20Komm%FAnismi.

[170] See Proppé, "Nýja myndlistin: Hvaðan kom Svavar?," 41-42.

> have going for them, is that their expression is *uninhibited* and in their work gives form to a temperament which is both strong and romantic... [...] One might argue that the Icelandic temperament is most clearly expressed in the abstract sculpture. In it we find a core. *Something original and primitive* that arises from the deep, shaping the stone through a powerful conflict.[171]

Thus, while modern avant-garde art's association with the "primitive" was decried by conservative nationalists such as Jónas from Hrifla as fundamentally opposed to the civilizing mission of Icelandic nationalism, foreign critics tended to see in the avant-garde's appropriation of the visual language of "primitive" cultures, of the art of children and the

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[171] Translated to Icelandic from Norwegian by *Lesbók Morgunblaðsins.* Original text by Johan Fredrik Michelet, published in *Verdens Gang.* Emphasis is mine. In the Icelandic: "…ofurlítill blær frá hinni köldu og afskektu ey þarna lengst norður í hafi, virðist nú samt sem áður vera í svölunum. Litavalið getur verið dökkt og dapurlegt, grátt og hjelukent, en stundum funandi og líkt sem eldgos. Maður fær veður af hinum einangruðu sálum, sem taka sjálfar sig ákaflega hátíðlega og telja lífið erfitt. Formmálið hefur keim af sveitabrag og heimavinnu, og er viðkunnanlegt og einlægt, en tilþrifin eru oftast bundin, eða hafa ekki fengið fulla útrás. [...] Það sem hinir ungu íslensku 'abstract' málarar hafa til síns ágætis, er, að þeir gefa sjer lausan tauminn og hjá þeim kemur fram skapgerð, sem er bæði sterk og rómantísk... [...] Skyldi ekki lyndiseinkenni Íslendinga nú sem stendur koma einna greinilegast fram í hinni hugsæu myndhöggvaralist? Í henni er kjarni. Það er eins og eitthvað frumlegt og frumstætt komi þar upp úr djúpinu og skapi formin innan frá með voldugum átökum." "Dómar um Óslóarsýninguna," in *Lesbók Morgunblaðsins,* March 11, 1951, 144-145, accessed August 2016, http://timarit.is/view_page_init.jsp?issId=240646&pageId=3279535&lang=is&q=D%F3mar%20um%20%D3sl%F3ars%FDninguna. Another critic, Håkon Stensvold writing for Aftenposten, started his review of the exhibition with the words: "One's first reaction is surprise of the fact that there is art in Iceland. And that strange realization perhaps lends one's verdict a softness which would not be accorded to e.g. French art." In the Icelandic: "Fyrst verður maður hissa á því að til skuli vera list á ÍSlandi. Og sú furðulega staðreynd verður ef til vill til þess að gera men mildari í dómnum heldur en ef hjer hefði t.d. verið um franska list að ræða." Ibid, 141.

mentally ill, a direct relationship to the "wild" forces of Icelandic nature, and its supposedly central role in the shaping of Icelandic national character and culture.

As I have noted in my discussion of Herder's philosophy of language, his theory of a natural, ecological origin of the multiplicity of human languages and cultures was rooted in his rejection of the Enlightenment notion of universality. This refusal was crucial for the justification of an original Icelandic national culture, which placed nature at the center of the construction of Icelandic art and national identity in the twentieth century. However, as the tendency of foreign critics to conflate Icelandic abstract art with a notion of the primitivity of Icelandic culture, the so-called naiveté of Icelandic artists, as well as the strength of natural forces in Iceland demonstrates, the idea of Icelander's closeness to nature – like the associated notion of the primitive character of Icelandic culture – is, ultimately a highly unstable concept, with the capacity to both idealize and denigrate.

The Rise of Abstract Art and the Emergence of an Institutional Framework for Art

After settling in Iceland in 1951, Svavar Guðnason's relationship to fellow former members of Helhesten – which had already waned after the establishment of CoBrA in 1948 – dissipated and he adopted an increasingly geometric visual vocabulary, in line with the emerging trend among Icelandic artists at the time.[172] Promoted by the September group – a

[172] The Autumn Exhibition (Danish: Høstudstillingen) of 1948, held at the building of The Free Exhibition (Danish: Den Frie Udstillingsbygning) marks the beginning of CoBrA's activities. Svavar Guðnason was among the participants. In the following years CoBrA organized two large group exhibits, at the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam in 1949 and in the Belgian city of Liège in 1951, in which Svavar did not participate. He did however exhibit alongside Asger Jorn and Carl Henning Pedersen at the Salon des Surindépendants in Paris in 1951. Asger Jorn continued to invite Svavar to

prominent group of abstract painters named after a series of exhibitions mounted in Reykjavík between 1947 and 1952 – by the mid-1950s geometric abstraction had won a dominant place within the small Icelandic art scene.[173]

The positioning of geometric abstraction at the forefront of Icelandic art in the 1950s corresponds to the emergence of an institutional framework for art in Iceland in the fifties and sixties and was attained partly through the patronage of Selma Jónsdóttir, the first director of the National Gallery of Iceland. The National Gallery of Iceland, established in 1884, had been stripped of its independence and subsumed under the National Museum of Iceland in 1916. A decade later, in 1928, it was put in the hands of the newly established politically elected Education Council and its name was changed to the State Gallery (Icel. Listasafn ríkisins). In 1950 art historian Selma Jónsdóttir – then newly graduated from Columbia University in New York – was hired as the gallery's overseer, although its

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participate in CoBrA exhibitions and in 1950 his work was the subject of a CoBrA publication series, *Le Petit Cobra.* See Proppé, "Nýja myndlistin: Hvaðan kom Svavar?," 26-51.

[173] The introduction of geometric abstraction into Icelandic art in the postwar period happened primarily through an interface with the Parisian artworld. The September group was composed of artists who had spent a shorter or longer amount of time in Paris in the years immediately following WWII, where the constructivist tradition and its extension in Concrete Art – also referred to as geometric abstraction – initated by Theo van Doesburg in 1930 was still a major force and was promoted primarily through the galleries of René Drouin and Denise René. See Hanna G. Guðmundsdóttir, "Formbylting," in *Íslensk listasaga frá síðari hluta 19. aldar til upphafs 21. aldar,* vol. III, ed. Kvaran, 67-176; Kristine Stiles, "Geometric Abstraction: Introduction," in *Theories and Documents of Contemporary Art: A Sourcebook of Artists' Writings,* eds. Kristine Stiles and Peter Selz, (Berkeley and Los Angeles, California/London, England: University of California Press, 2012), 78.

direction was still in the hands of the Education Council.[174] In 1961, it finally became a fully functioning independent institution. On the same occasion, Selma was appointed its first director and its original name was resumed. It remained, however, extremely underfunded, and shared a building with the National Museum of Iceland from 1950 to 1987.[175]

Aside from the National Gallery, the only other existing venue for artists to exhibit their work in Reykjavík in the early part of the century was the Artist Hall (Icel. Listamannaskálinn), a small shack located next to the parliamentary building Alþingi in the city centre. Built by the Society of Icelandic Visual Artists in 1943, it had been erected in the direct aftermath of Jónas Jónsson from Hrifla's exhibition of "unpatriotic" art.[176] In 1951 a new venue for modern art opened in the home and workshop of sculptor Ásmundur Sveinsson. Known as the The Hall of Art Patrons (Icel. Listvinasalurinn), it was run by art

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[174] Selma had studied art history at the University of Columbia in New York and the Warburg Institute in London and attained a graduate degree from Columbia University in 1949. In 1960 she became the first woman to complete a Ph.D. at the University of Iceland. Among her teachers at Columbia University was the influential Lithuanian-born art historian Meyer Schapiro (1904-1996). Selma's Ph.D. dissertation, which she defended in 1960, detailed the Byzantine origin of an eleventh century Last Judgement carved in wood that was found in Flatatunga, in the North of Iceland. See Jón Gíslason, "Býzönsk dómsdagsmynd í Flatatungu: Fyrsta doktorsritgerð konu við Háskóla Íslands," in *Nýjar kvöldvökur,* Feb. 1, 1960, 35-37, accessed August 2016, http://timarit.is/view_page_init.jsp?issId=310963&pageId=4793313&lang=is&q=d%F3msdagsmynd%20Flatatungu; EEG, "'Ég er alltaf að leita.' Viðtal við dr. Selmu Jónsdóttur listfræðing," in *19. júní,* June 19, 1960, 9-10, accessed August 2016, http://timarit.is/view_page_init.jsp?issId=326288&pageId=5114576&lang=is&q=LEITA%20Selmu%20J%F3nsd%F3ttur.

[175] In 1987 the National Gallery of Iceland opened to the public in its current location at Fríkirkjuvegur 7 in Reykjavík.

[176] See Sigurjónsdóttir, "Þjóðlegar myndir og óþjóðlegar," 13-17.

historian Björn Th. Björnsson and merchant and art enthusiast Gunnar Sigurðsson, and presented primarily modern abstract art.[177]

In her capacity as director of the National Gallery, Selma Jónsdóttir provided significant support for abstract artists, promoting their work through exhibitions and acquisitions.[178] Artist Valtýr Pétursson – a member of the September group – played an important role as well in introducing the public to modern abstract art, through his work as art critic for the major local daily newspaper *Morgunblaðið* (The Morning Paper) from 1953 until his death in 1988. However**,** although abstract artists certainly benefitted from the direct institutional promotion and support of the National Gallery as well as the promotion of Valtýr Pétursson in the 1950s, the public acceptance of abstract art in Iceland was no less dependent on its adaptation to the dominant nationalist discourse; the discursive framing of Icelandic abstract art as rooted in the specific experience of Iceland's natural environment.

The Adaptation of Abstract Art to Nationalist Discourse

In an article titled "The Exalted North," published in a weekend edition of *Morgunblaðið* in 2001, art historian Auður Ólafsdóttir discusses the impact of the tradition of landscape painting on modern and contemporary Icelandic art. As Auður points out, in the postwar

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[177] See "Listvinasalurinn," in *Vikan,* May 24, 1951, 3, accessed August 2016, http://timarit.is/view_page_init.jsp?issId=297886&pageId=4424558&lang=is&q=Listvinasalurinn.

[178] Prominent abstract painters regularly assisted Selma in choosing and curating work for exhibitions. A survey of the National Gallery's history, published by the National Gallery – on the occasion of its one hundredth year anniversary – in 1985, shows that, in addition to the work of well-known pioneers of Icelandic landscape painting, the gallery placed an overwhelming emphasis on the purchase of work by leading abstract painters. See Selma Jónsdóttir, "Listaverkaskrá," in *Listasafn Íslands 1884-1984: Íslensk listaverk í eigu safnsins* (Reykjavík: Listasafn Íslands, 1985), 161-208.

years abstract painters were repeatedly asked by reporters to position themselves in regards to landscape painting and were under pressure from local critics and commentators to draw parallels between their work and Icelandic nature.[179] With the rise of *tachisme* or *informel* painting in Europe and Abstract Expressionism in the United States in the 1950s, the geometric abstraction that had dominated art production in Iceland and the other Nordic countries began to lose sway to a more expressive artistic vocabulary. In response to the pressures described by Auður Ólafsdóttir, and in an effort to establish a modern national art historical cannon suitable for the emerging national institutional framework for art, it became necessary to conciliate abstract art to the dominant nationalist rhetoric in Iceland. Crucially, as a consequence both of the relatively short span of urban development in Iceland and of the existing ideological framework for art, Abstract Expressionism – or lyrical abstraction as it was generally termed in Iceland – came to be understood primarily as allowing for the expression of the artist's emotional connection to the local landscape.

Both French *informel* painting and American Abstract Expressionism can be understood as rooted, at least partly, in a sense of alienation related to continued urbanization and technical transformation of European and American urban centers, which resulted in a search for authenticity through reference to "primitive" subjective and emotional responses to the urban environment. Meanwhile, the notion of authenticity in Icelandic art discourse was largely circumscribed by romantic and nationalist frameworks of thought in which

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[179] Auður A. Ólafsdóttir, "Hið upphafna norður," in *Lesbók Morgunblaðsins,* October 13, 2001, 4-5, accessed August 2016, http://timarit.is/view_page_init.jsp?issId=253241&pageId=3521649&lang=is&q=HI%D0%20UPPHAFNA%20NOR%D0UR.

Icelandic identity was directly tied to an emotional experience of and response to the Icelandic landscape.

In translating *l'art informel* or Abstract Expressionism into an Icelandic discursive context, both artists and critics employed this older romantic model of authenticity, building on and adapting to the existing discourse tying landscape painting to nationality. Thus, artist and critic Valtýr Pétursson was able to write, in an article titled simply "Icelandic art" and published in *Morgunblaðið* on 1 November 1963:

> Man is a part of the environment in which he lives and works, an immutable fact, regardless of whether he resides in Grímsnes or on another planet. The Icelander experiences the colors of nature more strongly and directly than e.g. the Londoner, who sometimes will only glance the sun through city dust or fog. The enormous force of Iceland's waterfalls leaves a different impression on man than sunny Zealand. The forest possesses a different magic than Iceland's highlands, and so on. One thing is particularly noticeable about modern art. That is, that abstract art has separated more clearly different nations and mentalities. I believe that the features of the art of different nations have never been as clear as now. And yet modern art is international in its nature. A good painting has value anywhere, and is never locally bound.[180]

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[180] In the original: "Maðurinn er hluti þess umhverfis, er hann lifir og hrærist í, og á því verður engine breyting, hvað svo sem skeður, hvort heldur maðurinn býr í Grímsnesinu eða á nærliggjandi plánetum. Íslendingurinn sér liti náttúrunnar á sterkari og hreinni hátt en t.d. Lundúnabúinn, sem stundum griller aðeins sólbirtuna í borgarryki og þokuslæðing. Hið tröllaukna afl vatnsfalla Íslands orkar með öðrum hætti á manninn en hið brosmilda Sjáland. Skógurinn hefur annað seiðmagn en öræfi Íslands, og svo mætti lengi telja. Eitt er áberandi fyrir myndlist vorra daga. Það er, að abstrakta listin hefur dregið sterk skil milli ólíkra þjóða og hugarfars. Ég held að sérkenni í myndlist einstakra þjóða, hafi ekki verið eins greinileg á fyrri tímum og einmitt nú. Samt er nútímalist alþjóðleg í eðli sínu. Gott málverk hefur gildi alls staðar, og er hvergi staðbundið." Valtýr Pétursson, "Íslenzk myndlist," in *Morgunblaðið,* Nov. 1, 1963, 18-19, accessed August 2016,

The turn to a more expressive visual vocabulary was thus understood as allowing first and foremost for the free expression of a sensual and emotional reaction to nature. Through this reconstruction, abstract art came to be seen as simultaneously deeply local and global, a panhuman visual language rooted in specific natural and cultural environments, reflecting national character while transgressing national borders.

Landscape Painting and the Development of Contemporary Art within SÚM

The 1965 inaugural exhibition of SÚM – known retrospectively as *SÚM I* – presented its Icelandic audience with a heterogeneous mixture of efforts, all of which aimed at breaking free of the fundamental tenets of modern abstract painting that dominated the local art scene at the time, and the strict limitations of mediums associated with it. Among the thirty-five works presented were collages, paintings, ink drawings, kinetic constructions, and one ready-made [Figure 1.8]. Many reflected and confronted Iceland's changing cultural environment in the 1960s, shaped by increased commerce and globalization and growing economic prosperity. Two of the artists, Sigurjón Jóhannsson and Haukur Dór Sturluson, presented Pop-like collages, such as Sigurjón's triptych *Glorious* (1965) [Figure 1.9], composed of images of glamorous models, cut from magazine advertisements, dancing around a shiny wheel trim. The most experienced member of the group, Jón Gunnar Árnason, whose work had been exhibited both locally and internationally,[181] contributed seventeen kinetic

http://timarit.is/view_page_init.jsp?issId=117917&pageId=1530183&lang=is&q=MYNDLIST%20Valt%FDr%20VALT%DDR%20P%E9tursson.

[181] Jón Gunnar Árnason's work *Elemental Sculpture* (1961) had been included, along with the work of Dieter Roth, in the 1961 major large-scale travelling exhibition of kinetic art, organized by Swedish curator Pontus Hultén, known in English as *Movement in Art,* but presented under the titles

sculptures, many of which allowed for or relied on the audience's active engagement. For instance, *Svo er margt sinnið sem skinnið* (*To each his own,* 1965) [Figure 1.10], a large hanging sculpture made of metal sheets that the audience could manipulate, drawing each sheet back and forth, thus changing the work's appearance.[182] Another work, *Herra Guðmundur* (*Mr. Jones*, 1965) [Figure 1.11], was made of the head of a shop mannequin fastened on top of a steel pipe, which had been jammed into a pewter cookie tin decorated with images of women wearing traditional Icelandic costumes. Just below the mannequin head was a white collar and tie, and inside the head a small, electrified car turned in circles when the work was turned on.[183]

Bewogen Beweging at the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam, *Rörelse i konsten* at Moderna Museet and *Bevegelse i kunsten* at the Louisiana Museum of Modern Art in Humlebæk, just north of Copenhagen. Jón Gunnar's work had also been exhibited in group exhibitions organized by the Dutch artist group Nieuwe Tendenzen and by the Rijksmuseum van Oudheden in 1962, and in a solo-exhibition at Addi Køpcke's Copenhagen gallery that same year. His participation in these events came about through the intermediation of Dieter Roth, whom Jón Gunnar had met while working as a mechanic and producing various objects and interiors for commercial clients in Reykjavík around 1958. Shortly after the SÚM group's first exhibition in 1965, Jón Gunnar was granted admission to the Hornsey College of Art in London, where he subsequently spent the next two years. See Herdís Tómasdóttir, "Sýningar – Exhibitions," in *Hugarorka og sólstafir,* 96-100; "Og margir taka þetta hátíðlega," in *Tíminn,* Jan. 6, 1963, 9 and 13, accessed May 2015, http://timarit.is/view_page_init.jsp?issId=282205&pageId=4079263&lang=is&q=h%E1t%ED%F0lega.

[182] English translation of the title is my own.

[183] Laufey Helgadóttir, "SÚM," in *Íslensk listasaga frá síðari hluta 19. aldar til upphafs 21. aldar*, vol. IV, ed. Kvaran, 56.

The incorporation of mass-produced objects and commercial visual material into the frame of art was almost completely unknown to Icelandic audiences.[184] It registered the critical change that Icelandic society underwent mid-twentieth century,[185] as modern, urban,

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[184] Shortly before *SÚM I,* on 29 May 1965, an exhibition of more than one hundred works by the Icelandic artists Erró (b. Guðmundur Guðmundsson), including drawings, paintings, collages, mosaics and graphic works with surrealist imagery and pop undertones, opened at the Artist Hall in Reykjavík. Erró's adoption of the popular media imagery of contemporary consumer society came in the aftermath of his first visit to the United States in December of 1963. Arriving in New York, he was introduced, through Swedish artist Öyvind Fahlström, to a number of prominent artists associated with the emerging phenomenon of pop Art, including Andy Warhol, James Rosenquist, Jim Dine, Robert Rauschenberg and Claes Oldenburg. Furthermore, to the American performance artist and Fluxus affiliate Carolee Schneemann, whose body action *Eye Body* (1963) Erró documented that same year. In subsequent years Erró repeatedly visited the U.S. and concurrently began to adopt a visual vocabulary of popular culture. Erró's exhibition in Reykjavík in 1965 included both older surrealist and futurist inspired works and some of his newer more Pop-oriented works. See Laufey Helgadóttir, "Erró," in *Íslensk listasaga frá síðari hluta 19. aldar til upphafs 21. aldar,* vol. IV, ed. Kvaran, 10-31. While Erró's exhibition in Reykjavík in 1965 prefigures *SÚM I* slightly, the impact of Erró's work in Iceland was arguably delayed by the fact that he did not exhibit in Iceland again until 1978. In addition, Erró's incorporation of commercial and mass-produced imagery and his interjection into the modern tradition of art was determined by the limits of the traditional medium of painting, unlike the work presented at *SÚM,* which extended the traditional art object to the point of its complete displacement. As Danielle Kvaran notes Erró's 1965 exhibition garnered substantial interest drawing in large numbers of the public, but largely met with incomprehension in the press. The main critic for the largest newspaper *Morgunblaðið* (The Morning Paper), Valtýr Pétursson, described the exhibition as rather unusual, even a bit amusing, but offered little in the way of a substantial critique of the work exhibited. See Danielle Kvaran, "Erró, or the Porousness of Borders," in *A Cultural History of the Avant-Garde in the Nordic Countries 1950-1975,* ed. Örum and Olsson, 291-302.

[185] While urbanization had begun in the wake of the motorization of the fishing fleet in the early century, the process was quickened by increased commerce and growing contact with the outside world during WWII. In thirty years, between 1920 and 1950, the number of people living in urban nuclei (with more than two hundred inhabitants) rose from 40 per cent to about 75 per cent, a growth

and capitalist mass-culture flooded the island in the wake of Iceland's military occupation by British and later American forces during WWII. Furthermore, the work presented at *SÚM I* reflected the widespread ambivalence among the Icelandic people about the effects of the continued presence of an American military force in the island and of American cultural influence on national identity and the country's newfound political independence. Finally, as I will argue, the discursive framing and reception of *SÚM I* also revealed the continued authority of romantic nationalism and the related dominance of landscape painting in the general population's understanding of art in the postwar period. It was in the context of the sustained influence of landscape painting and nationalist discourse that SÚM focused their redefinition of the art object on a critical confrontation with landscape painting. While SÚM artists' overt critiques of modern art were pointed at abstract painting – both at the dominance of abstract artists over the institutional framework for art in Iceland, and the "degeneration" of abstract painting into a "decorative art for the bourgeoisie,"[186] as Jón

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comparative to what the U.S. experienced over a century, between 1890 and 1990. The capital of Reykjavík saw the largest growth during this period, its inhabitants counting about 10 per cent of the total population in 1900 but about 50 per cent in 1958. See Axel Hall, Ásgeir Jónsson and Sveinn Agnarsson, *Byggðir og búseta: Þéttbýlismyndun á Íslandi* (Reykjavík: Hagfræðistofnun Háskóla Íslands, 2002), accessed September 2016, https://notendur.hi.is/ajonsson/kennsla2006/Master-7.pdf.

[186] In an interview with Icelandic art historian Gunnar B. Kvaran, published in the catalogue for the first retrospective dedicated to SÚM in 1989, Jón Gunnar Árnason stated: "Of course, we could not avoid seeing how abstract art was, at this time, losing all contact with reality and degenerating into a decorative art for the bourgeoisie. It was the so-called abstract expressionism or lyrical abstraction that was fashionable at the time, and artists had taken up the honest efforts of groups like CoBrA and transformed it into a commercial product for business men." Gunnar B. Kvaran, "Jón Gunnar Árnason" [Interview], in *SÚM 1965-1972,* ed. Gunnar B. Kvaran (Reykjavík: Reykjavík Art Museum – Kjarvalsstaðir, 1989), 44, Exhibition catalogue.

Gunnar Árnason described it in 1989 – in practice, the attentions of SÚM artists fixed on the older tradition of landscape painting.

Popular Culture, "Americanization" and Postwar Cultural Debates

Concerns over the cultural and political impact of American influence in Iceland in the postwar period were not completely unfounded. For as it was elsewhere throughout the globe, the financial aid provided to Iceland by the U.S. in the postwar period was tied to a program of cultural integration, which served, ultimately, to secure American economic interests by staving off the threat of state-planned communism.[187] The United States Information Service (USIS) began operations in Iceland in 1948. A year later, the service opened a cultural and information center in Reykjavík, with the aim of disseminating anti-communist propaganda and furthering the United States' political, economic and ideological agenda. In an effort to challenge the operations of the Cultural Liaison of Iceland and the Soviet Union (Icel. Menningartengsl Íslands og Ráðstjórnarríkjanna; MÍR, est. 1950) – which acquired books, magazines and films promoting Soviet culture and science as well as publishing its own eponymous magazine between 1950 and 1959 – the USIS organized regular film screenings in Reykjavík from 1951.[188] Known after 1953 as the United States

[187] In the mid-1950s the Soviet Union became Iceland's biggest trading partner, and in 1956 the Icelandic people elected a new left-wing government, which included the pro-Soviet Socialist People's Alliance Party (Icel. Alþýðubandalagið). As historian Valur Ingimundarson notes, "No other member of NATO came close to being economically dependent on the Eastern bloc or allowed Communists to join the government." Ingimundarson, "Buttressing the West in the North," 80.

[188] In 1932 the Friends of the Soviet Union (Sovétvinafélag Íslands) was established with the goal to strengthen Iceland's cultural ties to the Soviet Union. This organization disintegrated in 1938, but its program was resurrected and broadened after the founding of MÍR in 1950. MÍR received financial

Information Agency (USIA), it also distributed propaganda films with Icelandic subtitles and other material in local elementary schools in collaboration with the Icelandic Ministry of Education, and in 1966 it provided the newly established Icelandic State Television (Icel. Ríkissjónvarpið) with children's programs.[189] In addition, the agency organized musical

support from VOKS Institute (Vsesojúznoe obsjsestvo kúltúrnykh svjaze s zagranitsej) and later SSOD (Sojuz sovetskikh obsjestv druzhby i kulturnyoj svjazei s zarubezhnym stranami) in Moscow, that supervised the introduction of Soviet culture and society abroad, as well as from the Soviet Embassy. By 1953 MÍR had around 2,000 members and operated through sixteen divisions located throughout Iceland. MÍR still operates in Iceland, although its goals have been reformulated after the collapse of the Soviet Union. See Sigurjón B. Hafsteinsson and Tinna Grétarsdóttir, "Screening Propaganda: The Reception of Soviet and American Film Screenings in Rural Iceland, 1950-1975," in *Film History,* vol. 23, no. 4, Audiences and Ideology (2011), 361-375.

[189] Ibid.

performances,[190] educational exhibits,[191] and a handful of art exhibitions from the 1940s to the 1960s.[192]

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[190] See e.g. Tónleikar í ameríska bókasafninu," in *Morgunblaðið,* Oct. 26, 1967, 8, accessed August 2016, http://timarit.is/view_page_init.jsp?issId=219042&pageId=2814867&lang=is&q=T%F3nleikar%20%ED%20amer%EDska%20b%F3kasafninu; "Klassísk og elektrónísk tónlist hjá USIS í þessari viku." *Alþýðublaðið,* May 28, 1974, 9, accessed August 2016, http://timarit.is/view_page_init.jsp?issId=235105&pageId=3208737&lang=is&q=t%F3nlist%20hj%E1%20USIS.

[191] For instance, in 1956 the USIS organized an exhibit on the positive uses of nuclear power. Nine years later it presented an educational exhibit of the newest developments in space exploration. See "Sýningin 'Kjarnorkan í þjónustu mannkynsins' opnuð hér 4. febrúar," in *Alþýðublaðið,* Jan. 15, 1956, 8 and 2, accessed August 2016, http://timarit.is/view_page_init.jsp?issId=133691&pageId=1242543&lang=is&q=kjarnorkan%20%ED; "Sýning á geimrannsóknum opnuð á mánudag," in *Vísir,* Sept. 30, 1965, 1, accessed August 2016, http://timarit.is/view_page_init.jsp?issId=183462&pageId=2379642&lang=is&q=S%FDning%20geimranns%F3knum%20s%FDning.

[192] On 12 April 1944, an exhibit of American art opened at the Artist Hall in Reykjavík. Organized by the U.S. Office of War Information and the U.S. Embassy in Iceland and curated by Icelandic-Canadian art historian H. Harvard Arnason (b. Hjörvarður H. Árnason), it presented watercolors by American artists and color-print reproductions of oil paintings by American and European artists, loaned through the courtesy of the Whitney Museum of American Art. See Orri, "Amerísk listsýning í Reykjavík," in *Morgunblaðið,* April 16, 1944, 5, accessed August 2016, http://timarit.is/view_page_init.jsp?issId=106072&pageId=1248654&lang=is&q=lists%FDning. Fifteen years later, in 1959, a survey exhibit of American art, titled *IX Generations of American Artists* (Icel. *IX kynslóðir amerískrar myndlistar*), was mounted at the Icelandic State Gallery (later the National Gallery). Organized by the USIA in collaboration with the Detroit Institute of Arts, the U.S. embassy in Iceland, and Iceland's Ministry of Education, the exhibition presented works by fifty-five American artists born between 1738 and 1926, including a number of abstract paintings. See *IX Generations of American Art* (Icel. IX Kynslóðir amerískrar myndlistar). Reykjavík: Listasafn ríkisins, 1959. Exhibition catalogue. The Archives of the National Gallery of Iceland.

In 1951 an article published in *Nýi tíminn* (The New Time), edited by Socialist politician Ásmundur Sigurðsson, complained of the distribution by the USIS of propaganda about the Korean war to Icelandic schoolchildren, in the form of a color-printed action comic. Significantly, it was not only the content of the comic but also its form that offended the author, who described action comics as morally corruptive and "foreign to the Icelandic mentality" – echoing sentiments expressed in manifold articles written in local papers on the destructiveness of American popular literature flowing into Iceland – and pronounced their distribution by the Americans as a conscious attempt to galvanize the most vulnerable citizens of Iceland, with the ultimate aim of destroying "the culture and feeling of independence of a small nation."[193] In addition, the article charged the Icelandic right-wing government of providing shelter for the American Embassy's espionage on Icelanders, a claim that has since been at least partly confirmed through recent research by historian, and current President of Iceland, Guðni Th. Jóhannesson.[194]

Television was one of the crucial battle grounds for cultural control in Iceland in the postwar period. Television broadcasting had first commenced at the U.S. military base in Keflavík in 1955 and in 1961 its capacity was greatly increased. By 1964 it was estimated that around 10,000 Icelanders watched American broadcasting regularly.[195] This was the

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[193] See "Ósvífinn áróður bandar. sendiráðsins: Lætur útbýta í barnaskólunum hasarblaði um Kóreustríðið," in *Nýi Tíminn,* Feb. 1, 1951, 8, accessed August 2016, http://timarit.is/view_page_init.jsp?issId=354776&pageId=5620878&lang=is&q=%F3sv%EDfinn%20%E1r%F3%F0ur.

[194] See Guðni Th. Jóhannesson, *Óvinir ríkisins: ógnir og innra öryggi í kalda stríðinu á Íslandi* (Reykjavík: Mál og menning, 2006).

[195] Sigríður Matthíasdóttir, "Róttæk stúdentahreyfing," in *Aldarsaga Háskóla Íslands 1911-2011,* ed. Gunnar Karlsson (Reykjavík, Iceland: The University of Iceland, 2011), 328.

cause of great public debate and put increased pressure on the government to provide television service to Icelanders, largely in order to prevent what was seen as the unwelcome influence of American television which many considered threatening to Icelandic cultural and political autonomy. Among those fiercest in their opposition to the infiltration of American mass culture were Socialists, many of whom considered American television an extension of U.S. imperialism, and thus a direct threat to the nation's newfound freedom.[196] Opposition was not bound to the political Left however, and American television was broadly viewed with suspicion, a fact that induced the Icelandic government to launch television transmissions through the Icelandic National Broadcasting Service (Icel. Ríkisútvarpið) in 1966.

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[196] The article "Icelandic culture," written by economist Þröstur Ólafsson and published in the daily newspaper *Tíminn* (Time) in 1965 is descriptive of the attitude of many left-leaning Icelanders: "The majority of Europe's nations, though they have a deeply rooted, ancient and alert culture, fear greatly the corrupting influence of the shallow but easily digestible American culture, that presently floods the world like the plague. The President of the United States himself has begun warning against the so-called American television. And we, barely upright from centuries of humiliation and savagery, pretend to be capable of raising our children in the warfare-worshipping capitalist ethos and the glaring bad taste of the army television broadcasting in Keflavík." Þröstur Ólafsson, "Íslenzk menning," in *Tíminn,* April 10,1965, 5 and 14, accessed September 2016, http://timarit.is/view_page_init.jsp?issId=84165&pageId=1194228&lang=is&q=%DER%D6STUR%20%D3LAFSSON%20%EDslenzk%20menning. Þröstur was a member of the People's Alliance (Alþýðubandalagið, est. 1956), which in 1968 became a socialist political party.

The Nationalist Framing and Reception of *SÚM I,* 1965

In an interview with the Socialist newspaper *Þjóðviljinn* (The National Will), published shortly after the opening of *SÚM I*, Sigurjón Jóhannsson, one of the exhibiting artists, stated:

> I don't have anything against technology, per se, but what is worse, is that it *seems to be transforming the saga nation into a toaster oven nation*. Issue after issue of weekly journals, women's magazines and other pop-literature tells us how we can achieve a better and more perfect life by accumulating this type of toaster or the other, this car or the other. I feel like, in the midst of this race, anything that is worth anything has had to yield to a love and worshipping of objects.[197]

Sigurjón's statement is revealing both of the general suspicion of American popular culture and of the continued influence of nationalist discourse in Iceland in the 1960s, not only among an older generation but also among the local youth. Furthermore, of the anti-imperialist core of Icelandic nationalism, as Sigurjón frames his ambivalence towards modern capitalist consumer culture with a reference to Iceland's Golden Age – the era of the old Commonwealth (Icel. *þjóðveldið*), an independent Icelandic republic existing in Iceland in the period 930-1262, prior to its incorporation into the Norwegian kingdom – described in the Icelandic Sagas.

SÚM I was completely ignored by members of the small and emerging professional framework for art in Iceland. Discussion of the exhibition in the local press was for the most part positive but reflected Icelanders' lack of familiarity with pop art and avant-garde

[197] "Myndlistin hlýtur að breyta um svip - Viðtal við Sigurjón Jóhannsson," in *Þjóðviljinn,* June 20, 1965, 7 and 2, accessed August 2016, http://timarit.is/view_page_init.jsp?issId=225997&pageId=2923410&lang=is&q=a%F0%20um%20a%F0%20myndlistin. [My emphasis]

practices such as collage and montage, and the work was generally treated as a curious if somewhat trivial novelty. In an interview with Sigurjón Jóhannsson, a reporter for the largest daily newspaper in Iceland, *Morgunblaðið* (The Morning Paper) stated simply: "You are not very fond of landscape painting," to which the artist replied: "No, we do not care about landscape. We have enough of that around us. What we are concerned with first and foremost is expressing ideas that the environment here in the city has given us."[198] Sigurjón's statement was ridiculed in a report of the exhibit published in the weekly magazine *Vikan* (The Week) one month later: "The mates have remarked in an interview, that they were opposed to landscape because there is so much of it wherever you look. However, there is an expressed scarcity of wheel trims, which is presumably why they have chosen to present them to the public."[199] Neither Sigurjón's discursive framing of Pop-art in terms of a critique of American neocolonialism nor the external pressure put on the artists to position themselves in relation to the tradition of landscape painting can be properly understood without an appreciation of the ways in which Icelandic nationalism and the country's modernization in the twentieth century is interwoven with the longer history of Iceland's subjugation under a foreign power and the mythical image of Iceland built up in foreign narratives through the centuries, which I have discussed above.

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[198] "Poplistin: list hins daglega lífs – Litið inn á samsýningu í Ásmundarsal og rabbað við Sigurjón Jóhannsson, listmálara," in *Morgunblaðið,* June 24, 1965, 8, accessed August 2016, http://timarit.is/view_page_init.jsp?issId=102218&pageId=1220575&lang=is&q=hins%20daglega%20l%EDfs.

[199] "Fjórir ungir menn kynna pop-list á Íslandi," in *Vikan,* July 29, 1965, 4-5 and 39, accessed August 2016, http://timarit.is/view_page_init.jsp?issId=298652&pageId=4449611&lang=is&q=Fj%F3rir%20ungir%20menn%20kynna%20pop%20list.

SÚM's Ambiguous Relationship to Nationalism: The First Outdoor Sculpture Exhibition

While Iceland's quest for political independence may have officially concluded in the mid-1940s, the country's occupation by British and American forces during WWII, and the continued presence of an American military force in the postwar period, sanctioned by the Icelandic government in 1951, fueled the fires of nationalist ideology. In this atmosphere, art and culture continued to be understood by political activists and critics as central to the project of securing Icelandic independence from all foreign political and cultural oppression, like it had been during the century long battle for independence from Denmark in the nineteenth and early twentieth century. As in the reform and protest movements of former colonies throughout the globe, a certain Icelandic cultural elite played a key role in public demonstrations against the continued cultural and political influence of the U.S. in Iceland in the postwar period.[200] The most prominent of these demonstrations were organized by the

[200] In 1964 sixty prominent Icelanders – including Professors at the University of Iceland, artists and the Bishop of Iceland – had signed and sent a petition to Alþingi to limit the broadcasting of television to the military base. See Alexander Jóhannesson et al., "Áskorun til alþingis um sjónvarpsmál," in *Morgunblaðið,* March 14, 1964, 2, accessed August 2016, http://timarit.is/view_page_init.jsp?issId=113304&pageId=1379841&lang=is&q=Al%FEingis%20til%20um. A year later, on the occasion of the forty-seventh anniversary of Icelands' sovereignty, on 1 December 1965, Sigurður Líndal – a prominent Professor of Law at the University of Iceland – gave a lecture to students at the University of Iceland titled "The preservation of nationality." Following Líndal's lecture six hundred students signed and sent a petition to the Icelandic parliament declaring their opposition to the army television broadcasting. See "Meginvandi íslenzkra þjóðernismála er hið erlenda sjónvarp," in *Þjóðviljinn,* Dec. 2, 1965, 1-3, accessed August 2016, http://timarit.is/view_page_init.jsp?issId=218443&pageId=2808208&lang=is&q=%FEj%F3%F0ernism%E1la%20er%20hi%F0%20erlenda%20sj%F3nvarp; Matthíasdóttir, "Róttæk stúdentahreyfing," 326-346.

Icelandic Anti-War Movement (Icel. Samtök hernámsandstæðinga, est. 1960, later Samtök herstöðvaandstæðinga) in the 1960s and seventies.[201]

In 1965 the Anti-War Movement organized a week of cultural activity beginning on 1 May, the International Workers' Day, calling for the closing of the U.S. military base at Keflavík. Among the events organized was an exhibition of artwork by thirty-five artists,

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[201] The English title of the Anti-War Movement is somewhat misleading. The Icelandic Samtök hernámsandstæðinga can be translated directly as the Association of the Opponents of Occupation, and the later Samtök herstöðvaandstæðinga as the Association of the Opponents of the Military Base. The Icelandic Anti-War Movement (Icel. *Samtök hernámsandstæðinga,* est. 1960, later *Samtök herstöðvaandstæðinga*) was established at a public meeting at Þingvellir in the fall of 1960, following the first of many demonstrations demanding Iceland's membership in NATO be terminated, that the U.S. Army would be made to leave the country and Iceland's ever-lasting neutrality be respected. Among the forerunners of the Icelandic Anti-War Movement were *Þjóðvarnarfélagið* (The National Defense Association, est. 1946), *Friðlýst land* (Protected Land, est. 1958) and *Þjóðvarnarflokkurinn* (The National Defense Company, est. 1953). See e.g. "Rithöfundafélag Íslands og Félag myndlistarmanna boða til almenns fundar…," in *Herinn burt,* Dec. 1, 1957, 8, accessed November 2016, http://timarit.is/view_page_init.jsp?issId=362154&pageId=5827749&lang=is&q=HERINN%20BURT%20Rith%F6fundaf%E9lag%20%EDslands; Samtök hernámsandstæðinga, *Bréf frá Samtökum hernámsandstæðinga til landsnefndar- og héraðsnefndamanna* I, Oct. 15, 1960, 1-16, accessed November 2016, http://timarit.is/view_page_init.jsp?issId=362182&pageId=5828066&lang=is&q=Br%E9f%20fr%E1%20Samt%F6kum%20hern%E1msandst%E6%F0inga; G. Guðmundsson and Ó. Guðmundsson, "'Við verðum að halda hreingerningunni áfram,'" in *Stúdentablaðið,* Dec. 1, 1972, 14, accessed November 2016, http://timarit.is/view_page_init.jsp?issId=295911&pageId=4389708&lang=is&q=Vi%F0%20ver%F0um%20a%F0%20halda%20hreingerningunni%20%E1fram%20vi%F0; Sverrir Jakobsson, "Þættir úr sögu þjóðvarnar," in *Dagfari,* Feb. 1, 2000, 28-39, accessed November 2016, http://timarit.is/view_page_init.jsp?issId=362268&pageId=5829251&lang=is&q=%DE%E6ttir%20%FAr%20s%F6gu%20%DEj%F3%F0varnar.

including works by all four founding members of SÚM; Haukur Dór Sturluson, Hreinn Friðfinnsson, Jón Gunnar Árnason and Sigurjón Jóhannsson.[202] No details of the works presented at the Anti-War exhibition in 1965 are to be found in public accounts, but given the close proximity of the event to the founding exhibition of SÚM – *SÚM I,* which opened on 12 June 1965 – it is not unlikely that at least some, if not most, of the works presented by Haukur Dór, Hreinn, Jón Gunnar and Sigurjón at the Anti-War Movement exhibition were later shown at *SÚM I.*

In the decade following *SÚM I* and the establishment of SÚM, members of the collective would further align themselves, both implicitly and explicitly, with nationalist critiques of the U.S. military presence in Iceland, and more broadly with Leftist critiques of American neocolonialism and of capitalist consumer culture and of the production and consumption of art as commodity. This positioning of SÚM work was complicated, however, by the strong association of Icelandic nationalism with nature – with the rural and the wild – visualized in the tradition of landscape painting. In light of this tradition, SÚM artists appropriation of the objects and visual language of urban mass consumer culture at *SÚM I* could easily be understood as anti-nationalist. Such an interpretation was in fact implicit in the positioning of SÚM artists in opposition to landscape painting by a reporter of *Morgunblaðið* in 1965.[203]

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[202] The full list of participants was published in the socialist newspaper *Þjóðviljinn* (The National Will) on 29 April 1965. See "Menningarvika hernámsandstæðinga: Samsýning 35 listamanna," in *Þjóðviljinn,* April 29, 1965, 1, accessed November 2016, http://timarit.is/view_page_init.jsp?issId=218251&pageId=2806016&lang=is&q=menningarvika.

[203] "Poplistin: list hins daglega lífs," 8.

As I noted in my introduction to this chapter, before the opening of Gallery SÚM in 1969, SÚM artists – marginalized by the ruling group of abstract artists and their official supporters – presented their work at a handful of group exhibitions, among them outdoor sculpture exhibitions organized by the Reykjavík School of Visual Art between 1967 and 1972. Despite their limits, these events are significant for the opportunities they provided SÚM artists to develop their artistic practice, and the unity they provided to the scattered group. Three works presented by SÚM artists Róska (b. Ragnhildur Óskarsdóttir), Jón Gunnar Árnason and Þórður Ben Sveinsson at the first outdoor sculpture exhibition in 1967 indicate what might be described as a shift within SÚM from the general critique of modern consumer society, predominant in the *SÚM I* exhibition in 1965, towards a more specific engagement with local politics, and Iceland's position and implication in global power dynamics, while simultaneously underscoring the continued relevance of nationalist discourse to SÚM work.

Jón Gunnar Árnason's *Radar* (1967) [Figure 1.12],[204] a flower-like kinetic wire construction made to rotate as the wind blew, can be understood as a critical commentary on the presence of the American military in Iceland in the postwar period, its title referring to the surveillance radar station at Miðnesheiði, a heath on the Reykjanes peninsula in the southwest of Iceland, run by the U.S. Air Force for NATO since 1953, whose mission it was

[204] In an article on Jón Gunnar, published in the artists' monograph by the National Gallery of Iceland in 1994, art historian Aðalsteinn Ingólfsson recounts that after its exhibition at the outdoor sculpture exhibition in 1967, *Radar* stood for several years in front of the ceramic studio of SÚM artist Haukur Dór Sturluson by Smiðjustígur in Reykjavík, but eventually ended up in a rubbish dump. See Aðalsteinn Ingólfsson, "Verk fyrir virkt fólk: Jón Gunnar, Dieter Roth og hreyfilistin," in *Hugarorka og sólstafir,* 38-39.

to intercept and shadow all Soviet aircraft that passed through its range and relay to the U.S. Navy base at Keflavík airport.[205] Þórður Ben Sveinsson's *Ræktunarsvæði nr. 3* (*Cultivation Area no. 3,* 1967) [Figure 1.13] – later retitled *Skuggi tímans* (*The Shadow of Time*) – also directly engaged the U.S. military presence in Iceland. It consisted of a fenced patch of earth – a small garden – in which the artist cultivated "images" of the shadows of battle jets flying overhead, by planting seeds of dark grass among lighter variations.[206] Finally, it is not unlikely that Róska may have understood her work *Tilvonandi húsmóðir* (*Future housewife,* 1967) [Figure 1.14] – also known as *Súper-þvottavél* (*Super-washing-machine*) – as a double critique of women's subjugation in bourgeois society and of modern warfare,[207] specifically the escalating conflict and military involvement of the United States in Vietnam which came under increasing scrutiny worldwide that year following mass protests in Washington, D.C.,

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[205] In its conflation of the technical and the natural, *Radar* anticipates many of Jón Gunnar's works from the late 1960s and early 1970s, in which the artist ruminated on the possible dystopian effects of the increasing implication of technology in the realm of nature, such as *Hjartað* (*The Heart*, 1968) which I discuss in the fourth chapter of this dissertation.

[206] See Inga S. Ragnarsdóttir and Kristín G. Guðnadóttir, "1967," in *Útisýningarnar á Skólavörðuholti 1967-1972,* ed. Inga S. Ragnarsdóttir and Kristín G. Guðnadóttir (Reykjavík: Minningarsjóður um Ragnar Kjartansson, 2017), 62-77.

[207] Immediately after her 1967 solo-exhibition and her participation in the outdoor sculpture exhibition Róska went back to Rome where she witnessed the occupation of universities and the student riots in 1968 and became embroiled in revolutionary activities in the northern Italian town of Fabbriccio. See Hjartarson, "The Early Avant-Garde in Iceland," 809-811; "Róska í Bæjarpistlinum: 'svo ægilega heppin að vera tekin föst,'" in *Helgarpósturinn,* June 26, 1981, 16-17, accessed May 2016, http://timarit.is/view_page_init.jsp?issId=53577&pageId=977084&lang=is&q=svo%20%E6gilega%20heppin%20a%F0%20vera%20tekin%20f%F6st%20tekin%20a%F0.

New York City and San Francisco.[208] The work was assembled out of an old discarded washing-machine the artist had beat up, in order to accentuate its already pathetic appearance, and a rocket, which she had attached to the side of the machine, transforming

[208] The Vietnam War became a focus of Icelandic student and artists' associations in 1967. In April that year, an Icelandic Vietnam Committee (Icel. Vietnamnefnd) was founded by eight associations, including the Socialist Youth League to which Róska belonged. The other associations were: The Association of Liberal Students (Icel. Félag frjálslyndra stúdenta), the Association of Radical Students (Icel. Félag róttækra stúdenta), The Icelandic Women's Organization for Culture and Peace (Icel. Menningar- og friðarsamtök íslenzkra kvenna, MFÍK, est. 1951), The Icelandic Writers' Association (Icel. Rithöfundafélag Íslands, est. 1942), the Association of Young People in the Progressive Party (Icel. Samband ungra framsóknarmanna, SUF), the Social-Democratic Youth (Icel. Samband ungra jafnaðarmanna, SUJ, est. 1929), and the Student Association of Social-Democrats (Icel. Stúdentafélag jafnaðarmanna). See "Ráðstefna um Vietnammálið og íslenzk Vietnamnefnd stofnuð," in *Alþýðublaðið,* Feb. 19, 1967, 2 and 14, accessed September 2017, http://timarit.is/view_page_init.jsp?issId=187622&pageId=2441084&lang=is&q=um%20r%E1%F0stefna%20um%20Vietnamm%E1li%F0; "Íslensk Vietnamnefnd stofnuð," in *Vísir,* April 14, 1967, 16, accessed September 2017, http://timarit.is/view_page_init.jsp?issId=184216&pageId=2391306&lang=is&q=Vietnamnefnd. In June 1967 three members of the National Liberation Front of South Vietnam (Fr. Front national de liberation du Sud Viêt Nam) – also known as the Viêt Cong – visited Iceland, on a tour of the Nordic countries organized by the World Federation of Democratic Youth in association with the Nordic Vietnam Committee, introducing the Icelandic public to their mission at a public event held in a Reykjavík cinema. See "Kynna hér á landi málstað þjóðfrelsishreyfingarinnar," in *Tíminn,* June 23, 1967, 14, accessed September 2017, http://timarit.is/view_page_init.jsp?issId=265435&pageId=3755744&lang=is&q=%E1%20%E1%20h%E9r. And on 10 December 1967 – on the United Nations' Human Rights Day – the Socialist Youth League held a public demonstration against U.S. involvement in the Vietnam War by the U.S. Embassy in Reykjavík. See e.g. "Mótmæltu aðstoð Bandaríkjanna við Suður Víetnam." *Morgunblaðið,* Jan. 25, 1967, 3, accessed September 2017, http://timarit.is/view_page_init.jsp?issId=117558&pageId=1516252&lang=is&q=V%EDetnam%20m%F3tm%E6ltu.

this embodiment of modern housekeeping into a launching pad. On the front of the machine Róska had painted the emblem of the atom bomb.

In their exposition of the hidden or naturalized presence of a foreign military power in Iceland, the abovementioned works by Jón Gunnar, Þórður Ben and Róska aligned with the nationalist rhetoric of the Anti-War Movement. Through its evocation of the Vietnam War and feminine labor, Róska's work also testifies to the emergence of a distinctly different kind of Icelandic nationalism than that propagated by conservative nationalists like Jónas from Hrifla in the early twentieth century; one fundamentally intersected with an international Leftist, anti-colonial and anti-war struggle. Such a position is, arguably, exemplified by the rhetoric and activities of the Socialist Youth League, a youth organization originally associated with the Icelandic Socialist Party (Icel. Sameiningarflokkur alþýðu – Sósíalistaflokkurinn, est. 1938), to which Róska belonged.

In 1969, members of the League – including Róska – snuck into the broadcasting room at the Keflavík army station and managed to spray paint various political statements, such as "Viva Cuba" on the walls as well as spraying paint into the lenses of recording equipment.[209] A year prior, Róska's close friend and fellow Youth League member, Birna Þórðardóttir, had accused the Icelandic television broadcasting company of biased reporting, or failing to report on the brutality of the American war effort in Vietnam and of actively distributing American anti-communist propaganda, in an article published in the League's newspaper, *Neisti* (Spark).[210] In light of how politicized the founding of the Icelandic

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[209] See "Róska í Bæjarpistlinum," 16-17.

[210] See Birna Þórðardóttir, "Sjónvarp." *Neisti,* Dec. 1, 1968, 16-17, accessed September 2017, http://timarit.is/view_page_init.jsp?issId=291925&pageId=4302537&lang=is&q=Birna%20%DE%F3r%F0ard%F3ttir.

television broadcasting company two years prior had been, one might hypothesize that League members understood their attack on the U.S. television broadcasting station in Keflavík in 1969 as a defence of Icelandic political and cultural sovereignty, which they viewed as fundamentally aligned both with the struggles of former or currently subjugated nations, and the plight of labor worldwide.

SÚM's Challenge to the Tradition of Landscape Painting

On 15 February 1969, SÚM finally launched its own exhibition space, Gallery SÚM, in a run-down building on Vatnsstígur in Reykjavík, Iceland's capital, inaugurating its activities with a solo-exhibition by artist Sigurður Guðmundsson. Presented were twenty works, including paintings, photographs, assemblages and found objects.[211] The titles of several of the pieces simultaneously implied and negated a continuation of the tradition of landscape painting; there was *Fjallatoppar* (*Mountain Peaks*, 1969), the humorously titled *Landslag með símanúmerum* (*Landscape with phone numbers*, 1969), and the more generic serial titles of *Landslag I* (*Landscape I*, 1969), *Landslag II* (*Landscape II*, 1969), and *Landslag III* (*Landscape III*, 1969).[212]

[211] Art exhibition by Sigurður Guðmundsson: Gallery SÚM Feb – March [1969] (Icel. Myndlistarsýning Sigurðar Guðmundssonar: Galerie SÚM, feb. – marz [1969]). 1969. Document listing works by Sigurður Guðmundsson exhibited in Gallery SÚM's inaugural exhibition, which opened Feb. 15, 1969. Gallerie SÚM Papers, Box 2/5, Folder E. The Archive of Artist-Run Initiatives. The Living Art Museum, Reykjavík. Iceland.

[212] Ibid.

Landslag III was composed of a black wooden crate filled with two square meters of moss.[213] If the generic title of the work negated the uniqueness of individual artistic expression, Sigurður's introduction of found, readymade, and biodegradable materials further subverted traditional notions of artistic skill and the romantic notion of the landscape picture as a synthesis of the exteriority of the natural world and the interiority of the artist. Simultaneously, Sigurður can be said to have repositioned the landscape picture as part of the Icelandic everyday, as the local audience would immediately have associated the materials of his readymade landscape to the moss-grown lava-fields surrounding Reykjavík and much of the island.

At least one of Sigurður's reconfigurations of the traditional landscape picture included the introduction of text into the frame of painting, replacing the icons of landscape painting with symbolic, textual representation [Figure 1.15]. Dividing the canvas into four equal horizontal bands of paint, classic motifs of Icelandic landscape painting are symbolized through handwritten and capitalized words glued onto each band: *HIMINN* (sky) on top, then *FJALL* (mountain), *SJÓR* (ocean), and *JÖRÐ* (earth). The addition of several more specific and descriptive words and phrases – such as *RIGNING?* (rain?), *klettabelti* (cliffs), *FISKIBANKI* (school of fish), *Engar kindur* (No sheep) – written in smaller letters and glued to the sides of the canvas, simultaneously adds fullness to the representation and presents a humorous contradiction to the psychological, emotive and transcendental associations of romantic landscape painting.

[213]Halldór B. Runólfsson, "Times of Continuous Transition: Icelandic Art from the 1960s to Today," in *Icelandic Art Today,* ed. Schoen and Runólfsson, 17.

An ironic reworking of the romantic landscape tradition also marked SÚM members' contributions to the group exhibition *SÚM III*, which opened at Gallery SÚM on 13 September 1969.[214] Among the works presented were Kristján Guðmundsson's *Landslag* (*Landscape,* 1969), which consisted of an old wooden ironing board on top of which lay a rag covered in chicken feces, and to the side of which the artist had attached a twisted neon tube, emitting a pale blue light onto the messy surface [Figure 1.16].[215] Sigurður Guðmundsson's *Drengur* (*Boy,* 1969) [Figure 1.17], meanwhile, was composed of a rough replication of a human form made of coarse timber, with a framed drawing of a sunny mountain view replacing the figure's head, and a glowing lightbulb fastened to an erect

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[214] For list of participants and their contributions see *SÚM III.* Reykjavík: Gallery SÚM, 1969. Exhibition catalogue. Gallerie SÚM Papers, Box 3/5, Folder M. The Archive of Artist-Run Initiatives. The Living Art Museum, Reykjavík, Iceland. I discuss the exhibition *SÚM III* further in Chapter 3 of this dissertation.

[215] Kristján Guðmundsson's ironing board had previously been exhibited at Gallery SÚM, as the centerpiece of Kristján's solo-exhibition, titled *Environmental Sculpture,* which ran from 21 July to 11 August 1969. See Gallery SÚM Diary. 1969. Gallerie SÚM Papers, Unfiled [Icel. óskráð]. The Archive of Artist-Run Initiatives. The Living Art Museum, Reykjavík, Iceland. As the reference to Allan Kaprow's "environments" indicates, the exhibition was composed of a variety of commonplace found everyday objects, each of which could not be divorced from the others without threatening something of the atmospheric and conceptual effect created by their association. Among the objects making up Kristján's "environment" were empty Coke bottles, ripped packaging paper in old frames, autobiographies of various unknown Icelanders which Kristján had tied and covered with tarred rope, old clothing, and lines of paper bags half-filled with sand. Art critic and SÚM member Ólafur Gíslason has commented that the feeling evoked by Kristján's exhibition was one of "emptiness," one "which is not merely the emptiness of realistic imitation in the visual language, but also an existential emptiness whose roots lie in the spirit of the age." Ólafur Gíslason, "Emptiness and the Filling of It," in *Kristján Guðmundsson,* ed. Ólafur Jónsson (Reykjavík: Mál og menning & Reykjavík Art Museum, 2001), 111-114, Exhibition catalogue.

wooden stick around his genital area, invoking the connotations of artistic expression with both the natural and the sexual.

Another of Sigurður's works, listed in the exhibition catalogue simply as *Landslag* (*Landscape,* 1969), but also known as *Landslag með pönnukökum* (*Landscape with pancakes*), presented a mountain view – the classic ideal of Icelandic landscape painting – in the form of a framed relief, but with pancakes topping the mountains instead of the typical snowcaps.[216] One reporter – confusing Sigurður with his brother Kristján – commented that the "old cakes" (Icel. "gamlar lummur") in the landscape would likely draw the ire of many.[217] The designation "gamlar lummur," used by the reporter, generally refers to something which has lost its appeal or is past its prime, repetitive and old news – an apt metaphor for SÚM's attitude towards the romantic tradition of landscape painting and its ideological foundation.

Sigurður's and Kristján's ironic expansion of landscape painting was prefigured by SÚM affiliate Magnús Pálsson's *Erðanú borð!* (*What a table!,* 1962) [Figure 1.18], which was exhibited at Magnús's first solo-exhibition at Ásmundarsalur in Reykjavík a year prior, in September 1968. One of Magnús's first artistic creations, made six years prior to the exhibition, *Erðanú borð!* can be described as a coffee-table transformed into a landscape

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[216] The only photograph of Sigurður Guðmundsson's *Landslag með pönnukökum* (*Landscape with pancakes,* 1969) that I have come across is included in a discussion of Sigurður's work, written by former SÚM member Ólafur Gíslason and published on his blog. See Ólafur Gíslason, "Sigurður Guðmundsson," Hugrunir, accessed Sept. 2017, http://hugrunir.com/2016/11/23/sigurdur-gudmundsson/.

[217] See LÞ, "SÚM-sýningin," in *Þjóðviljnn,* Sept. 25, 1969, 4, accessed May 2015, http://timarit.is/view_page_init.jsp?issId=220473&pageId=2831712&lang=is&q=S%FAm%20s%FDningin.

picture, or perhaps more properly a landscape sculpture. Poking through the top of the thoroughly dysfunctional table is the tip of a mountain, made of paper and plaster and painted blue with a white cap of snow. Underneath the table top is a shelf, covered in a grassy green field of plaster, on top of which sits the base of the mountain. Beneath the shelf hang the roots of the mountain, in the form of an unpainted mass of paper and various cardboard containers. And from the sides of the table long strips of paper painted with red blots, reminiscent of glowing lava flowing from the mountain above.

SÚM artists' confrontation with the landscape tradition was given an explicitly political dimension some years later, at an exhibition of drawings by Gylfi Gíslason in Gallery SÚM in May 1971.[218] Among the twenty-four drawings exhibited, *Fjallasúrmjólk* (*Mountain Sour Milk,* 1971) [Figure 1.19] directly appropriated one of Jóhannes S. Kjarval's best-known work, a painting titled *Fjallamjólk* (*Mountain Milk,* 1941) [Figure 1.20], depicting the rugged landscape of Þingvellir. Rendering Kjarval's painting in ink, Gylfi added checkered tanks into the landscape; a reference to the newly erected aluminum plant in Straumsvík, just outside of Reykjavík. Constructed by the multinational corporation Rio Tinto in 1969 – and sanctioned by then Minister of Industry, Jóhann Hafstein, a member of (and between 1970-1973 leader of) the center-right Independence Party (Icel. Sjálfstæðisflokkurinn) – by 1970 the aluminum plant was shown to have caused serious damage to the environment surrounding the plant, with reports of toxic levels of fluoride in

[218] Gallery SÚM Vatnsstíg 3b Gylfi Gíslason May 22 – June 5, 1971 (Icel. Gallerí SÚM Vatnsstíg 3b Gylfi Gíslason 22. maí – 5. júní 1971). Document listing works exhibited by Gylfi Gíslason in Gallery SÚM May 22 – June 5, 1971. Gallerie SÚM Papers, Box 1/5, Folder C. The Archive of Artist-Run Initiatives. The Living Art Museum, Reykjavík, Iceland.

plants and trees.[219] Pitching the romanticized image of Iceland's landscape in works such as Kjarval's *Fjallamjólk* and paintings by Þórarinn B. Þorláksson and others – works celebrated by the Icelandic middle class as signs of patriotism, bourgeois respectability and the "purity" of Icelandic nature – against the manmade industrial constructs of the plant, Gylfi highlighted the hypocrisy inherent in the celebration of idealized landscape in the face of the forceful push towards Iceland's modernization and industrialization.

Conclusion

In the internal and external positioning of their work, SÚM is marked, from its establishment, by a central ambiguity. While the work of its members was understood, both by SÚM artists themselves and by their critics, as antithetical to landscape painting, in the discursive framing of their work, SÚM artists continued to refer to and rely on the ideological foundation of the Icelandic landscape tradition, in order to position their work in resistance to American popular culture, and by extension, to what many perceived as the United States' neocolonial politics. This tension would continue to mark the work of SÚM artists and their discourse on art in the following decade.

SÚM's critique of Iceland's "Americanization" and of American neocolonialism relied on the artistic tactics developed by the historical avant-garde in the early twentieth century; that is of the appropriation of the products of mass consumer culture through collage or the readymade. That SÚM's ironic mimicry of capitalist mass consumer culture through

[219] See e.g. Ingólfur Davíðsson, "Skemmdir á gróðri vegna fluor-mengunar frá álbræðslunni í Straumsvík," in *Tíminn,* Oct. 1, 1970, 1 and 14, accessed September 2017, http://timarit.is/view_page_init.jsp?issId=262867&pageId=3686145&lang=is&q=Straumsv%EDk%20%E1%20gr%F3%F0ri.

these avant-garde techniques went unrecognized – or that its critical force was trivialized – by critics and commentators of *SÚM I* can be explained by Icelander's general lack of familiarity with the artistic strategies of the avant-garde.

Moreover, SÚM's translation of these strategies into the cultural context of postwar Iceland was complicated by the role of American cultural diplomacy in this process. For as SÚM member Sigurður Guðmundsson commented in 1988, one of the crucial sources of information available to young Icelandic artists hungry for any and all information about international artistic developments were magazines and other journals purchased and held by the USIA library branch in Reykjavík, stolen copies of which circulated among artists as Sigurður notes.[220] SÚM's adaptation of collage and the readymade to a critique of American capitalist popular culture and U.S. foreign policy thus relied, ironically, on the rise of the United States as a global economic and political power in the same period.

Nevertheless, the extension of the art object within SÚM was also, as I have highlighted, distinguished by SÚM artist's critical confrontation with the Icelandic tradition of landscape painting. That SÚM artists' confrontation with the tradition of painting should focus on the genre of the landscape picture, rather than the institutionally sanctioned and supported abstract painting that had dominated the small Icelandic art scene since the early 1950s can, as I have suggested, be understood in light of the central position of nature to the discourse of art in Iceland, as well as Icelandic nationalist discourse and identity more broadly.

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[220] Sigurður made the statement in an interview conducted in 1988 and published in the catalogue for the first survey exhibition of the SÚM group held at the Reykjavík Art Museum in 1989. See Gunnar B. Kvaran, "Sigurður Guðmundsson" [Interview, Amsterdam 1 Dec. 1988], in *SÚM 1965-1972,* 68.

Like their peers around the globe, SÚM artists understood their extension of the art object into the everyday as a critique of conventional art forms' complicity in a capitalist mode of production and consumption. The landscape picture was in many ways *the* sign of bourgeois respectability in postwar Iceland – perhaps more so than abstract painting – and its popularity among the general public was immense, as the comment directed at SÚM artists by the reporter from *Morgunblaðið* in 1965 attests: "You are not very fond of landscape painting."[221] The transformation of art into commodity may have appeared especially blatant to SÚM artists in the case of landscape painting because of its tacit association with a romantic critique of the expansion of the capitalist world economy through colonial practices. In light of SÚM's political engagement with nationalist anti-colonial critique, SÚM artists' resistance to the subsumption of landscape painting under capital can, finally, be understood to involve an implicit critique of the continued subjugation of the Icelandic nation under the same forces.

[221] "Poplistin: list hins daglega lífs," 8.

Chapter 2. SÚM, Dieter Roth, and Fluxus

Fine art and the sciences, if they do not make man morally better, yet, by conveying a pleasure that admits of universal communication and by introducing polish and refinement into society, make him civilized. Thus they do much to overcome the tyrannical propensities of the senses, and so prepare man for a sovereignty in which reason alone shall have sway.

- Immanuel Kant, 1790[222]

Why shouldn't we be pigs? Why shouldn't I experience the fall? Why shouldn't I be allowed to express it, why shouldn't I be silly? It's all in the context of so-called art so it doesn't hurt anybody.

- Dieter Roth, 1979[223]

I won't say what Duchamp was for the Americans or Hamilton for the British, but without Dieter Roth this would all have passed by us. […] Dieter broke the isolation.

- Magnús Pálsson, 1978[224]

SÚM's introduction of experimental and avant-garde practices into postwar Iceland was encouraged and broadly shaped by the artists' friendship and collaboration with the Swiss-German artist Dieter Roth, who lived in Iceland for seven years, between 1957 and 1964.

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[222] Immanuel Kant, "Appendix. Theory of the Method of Teleological Judgement," in *Critique of Judgement,* transl. by James C. Meredith. Revised, edited, and introduced by Nicholas Walker (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 262.

[223] Irmelin Lebeer-Hossmann, "Dieter Roth Interview von Irmelin Lebeer-Hossman (Hamburg, 28-30 September 1976, und Stuttgart, 20-22 Juni 1979)," in Barbara Wien, *3 vorläufige Listen* (Basel: Roth's Verlag, 1987), 115-116. Quoted from: Theodora Vischer, "Roth Time: A Retrospective," in *ROTH TIME: A Dieter Roth Retrospective,* Ed. Theodora Vischer and Bernadette Walter, trans. Catherine Schelbert (New York: The Museum of Modern Art; Baden, Switzerland: Lars Müller Publishers, 2003), 15, Exhibition catalogue.

[224] Steingrímur E. Kristmundsson and Kristinn G. Harðarson, "Viðtal við Magnús Pálsson," in *Svart á hvítu,* Jan. 1, 1978, 9, accessed June 2016, http://timarit.is/view_page_init.jsp?issId=343697&pageId=5386637&lang=is&q=Vi%F0tal%20vi%F0%20Magn%FAs%20P%E1lsson.

While Roth remained, in the 1960s, an outsider in Icelandic society and an unknown figure to most,[225] his presence and work in Iceland left an indelible mark on the generation of Icelandic artists emerging with the establishment of SÚM.

Shortly after his arrival in Iceland in 1957, Roth relayed the following impression of the island in a letter to his parents:

> … there's probably no place else in the world where the way people live is so tasteless, ugly, and bad all bloody improvisation […] maybe it's just the converse of the rest of Europe the way they live here is ugly and their souls are more beautiful life is more beautiful there and the souls are ugly.[226]

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[225] By the time of his departure in 1964, art work by Roth had only been presented publicly in Iceland twice; at a solo-exhibit at Café Mokka in 1958 and in an exhibition organized by the Reykjavík School of Visual Arts, on the occasion of its upcoming fifteen-year anniversary which opened on 16 September 1961. Roth's exhibition at Café Mokka – which presented a collection of silk prints – made little to no impact, as there was no coverage of it in the local press, and no works were sold. The Icelandic press' attention was, however, directed towards Roth in the early months of 1961 after Icelandic artist Erró (Guðmundur Guðmundsson) sent major newspapers a public letter detailing Roth's artistic accomplishment and the prestige of the Copley award which Roth received in December of the prior year. See "Svisslendingnum Diter Rot sýndur mikill heiður ytra," in *Þjóðviljinn,* Feb. 15, 1961, 5, accessed June 2016, http://timarit.is/view_page_init.jsp?issId=215393&pageId=2772165&lang=is&q=rot. Following this revelation, two daily newspapers published interviews with Roth, but the reporters seem to have had limited ground to understand his work and little attempt was made to contextualize or analyze it. See "Í dag," in *Morgunblaðið,* Feb. 19, 1961, 5, accessed June 2016, http://timarit.is/view_page_init.jsp?issId=111503&pageId=1334088&lang=is&q=Diter%20Rot%20diter%20rot%20%ED%20%ED; "Listir og bókmenntir. Sonur listamannsins sagði: 'Þetta er andrésöndin hans pabba,'" in *Vísir,* Feb. 20, 1961, 4, accessed June 2016, http://timarit.is/view_page_init.jsp?issId=181816&pageId=2353620&lang=is&q=DITER%20ROT%20Diter%20og.

[226] Dieter Roth, letter to his parents, n.d. (February 1957). Trans. by Dirk Dobke and Bernadette Walter. In the original: "es gibt wol auf der ganzen erde kain geschmackloseres häslicher wonendes

Resonating in Roth's description are the same oscillating tensions found in travelers' accounts from throughout the centuries; alternating between disdain or even disgust of Icelander's uncivilized, "tasteless" way of being and admiration for that same lack of restriction or contamination of a modern way of being. In Roth's brief comments on the state of Icelandic society and culture, however, we also glimpse a critical attitude towards modernity that would come to be fundamental to his art. In particular, Roth's words reveal an emerging critique of the notion of good taste and its concomitant ethical implications.

From his arrival in in 1957 until his departure for the United States in 1964 Dieter Roth's artistic practice underwent a dramatic change. Rejecting the strict, systematic aesthetic of Concrete art that had occupied his youth, in the early 1960s Roth began to experiment with various artistic media and processes, incorporating found readymade materials and objects, chance-based processes, destruction and organic bio-degradable materials into his practice.

More particularly, as I highlight, Roth's practice post-1960s is distinguished by a sustained and critical interruption of the traditional limits of the spheres of nature and culture. Such a project manifests itself most prominently in Roth's pioneering use of unstable, biodegradable materials that, in their unavoidable disintegration, threaten the art object's perceived cohesion and stability; in works such as his "pressings" and "squashings," [Figure 2.1] his many "islands" from the 1960s and seventies [Figure 2.2], and in works made from chocolate and cheese, such as *P.O.TH.A.A.VFB* (Portrait of the artists as

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und schlechter lebendes folk ales ist blutige improvisation... es ist hir filaicht nur umgekert als anderswo in oiropa hir haben si das häsliche leben and di schöneren selen dort haben si das schönere leben and di häslichen selen." Dirk Dobke and Bernadette Walter, "Under the Spell of the Concrete," in *ROTH TIME,* 40.

Vogelfutterbüste [birdseed bust], 1968) [Figure 2.3], *Löwenselbst* (*Lion self,* 1969), *Löwenturm* (*Lion tower,* 1969-88/2003 / 1970-98/2003) [Figure 2.4] and *Staple Cheese (A Race)* (1970) [Figure 2.5]. It is, however, perhaps most spectacularly demonstrated by Roth's ever-growing *Gartenskulptur* (*Garden sculpture*, 1968-) [Figure 2.6], the earliest version of which was installed by Roth in the garden of his assistant/manufacturer Rudolf Rieser in Cologne, Germany, in 1970. Composed of a simple wooden platform on four posts, on which Roth placed various drawings, sketches, paintings, collages, and objects propped up against a green trellis, and exposed to the natural elements, the pictures and objects gradually degenerated, their decomposed elements in turn serving as sources of further artistic production.[227]

The transformation of Roth's practice was rooted in a rejection of the fundamental terms of the modern western tradition of aesthetics, and aided by his introduction in the late 1950s and early 1960s into a global network of experimental artists emerging across Europe, America and Japan – artists associated with ZERO, Nouveau Réalisme, and Fluxus – who

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[227] Paint and other elements washed away by the rain and wind were captured in a jar placed underneath the platform, documented and re-used. The initial version of this "generator of works of art" also included a copy of *P.O.TH.A.A.VFB.* To later iterations of the work, Roth added several of his *Karnickelköttelkarnickel* (bunny-dung bunnies), along with chocolate Easter rabbits, plush rabbits, and flat wooden rabbits, and even a live bunny, belonging to the collector Ulrich Buse's son. *Gartenskulptur* was last exhibited outside in 1989, in the courtyard of the Claudine Papillon gallery in Paris. At the closing of the exhibition, it was dismantled and stored in two containers. In later exhibitions of the work it continued to accumulate additional elements and extend the sculpture. Since Roth's death in 1998 it has been managed and exhibited by Roth's son, Björn Roth, who had assisted his father since the early 1980s. In its latest version, exhibited at the Basel Schaulager in the spring of 2000, it had grown 131 feet long. See Dirk Dobke and Bernadette Walter, "Garden Sculpture," in *ROTH TIME,* 242-244.

were beginning to break free of the terms of the stale debate between "hard" (geometric) and "soft" (expressive) abstraction. More specifically, my discussion in this chapter highlights the significance of Roth's implicit recognition of the complicity of the western aesthetic tradition with the remnants of a colonialist discourse, at the core of which is the distinction of civilized peoples from those considered to be located outside of civilization, in a state of nature. Significantly, it is in the context of Roth's interface with Iceland, Icelandic artists and culture, that his focus on the limits of the natural and cultural makes sense.

Shortly after his arrival in Iceland, Roth met, developed close friendships and collaborated on a number of projects with the Icelandic artists Magnús Pálsson and Jón Gunnar Árnason, both of whom would soon be affiliated with SÚM.[228] Despite emigrating to the United States in 1964 Roth continued to visit Iceland regularly in the next decades, and in 1965 he was indirectly involved in the establishment of SÚM, acting as un-official co-curator and assistant to the original SÚM foursome and designing the catalogue for the group's first exhibition, *SÚM I* [Figure 2.7]. Roth's influence on SÚM continued to be felt in subsequent years as well, in his contributions to SÚM exhibitions and in his direct or indirect facilitation of SÚM's collaboration with American and European Fluxus artists in the late 1960s and early 1970s.

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[228] See e.g. Bernadette Walter, "Designs," in *ROTH TIME,* 56-57; Aðalsteinn Ingólfsson, "Æviatriði – Biography," in *Hugarorka og sólstafir,* 82-95; "Líkan af Arnarnesi sýnt," in *Morgunblaðið,* Jan. 7, 1962, 24, accessed June 2016, http://timarit.is/view_page_init.jsp?issId=117746&pageId=1523399&lang=is&q=af; "Skrúfur og tannhjól í skartgripi," in *Tíminn,* Apr. 4, 1962, 15-16, accessed June 2016, http://timarit.is/view_page_init.jsp?issId=61919&pageId=1049757&lang=is&q=SKR%DAFUR%20OG%20TANNHJ%D3L

In this facilitative role, Roth might be said to have operated as a crucial node, a redistribution point, connecting Icelandic artists to a global artistic network and opening the small Icelandic art scene up to artistic currents that otherwise would likely have passed it by, as Magnús Pálsson commented in 1978. Furthermore, as the next chapter will show, the example Roth's own work provided would prove important for SÚM artists' own critical renegotiations of the relationship between the concepts of nature and culture – and their circumscription of Icelandic identity and art – in the coming years. Crucially, however, Iceland and Icelandic culture played an equally vital role in the development of Roth's own practice.

The Transformation of Dieter Roth's Practice

Trained in the commercial arts of graphic design and lithography, in the years prior to his arrival in Iceland Dieter Roth had begun to establish a career for himself working periodically for various design studios in Bern, Switzerland, before moving to Copenhagen in 1956, where he had been offered a position as a designer of carpet and fabric patterns for the Danish company Unika-Vaev.[229] He had also achieved some recognition on the European continent as a visual artist and writer of concrete poetry.[230] It was in Copenhagen that Roth met his soon-to-be-bride, the Icelandic art therapist Sigríður Björnsdóttir who was studying there. Following his love to the northern island, Roth was confronted not only with the "tastelessness" of the emerging urban landscape in Reykjavík but also with the harsh reality of trying to provide for his growing family in an unfamiliar, and somewhat unwelcoming,

[229] Dobke and Walter, "Under the Spell of the Concrete," 39.

[230] See Bernadette Walter, "spirale," in *ROTH TIME,* 30-31.

culture and society. With the Icelandic association of graphic artists (Félag íslenskra teiknara, est. 1953) refusing to grant him a work permit, Roth struggled in the coming years to find work, taking on various commercial projects, all the while continuing to develop his artistic practice.[231]

Shortly after his arrival Roth created his first artist books, for which he would become well known in subsequent years, and soon thereafter various kinetic sculptures and pictures, rubber-stamp pictures and poetry.[232] Unable to find publishers willing to distribute his books, Roth decided to establish his own publishing house in 1957, along with the Icelandic poet Einar Bragi.[233] They called it forlag ed., after their first initials. The first book by Dieter Roth published through forlag ed. is paradigmatic of Roth's early books and of the fundamentals of Concrete art. A remake of the first book that he ever made, as a gift for the German theater director and poet Claus Bremer's newborn son in 1954, Roth's *Kinderbuch*

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231 Dobke and Walter, "Under the Spell of the Concrete," 40-61; Anna Jóhannsdóttir, "Exile, Correspondence, Rebellion – Tracing the Interactive Relationship between Iceland and Dieter Roth," in *A Cultural History of the Avant-Garde in the Nordic Countries 1950-1975,* ed. Ørum & Olsson, 239-250.

232 See Bernadette Walter, "Books," in *ROTH TIME,* 48-53; Dirk Dobke, "Bewogen Beweging – Kinetic Objects and Revolving Grids," in *ROTH TIME,* 66-69; Dirk Dobke, "Copley Book," in *ROTH TIME,* 80-85; Dirk Dobke, "Mundunculum," in *ROTH TIME,* 86-89.

233 Einar Bragi Sigurðsson was the founder and editor of the literary magazine *Birtingur,* the most important venue for the introduction of modern literature and art in Iceland in the 1950s and sixties. He was also known in Iceland as one of the so-called "atom poets;" a generation of poets that disregarded classic rules of rhyming and alliteration. The term was derived from Nobel Prize winner Halldór Kiljan Laxness' novel *The Atom Station* (*Atómstöðin,* publ. 1948) and used in a derogatory manner to describe all poets who wrote in a nontraditional way. See Eysteinn Þorvaldsson, "Icelandic Poetry Since 1940," in *A History of Icelandic Literature,* ed. Neijmann, 471-502. He was also, in 1960, among the founders of the Icelandic Anti-War Movement.

(*Children's Book*, 1957) [Figure 2.8] is composed of layers of carton bound with a coil spring. Each page contains printed images of circle and diamond forms of various sizes in blue, red, yellow, and green, creating a complex optical interplay of form and color as the reader leafs through the book. Composed entirely of non-referential, non-mimetic pictorial elements, *Kinderbuch* effectively embodies Concrete art's principle of pure plasticity.[234]

Roth's abandonment of the principles of Concrete art, and his adoption of processes of chance and destruction and incorporation of biodegradable materials, is dramatically encapsulated in his iconic *Literaturwürste* (*Literature Sausages,* 1961-74) [Figure 2.9]. Conceived for his friend, the Romanian-born Swiss artist Daniel Spoerri, in 1961, Roth created the original "literature sausage" by cutting strips of pages from various books and – following original sausage recipes – mixing the pages with food ingredients, which he then shoved into a natural casing.[235] If in his earlier artist books, such as *Kinderbuch* (1957), Roth

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[234] In their manifesto of Concrete art, published in the journal *Art Concret* in 1930, Theo van Doesburg, Otto G. Karlslund, Jean Hélion, Marcel Wants and Léon Arthur Tutundijan declare: "The painting should be constructed completely with pure plastic elements, that is to say, with planes and colours. A pictorial element has no other meaning than what it represents, consequently the painting possesses no other meaning than what it is by itself." Theo van Doesburg et al., "Art Concret. The Basis of concrete painting," [*Art Concret,* April 1930, 1], in Joost Baljeu, *Theo van Doesburg* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., Inc., 1974), 180-181.

[235] As art historian Dirk Dobke notes, Roth chose books for the sausages that "he did not like or that were written by authors whose success he envied." Returning to the idea in the late 1960's, Roth produced twenty-five more sausages using, among others, the books *Die Blechtrommel* (The Tin Drum, by Günther Grass, 1959) and *Suche nach einer neuen Welt* (To Seek a Newer World, by Robert Kennedy, 1967). In 1970 he expanded the series to include German magazines and newspapers and in 1974 Roth made his last work for the series, the large-format Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel's *Werke in 20 Bänden* (George Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel's Works in twenty volumes). Dirk Dobke, "Literature Sausage," in *ROTH TIME*, 74.

had striven for a certain "purity" of form, in keeping with the doctrines of Concrete art, the *Literaturwürste* give a distinct impression of impurity. Made from various animal tissues and organs, fat and blood, and traditionally encased in the intestine of animals such as sheep, pigs, goats or cattle, sausages have a definite association with the internal and with fleshly, carnal existence. Coupled with this is the suggestion of human consumption and digestion, in which the processed innards of animals pass through the human digestive system and intestines, eventually to be passed out of this system in a shape oddly reminiscent of the original product. The *Literaturwürste,* in other words, amounted not only to a violent destruction of literature through the material shredding of paper and ink but also brought this highest of human arts – and by extension, language; that which is traditionally believed to separate human beings from animals – down to the "gutter," into the sphere of the bodily, the sensual, and the animalistic. Finally, Roth's *Literaturwürste* reclaim the notion of the artwork as an expression but translates this into the realm of the material and the bodily; the sausage evoking the outcome of a literal ex-pression, of the pressing or squeezing of materials through the system of the body.

As I will argue, the change in Roth's artistic practice, demonstrated in the comparison of *Kinderbuch* and the *Literaturwürste,* follows from his rejection of the fundamental tenets of modern aesthetics, established by Immanuel Kant. While propelled by Roth's introduction into postwar avant-garde artistic networks, this was prompted, at least partly, by Roth's confrontation with Iceland, its environment, people and culture.

Aesthetics, Ethics and the Nonhuman

In 1963, Roth published an "essay" consisting of a page of Immanuel Kant's *Critique of Aesthetic Judgement* (1790) into which he had punched holes.[236] In this foundational text of modern aesthetics Kant postulates an inherent analogy between moral and aesthetic judgements, arguing that the pursuit of beauty facilitates individual moral development by preparing the individual "to love something, even nature, apart from any interest."[237] Underlying Kant's aesthetic theory is the notion of education or self-cultivation (G. *Bildung*) which Kant argues is achieved through the development of our reason and through an affiliated gradual detachment from our more "primal" emotional and sensual urges. Crucially, it is the supposed disinterestedness of our experience of beauty – its separateness from sensual pleasure and instinctive drives – that gives it its moral character, enabling one to transcend the individual and subjective and connect with the universal.

In a recent analysis of the relationship between Kant's aesthetics and his anthropology and moral psychology, Canadian philosopher Bradley Murray notes that "the notion of 'culture' plays a central role in Kant's philosophy, including his aesthetics, even if at times it plays its role unassumingly in the background."[238] Further, in discussing Kant's categorization of the different stages of culture,[239] Murray notes that while they may differ

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[236] See Dirk Dobke and Bernadette Walter, "Breaking the Spell," in *ROTH TIME,* 78.

[237] Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgement*, 98.

[238] Bradley Murray, *The Possibility of Culture: Pleasure and Moral Development in Kant's Aesthetics* (Chichester, West Sussex, UK: John Wiley & Sons Inc, 2015), 19.

[239] As Murray notes, in his *Lectures on Pedagogy* from 1803, Kant defined four main stages of the development of culture; discipline, skill, prudence, and moralization. Earlier, in his textbook *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View,* published in 1798 but based on Kant's lectures on anthropology delivered at the University of Königsberg between 1772/73 and 1795/6, Kant had

slightly across his writing, "Kant's characterizations have in common a tendency to frame the issue of individual development as embodying a transition away from 'animality.'"[240] The concept of culture functions ultimately to separate humans from animals, on the grounds of human beings' supposedly unique and innate capacity to distance themselves from their own instinctive drives through self-reflection and logical thinking.[241]

Murray's work is part of a surge of interest in Kant's anthropology,[242] following the 1997 publication in German of student notes from Kant's lectures on anthropology delivered

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described three developmental stages of reason consisting in skill, prudence and wisdom. See Ibid, 28-29.

[240] Ibid, 20.

[241] In the "Analytic of the Beautiful," Kant differentiates between the agreeable, the beautiful and the good: "The *agreeable* is what GRATIFIES us; the *beautiful* what simply PLEASES us; the *good* what is ESTEEMED (*approved*), i.e. that on which we set an objective worth. Agreeableness is a significant factor even with animals devoid of reason; beauty has purport or significance only for human beings, i.e. for beings at once animal and rational (but not merely for them as rational beings – as spirits for example – but only for them as both animal and rational); whereas the good is good for every rational being in general… Of all these three kinds of delight, that of taste in the beautiful may be said to be the one and only disinterested and *free* delight; for, with it, no interest, whether of sense or reason, extorts approval." Kant, *Critique of Judgement*, 41.

[242] See e.g. Brian Jacobs and Patrick Kain, eds., *Essays on Kant's anthropology* (Cambridge, U.K.; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003); Patrick R. Frierson, *Freedom and Anthropology in Kant's Moral Philosophy* (Cambridge, U.K.; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003); Holly L. Wilson, *Kant's Pragmatic Anthropology: Its Origin, Meaning, and Critical Significance* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2006); Alix Cohen, *Kant's Lectures on Anthropology: A Critical Guide* (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 2014); Kristi Sweet, "What is Philosophical About Kant's Anthropology?," in *International Journal of Philosophical Studies,* vol. 25, no. 3 (2017), 336-347.

at the University of Königsberg between 1772/3 and 1795/6,[243] and their English translation in the *Cambridge Edition of the Works of Immanuel Kant* volume entitled *Lectures on Anthropology,* in 2012.[244] As the philosopher Paul Guyer notes, Kant's lectures on anthropology provide new insight into his long-standing engagement with issues in aesthetics as well as the significance of Kant aesthetic theory to his larger philosophical project.[245] More specifically, Guyer notes that "what the lectures on anthropology show is that what the *Critique of Judgement* adds to all the elements of his aesthetic theory that were already in place by the mid-1780s is all and only those elements of the theory that reveal the teleological significance of the experience of beauty and of the existence of both natural and artistic beauty."[246] In Kant's account the final end of nature is the cultivation of human morality through reason.[247] The theory of the autonomy of aesthetic judgement becomes

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[243] As the editors of a recent collection of essays on Kant's anthropology note, the scholarly neglect of Kant's anthropology can be explained partly with recourse to difficult access to the manuscripts of Kant's students because of the political situation in Eastern Europe for most of the twentieth century. See Brian Jacobs and Patrick Pain, "Introduction," in *Essays on Kant's anthropology,* ed. Jacobs and Kain, 4-5.

[244] See Immanuel Kant, *Lectures on Anthropology,* ed. Allen W. Wood and Robert B. Louden, trans. Robert C. Clewis et al. (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

[245] Guyer writes: "Not only do the lectures on anthropology as well as those on logic and metaphysics make it clear that there was nothing new in Kant's tripartite division of the powers of the human mind, but the lectures on anthropology make it clear as no other sources do that Kant had in fact long considered the possibility and sometimes even asserted that there are *a priori* principles for the feeling of pleasure and displeasure, in the form of principles of taste." Paul Guyer, "Beauty, Freedom, and Morality: Kant's Lectures on Anthropology and the Development of His Aesthetic Theory" in *Essays on Kant's Anthropology*, ed. Jacobs and Kain, 136.

[246] Ibid, 136-137.

[247] Ibid, 137.

central to Kant's philosophy, and to the larger project of the Enlightenment, then, because of the role he assigns to it for the production of a self-reflective, rational subject.

While Kant does not doubt that there is a single nature common to all humans and that all human beings have the capacity for culture, his descriptions of education or self-cultivation as a process of separating from animalistic urges,[248] and his postulation of the existence of universal *a priori* principles of taste, also imply a hierarchy of more or less developed cultures, and by extension, of the distinction of populations into more or lesser human beings. And in fact, explicit statements arguing for precisely such a hierarchy of human cultures and races are frequent in Kant's writings of the 1760s and 1770s.[249]

In light of Kant's aesthetic theory, the "tastelessness" of Icelanders, commented on by Roth in 1957, could be understood as a reflection of the Icelandic people's underdeveloped moral sensibility. Such arguments were actually, as I noted in the previous chapter, commonplace in the accounts of travelers to Iceland throughout the Early Modern period and well into the nineteenth century, with some authors even describing the Icelandic population

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[248] Philosopher Allen W. Wood notes that "in Kant's view, human beings are human at all only through the actions of others who educate them: 'A human being can become human only through education. He is nothing but what education makes of him' (Ak: 9:443)." Further, that "In common with other animals, human beings have a predisposition to 'animality,' to instinctive desires and behavior aiming at self-preservation, reproduction of the species, and sociability… But human beings also have predispositions to 'humanity' – to set their own ends according to reason, and 'personality' – to give themselves, and to obey moral laws through pure reason." Allen W. Wood, "Kant and the Problem of Human Nature," in *Essays on Kant's Anthropology*, ed. Jacobs and Kain, 40-41 and 52.

[249] See Jon M. Mikkelsen, "Translator's Introduction: Recent Work on Kant's Race Theory / The Texts / The Translations," in *Kant and the Concept of Race: Late Eighteenth-Century Writings,* ed. Jon M. Mikkelsen (New York: State University of New York Press, 2012), 8.

as subhuman.[250] The romantic nationalist rhetoric cultivated by educated Icelanders in the late nineteenth-century was based on a rejection of the notion of the universality of aesthetic judgement. Nevertheless, it retained from the Enlightenment the basic concern with a cultivation of morality through aesthetic refinement, an idea which grounds the development of landscape painting in Iceland. In comparison, while Dieter Roth still retained, in 1957, the notion of "good taste," he was beginning – as is evident in the letter to his parents – to question its ethical relevance.[251]

In an interview with Icelandic art historian and critic Aðalsteinn Ingólfsson, conducted in 1986, Roth commented on the impact Iceland had on his work in his early career. Replying to Aðalsteinn's comments that his work seems driven by two opposite forces, some

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[250] See e.g. Ísleifsson, "Introduction: Imaginations of National Identity and the North," 3-22 and 41-66; Zacharasiewicz, "The Theory of Climate and the North in Anglophone Literatures."

[251] In reality, the "tastelessness" of Reykjavík's appearance, commented on by Roth in 1957, was not the result of the Icelandic population's lack of aesthetic sensibility but rather of the city's extremely rapid growth in the early- to mid-twentieth century brought on by Iceland's occupation by British and American forces during WWII. Iceland – Northern Europe's poorest country in 1939 – was, still in the late 1950s, in the process of transforming from an essentially agrarian society to an urban one. In thirty years, between 1920 and 1950, the number of people living in urban nuclei (with more than two hundred inhabitants) rose from 40 per cent to about 75 per cent, a growth comparative to what the U.S. experienced over a century, between 1890 and 1990. The capital of Reykjavík saw the largest growth during this period, its inhabitants counting about 10 per cent of the total population in 1900 but about 50 per cent in 1958. See Hall and Agnarsson, *Byggðir og búseta*. Despite growing economic prosperity, there was little order to the expanding urban sphere and the capital city Reykjavík was widely spread out. Amidst the emerging concrete architecture of the city there were army barracks left by British and U.S. troops in the aftermath of WWII that were inhabited throughout the 1950s and into the 1960s, old shacks, run-down farms and even the occasional remaining turf house, remnants from a rapidly disappearing age. And a stone's throw away from the city, open fields and gravel roads.

of it having a strict, mechanical and exact appearance while other works appear more "expressionistic," Roth stated:

> I see this schism everywhere, especially after my arrival in Iceland. There, I learned to give in a little bit. Everything here was so different from what I was used to. These were circumstances that I would never have had accepted anywhere else, there was so much disrepair. But I had a family to provide for so I had to swallow my pride, give in, in order to survive. That was difficult for me. The only thing to do was to accept the situation, to get stuck in, and begin stirring and smearing.[252]

If the unrefined environment in Iceland was a shock to Roth's senses and the lack of cultural infrastructure may have precipitated the change in his practice, his adoption of processes of destruction and organic disintegration also occurs, crucially, alongside his introduction, around 1960, to the work of the newly formed Nouveaux Réalistes, and shortly thereafter, his introduction and participation in the emerging phenomena of Fluxus. Both events were facilitated by Roth's friend, the Swiss-Romanian artist Daniel Spoerri who contributed to both Nouveau Réalisme and Fluxus.

Roth's Network

As statements made by Roth reveal, the Nouveaux Réalistes provided him with important examples of alternatives to the rule-based Concrete art that he had been immersed in during his early years. Roth's first direct encounter with Jean Tinguely's work, in Basel, Switzerland, in August 1960, seems to have been particularly formative. Speaking with the

[252] Aðalsteinn Ingólfsson, "Kaflar úr viðtölum sem tekin voru 1986," in *Dieter Roth,* ed. Níels Hafstein (Reykjavík: The Living Art Museum, 1994), 5, Exhibition catalogue.

art critic Irmelin Lebeer-Hossmann in 1976, Roth described it as follows: "Everything was so rusty and broken and made so much noise, and I was [...] impressed half to death. It was simply a completely different world from my Constructivism, it was something like a paradise that I'd lost."[253] While Roth's work had previously been exhibited alongside Tinguely's in exhibitions organized under the banner of ZERO,[254] the disorderly, destructive and pointedly useless character of Tinguely's recent works – his *Méta-Matics* presented at Iris Clert's gallery in Paris in the summer of 1959 and his "self-destroying" *Homage to New York,* presented in the outdoor sculpture garden of the Museum of Modern Art in New York on 17 March 1960 – and their incorporation of sound, chance, humor and irony and increasing emphasis, drawn from dada and futurism, on performance was a complete reversal from the static order of Concrete art,[255] and the attendant idealism inherited and retained from Concrete art in ZERO.[256]

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[253] Irmelin Lebeer-Hossmann, "Dieter Roth Interview." Quoted from *ROTH TIME,* ed. Vischer and Walter, 64.

[254] Roth's work had previously been exhibited alongside Tinguely's in two exhibitions that mark important moments in the development of the international collaborative artist network ZERO; *Vision in Motion/Motion in Vision* at Hessenhuis, Antwerp, and *Dynamo 1,* at Galerie Renate Boukes in Wiesbaden. See Dobke and Walter, "Under the Spell of the Concrete," 55.

[255] Tinguely's early example of motorized works had been important for the development of ZERO's aesthetic, but at the turn of the century his destructive "anti-machines" would distance him from the optimistic rhetoric of ZERO. See Stephen B. Petersen, "Space and the Space Age in Postwar European Art: Lucio Fontana, Yves Klein, and their Contemporaries" (PhD Diss., The University of Texas at Austin, 2001), ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global; Stephanie J. Hanor, "Jean Tinguely: Useless Machines and Mechanical Performers, 1955-1970" (PhD Diss., The University of Texas at Austin, 2003), ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global.

[256] As a response to the success of the Nouveaux Réalistes (est. 27 October 1960) – which included ZERO participants Yves Klein, Arman and Jean Tinguely – ZERO artists Otto Piene, Günther Uecker

One year after his introduction to Tinguely, Daniel Spoerri facilitated Roth's participation in a major large-scale traveling exhibition of kinetic art, known in English as *Movement in Art.* Organized by the Swedish curator – and later director of Moderna Museet in Stockholm – Pontus Hultén, in collaboration with Willem Sandberg, the director of the Stedelijk Museum, as well as Daniel Spoerri and Jean Tinguely, *Movement in Art* opened at the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam in the spring of 1961 under the title *Bewogen Beweging.* It later moved to Moderna Museet (under the title *Rörelse i konsten*) and the Louisiana Museum of Modern Art in Humlebæk, just north of Copenhagen (under the title *Bevegelse i kunsten*).[257] Bringing together works by eighty-three artists from eighteen countries, the exhibition was an enormous undertaking, and, as Julia Robinson points out, seminal in that it was the first recognition of a major museum of the new approaches to art emerging throughout Europe, America and Asia in the late 1950s.[258]

Roth exhibited three works: his *Gummibandbild* (Rubber-band picture, 1961) [Figure 2.10] – an interactive artwork that allowed the viewer to create an infinite number of patterns

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and Heinz Mack published of the first and only manifesto of ZERO, titled *Zero der neue Idealismus* (Zero the new idealism), as a broadsheet, in exhibition posters and catalogues and in the art journal *Quadrum* in 1963. The manifesto announced ZERO's utopian aspirations of the reconciliation of art, nature and technology, manifested in works exploring the physical, spiritual and aesthetic dimensions and connotations of light. See Petersen, "Space and the Space Age in Postwar European Art," 229.

[257] See Patrik L. Andersson, "Euro-Pop: The Mechanical Bride Stripped Bare in Stockholm, Even" (PhD Diss., The University of British Columbia, 2001), ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global.

[258] Among other participants were Marcel Duchamp, Man Ray, Robert Rauschenberg, Daniel Spoerri, Tinguely, Robert Watts and George Brecht, as well as ZERO artists Otto Piene, Heinz Mack and Günther Uecker. See Julia Robinson, "Before Attitudes Became Form – New Realisms: 1957-1962," in *New Realisms: 1957-1962. Object Strategies Between Readymade and Spectacle,* ed. Julia Robinson (Madrid: Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía; Cambridge, M.A.; London, England: The MIT Press, 2010), 24.

by hanging rubber bands on a grid of nails hammered into a square sheet of painted plywood – and the artist books *bók 3b* (*book 3b*, 1961) and *bók 3d* (*book 3d*, 1961) [Figure 2.11]. *Bók 3b* and *bók 3d* are made up of pages of found children's comics and coloring books, which Roth bound together and then randomly cut holes of different sizes from, allowing fragments of previous and subsequent pages to penetrate the reading of each page and disrupt the narrative. Asked to design a poster for the exhibition, Roth repeated the same process, punching holes into a simple black sheet [Figure 2.12]. When pasted upon street walls the poster would reveal glimpses of the ground beneath, inviting the outside environment to quite literally penetrate the image.

Roth's incorporation of found manufactured popular material and imagery in *bók 3b* and *bók 3d* is emblematic of his rejection of the conceptual framework of Concrete art, in particular its emphasis on the artwork's complete autonomy from its environment – its radically non-impressionistic, non-referential "concreteness." It is also aligned with the newly formed Nouveaux Réalistes' call for the creation of artworks relevant to contemporary urban capitalist reality. As with many of the Nouveaux Réalistes' recycling of industrial and commercial material, Roth seems less interested in the constitution of contemporary reality through representation than in the lowly, debased, materiality of the comics.[259] Meanwhile, the perforation of the pages introduces an element of chance, as it had in Roth's earlier *book* (1958-59), by literally opening the work of art to its environment.[260] It also involves, of course – like the lacerated posters of Wolf Vostell, François Dufrêne, Jacques de la Villeglé

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[259] Also in 1961, Roth created books out of waste paper and Icelandic newspapers. Examples include his miniature books *daily mirror book* (1961) and *Daglegt Bull* (1961). See Dobke and Walter, "Breaking the Spell," 70-73.

[260] Walter, "Books," 48-53.

and Raymond Hains – a degree of violence, an execution of force that destroys that which was.

Roth's participation in another artistic collaboration that same year introduced his work to another emerging circle of young artists. In *Kalenderrolle 1* – the first issue of "A survey of Avant-Garde Art" edited and published by Bernd Ebeling and Hansjoachim Dietrich in Wuppertal, Germany – Roth's work was produced alongside works by numerous artists associated with Nouveau Réalisme, ZERO, neo-dada and later Fluxus, many of whose works were also presented at *Movement in Art* [Figure 2.13].[261] Around the time of *Kalenderrolle 1*'s publication, another contributor, the American composer La Monte Young, was collecting material for a publication of experimental poetry, music and art. As Young and his collaborative partner Marian Zazeela recounted in an interview with art historian Dirk Dobke in 2014,[262] it was Roth's contributions to *Kalenderrolle,* as well as some of his early artist books, that led Young to include Roth's work in his *Anthology of*

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[261] E.g. Benjamin Patterson, Emmett Williams, Wolf Vostell, Nam June Paik, Daniel Spoerri, La Monte Young, Lucio Fontana, Cy Twombly, Piero Manzoni, Jasper Johns, Robert Rauschenberg and others. Also included were two sound poems by dadaist Raoul Hausmann. See *Kalenderrolle 1.* Edited by Ebeling and Dietrich (Wuppertal: Verlag Kalender/Ebeling und Dietrich, 1961). The Living Art Museum Collection, N-1211, Reykjavík.

[262] In the interview Marian Zazeela states: "La Monte was already very impressed with his work which he had known since 1960 [through?] publications of *Kalenderrolle* and others. LaMonte also already owned an early book of his poetry, printed, we believe in Iceland. Therefore, we always thought of him as an Icelandic artist. From 1960 to 1963 La Monte was collecting the works for 'An Anthology', which he edited and published in 1963. La Monte published Diter's *White Page with Holes* in 'An Anthology,' so they must have corresponded at some point during those years." Dirk Dobke, *Dieter Roth in America* (London: Edition Hansjörg Mayer, 2004), 39.

Chance Operations (1963) [Figure 2.14], a publication recognized as foundational to Fluxus.[263]

Although not published until 1963, *An Anthology* played a significant role in the emergence of Fluxus in Europe in 1962, for as George Maciunas – the self-proclaimed but controversial "chairman" of Fluxus – explained in 1978, it was his quest to have the material that Young had collected published that led him to organize the first Fluxus concerts in Germany in 1962.[264] *Anthology* included contributions by many artists that would soon play a central role in Fluxus, such as George Brecht, Dick Higgins, Yoko Ono, Henry Flynt and others. Some of these artists Young knew from his student years in California. Others he had met at composer Karlheinz Stockhausen's summer course in Darmstadt in 1959 and the work of yet others, such as Dieter Roth's, he had encountered in publications and concerts. Many had been students of John Cage, in his Experimental Composition classes at the New School for Social Research in New York in the late 1950s.[265]

It is not unlikely that Roth's participation in *Kalenderrolle 1* was facilitated by his inclusion in yet another network of artists circulating through the Cologne studio of artist Mary Bauermeister. Between 1960 and 1961 Bauermeister's atelier was the scene of legendary performances of experimental music, poetry and dance, which through the mediation of David Tudor and John Cage were directly connected to Black Mountain

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[263] The full title is *AN ANTHOLOGY of chance operations concept art anti-art indeterminacy improvisation meaningless work natural disasters plans of action stories diagrams Music poetry essays dance constructions mathematics compositions*.

[264] See Lars Miller, Transcript of the videotaped "Interview with George Maciunas, 24. March 1978," in *The Fluxus Reader,* ed. Ken Friedman (West Sussex: Academy Edition, 1998), 187.

[265] Ibid.

College in North Carolina.[266] Among the artists who presented their work at events organized by Bauermeister several would later be associated with Fluxus, such as Nam June Paik, George Brecht, La Monte Young and Benjamin Patterson. However, alongside experimental music and performances Bauermeister also presented Concrete art and poetry. In June 1961 she organized an exhibition of Concrete Art, titled *The Spirit of the Times in Painting and Sculpture,* at the home of the Cologne architect Peter Neufert. Among the artists chosen by Bauermeister to represent "the spirit of the times" was Dieter Roth, who exhibited one of his artist books alongside work by ZERO artists Otto Piene and André Thomkins.[267]

Back in Iceland, in the fall of 1961, Roth created and exhibited his first electrified artwork, for an exhibition organized by the Reykjavík School of Visual Arts on the occasion of its upcoming fifteen-year anniversary. Participants in the exhibition included current students, alumni from the school, and one guest, Dieter Roth. Roth's contribution was fairly extensive, counting eleven works, including his *Kúluspil* (G. *Kugelspiel,* E. *Bead Game,* 1961) [Figure 2.15], various rotating images and a "sculpture" consisting of a heap of random trashed objects, among them a burnt lightbulb and an old bike saddle, which Roth spray-painted the same rusty red as the gravel underneath – a gesture which he described as indicating the impossibility of distinguishing the sculpture from its ground.[268] Undoubtedly

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[266] See Wilfried Dörstel, Rainer Steinberg and Robert von Zahn, "The Bauermeister Studio: Proto-Fluxus in Cologne 1960-62," in *Fluxus Virus, 1962-1992,* ed. Ken Friedman (Köln: Verlag Schüppenhauer, 1992), 56-60, Exhibition catalogue.

[267] Ibid.

[268] In an interview with Irmelin Lebeer in 1976 Roth commented on the work that: "Da hat man nicht mehr zwischen Skulptur und der Schlacke unterscheiden können." ("Then one could no longer distinguish between the sculpture and the mound underneath.") Irmelin Lebeer-Hossmann, "Interview Lebeer, 28.-30.09.76," in Barbara Wien, *3 vorläufige Listen*, 66. Quoted from: Dirk Dobke,

the most prominent work of the exhibition, however, was Roth's *Vindharpa* (*Windharp,* 1961) [Figure 2.16]. Suspending microphones and scrap iron on a lamp pole on a bare windy hill in front of the exhibition hall and running electric cables from the microphones into the house, the idea was to allow the frequently volatile howling of the wind outside to be transmitted into the exhibition hall shaping the audience's experience of other works.

Unsurprisingly, given its prime location in the exhibition, Roth's harp caught the attention of local press and many papers included an image of its construction in their coverage of the exhibition.[269] There were, however, no serious critical reviews of *Vindharpa,* Roth's other works nor of the exhibition as a whole. This is reflective both of the lack of cultural infrastructure, the overwhelming dominance of abstract art in Iceland at this time and Icelanders' unfamiliarity with the experimental artistic practices of the avant-garde.

The exhibition at Ásmundarsalur in the fall of 1961 marks a significant moment in the development of Dieter Roth's artistic practice, as the first public indication of Roth's turn away from Concrete art. Crucially, unlike in his prior kinetic works, the introduction of

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"'Melancholischer Nippes': Dieter Roths frühe Objekte und Materialbilder (1960´1975)" (PhD Diss., der Universität Hamburg, Hamburg, Germany, 1997), 25, accessed September 2016, http://ediss.sub.uni-hamburg.de/volltexte/1997/40/pdf/Dissertation_gesamt.pdf.

[269] See "Vindharpa, Völuspá, Fjörufugl: Nýstárleg afmælissýning Myndlistarskólans," in *Tíminn,* Sept. 16, 1961, 1 and 15, accessed July 2016, http://timarit.is/view_page_init.jsp?issId=61745&pageId=1047029&lang=is&q=s%FDning; "Slagur vindhörpunnar: Óvenjuleg myndlistarsýning opnuð í dag," in *Vísir,* Sept. 16, 1961, 1 and 5, accessed July 2016, http://timarit.is/view_page_init.jsp?issId=236992&pageId=3226967&lang=is&q=Slagur%20vindh%F6rpunnar; "Listsýning í tilefni af 15 ára afmæli Myndlistarskólans," in *Þjóðviljinn,* Sept. 16, 1961, 3, accessed July 2016, http://timarit.is/view_page_init.jsp?issId=221579&pageId=2848984&lang=is&q=%ED%20tilefni%20%E1ra%20%ED%20tilefni.

chance was imagined not through audience participation or interaction with the art object, but rather through the random performance of the material forces of nature, dramatized and mediated through the microphone.

If Roth's introduction of electricity into his work, and his adoption of chance-procedures and destruction were instigated in part by his confrontation with Tinguely's chaotic machines, the challenge Tinguely's work posed to the ideological foundations of Concrete art may well have struck a chord because of the critical attitude he was already developing, through his confrontation with Iceland, towards the foundational ideals of modern aesthetics. While the transformation of Roth's oeuvre was facilitated by his participation in a global network of artists – the dynamics and interactions of which are complex and multifaceted – his location, in the late 1950s and early 1960s, outside of the centers of the art world and his confrontation with the "tasteless," uncultivated environment in Iceland played a crucial role in the development of his art.

Dieter Roth and Fluxus

A year prior to his participation in the Reykjavík School of Visual Art exhibition, in July 1960, the first solo-exhibition of Roth's books opened at Arthur (Addi) Køpcke's gallery in Copenhagen, and in December of that same year the artistic innovation of Roth's books was recognized when he was granted the William and Noma Copley Award.[270] Disparaged by the

[270] Roth had been recommended for the award by British artist Richard Hamilton, who had seen his books at the exhibition *Æeuvres d'Art Transformable,* opened in London's Gallery One in February of that year. In addition to William and Noma Copley the jury consisted of Alfred H. Barr Jr., director of the Museum of Modern Art, N.Y., English art historian Sir Herbert Read, and artists Hans Arp, Max Ernst, Man Ray and Marcel Duchamp. The Copley award included an offer of funding for an

lack of opportunity and understanding in Iceland and emboldened by external encouragement, Roth finally chose to seek opportunities outside of Iceland. In the spring of 1964 he travelled to the United States with an offer of an artist residency at the Museum College of Art in Philadelphia.[271] He arrived first in New York, where he was introduced, through the mediation of American artist Emmett Williams, to Fluxus artists Dick Higgins, Alison Knowles, La Monte Young, Nam June Paik, George Brecht, Al Hansen and others.[272] Roth had contributed to Fluxus events and publications in the preceding years and while in New York he strengthened his ties to Fluxus artists there.[273] By early 1965 Roth had secured a teaching position at the Rhode Island School of Design, where he invited La Monte Young

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artist monograph, which Roth rejected, asking instead to use the award money for a new book project; the *Copley Book.* See Dobke and Walter, "Breaking the Spell," 64-65; Dirk Dobke, "Copley Book," 80.

[271] See Dobke and Walter, "Under the Spell of the Concrete," 54; *ROTH TIME,* ed. Vischer and Walter, 90-96; Dobke, *Dieter Roth in America*, 7-17.

[272] Roth had met Emmett Williams at Jean Tinguely's exhibition in Basel in 1960. Williams was a part of the Darmstadt Circle of experimental poets 1957-1959, with Roth's close friend Daniel Spoerri and Klaus Bremen and André Thomkins. As Williams explained in an interview published in the quarterly art journal *Umbrella* in March 1998, his poetry work which is most often associated with Fluxus was already developed in Darmstadt. See Judith A. Hoffberg, "Interview with Emmett Williams: Fluxus Artist Extraordinaire," in *Umbrella,* vol. 21, no. 1 (1998), 3-7, accessed Sept. 2016, http://ulib.iupuidigital.org/cdm/compoundobject/collection/Umbrella/id/2327/rec/64; Dobke and Walter, "Breaking the Spell," 64.

[273] Whether or not Roth attended any of the earliest pre-Fluxus and Fluxus concerts in Europe in the late 1950s and early 1960s remains unclear. However, in an interview with art historian Dirk Dobke in 2003 Alison Knowles claims that she first met Roth in Europe, although she is not able to identify the year. She states: "There were many times when we would be together in the same room or group, and that I'm sure of. That was mostly in Europe." Dobke, *Dieter Roth in America*, 43.

and Marian Zazeela, and Nam June Paik and Charlotte Moorman, to perform for his students.[274]

Roth's arrival in New York in 1964 coincided with the disintegration of Fluxus unity that summer, brought on by George Maciunas's attempts to mold the loose network of artists into a politically and artistically cohesive collective, or what he called a "common front."[275] Like so many of the Fluxus artists, Roth reacted negatively to Maciunas's endeavors, and chose soon to divorce himself from Maciunas's brand of Fluxus. As Emmett Williams, Roth's close friend, recalled in 2003:

> The Fluxus people tried to get him to flux with them, but Dieter wasn't the least bit interested in joining George Maciunas' Fluxus "collective" and being told what to do and what not to do. I have a letter from him in which he says he met Maciunas only twice, and "was no fun to be with." He describes him as a teacher who compensated for his own lack of talent by scolding his students, to keep them in line with his own restrictive moral code. Besides, Dieter was his own one-man movement.[276]

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[274] Dirk Dobke recounts in his study of Roth's years in the U.S. that Roth attended La Monte Young and Marian Zazeela's concerts in New York on a number of occasions alongside friends. He further notes that Roth starred in one of Nam June Paik's first videos, recorded in Paik's studio in Canal Street in New York. The video features Roth reading his *Scheisse* (shit) poems, which he had his students at Providence print as *Scheisse. Neue Gedichte von Dieter Roth* (Shit. New Poems by Dieter Roth, 1966). See: Dobke, *Dieter Roth in America,* 7-17. Marian Zazeela notes that the performance for Roth's students at the Philadelphia College of Art, on 9 October 1964, was a "historic concert in the development and presentation of La Monte's music because it was the first public concert of La Monte singing with his 'Theatre of Eternal Music' ensemble." Ibid, 39. Nam June Paik recalls him and Charlotte Moorman playing the *Pop Sonata* for Roth's students. See Ibid, 41.

[275] See Hannah Higgins, *Fluxus Experience* (Berkeley & Los Angeles, California; London, U.K.: University of California Press, 2002), 71-82.

[276] Dobke, *Dieter Roth in America*, 31.

The evocation of Maciunas's "moralism," is, I will argue, key to understanding Roth's decision to detach himself from the official project of Fluxus headed by Maciunas. Nevertheless, Roth continued to associate and collaborate with artists affiliated with Fluxus in the late 1960s and seventies. Despite his peripheral position within Fluxus, he shared critical artistic concerns, interests and tactics with Fluxus artists, and considering Roth's work in relation to Fluxus reveals crucial insights about his practice.

Fluxus and the Reconceptualization of the "Concrete"

Dieter Roth's contribution to *An Anthology* was titled *Black page with holes.*[277] It consisted of a sheet of white cardboard into which Roth had punched holes, creating what he called a *Dichtungsmaschine* (poetry machine), a chance-based, un-subjective, method of composing poetry.[278] It was realized in performance by Jackson Mac Low at a concert at the Living Theatre in New York on 5 February 1962 intended to raise funds for the publication of *An Anthology,* and again at YAM Day (11-12 May 1963); a two-day concert of new music, plays, happenings, simultaneities, poetry, dance, etc., organized by George Brecht and

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[277] *An Anthology of Chance Operations.* Edited by La Monte Young. New York: La Monte Young & Jackson Mac Low, 1963. The Living Art Museum Collection, N-480, Reykjavík, Iceland.

[278] Jackson Mac Low recounts that Roth had asked that his work be realized in heavy black paper like cardstock, but that as it was hard to find and expensive to buy so Roth's piece ended up being realized in white cardstock instead, and retitled *white page with holes,* in the second edition of *An Anthology.* As Mac Low recounts "This was quite all right with Dieter, who also informed us by mail that it didn't even matter whether we followed his original pattern exactly." Jackson Mac Low, "Wie George Maciunas die New Yorker Avantgarde kennenlernte und möglicherweise erfand, was man später FLUXUS nannte," in *Wiesbaden Fluxus 1962-1982: Eine kleine Geschichte von Fluxus in drei Teilen,* ed. René Block (Wiesbaden: Harlekin Art; Berlin: Berliner Künstlerprogramm das DAAD, 1983), 118-119, Exhibition catalogue.

Robert Watts, and presented, on the occasion of *An Anthology's* publication, at the Hardware Poets Playhouse on West 54th St., New York.[279] Mac Low has recounted his performance of Roth's work at the Living Theatre as follows:

> I burned ten holes through a rectangle of much heavier cardboard, with some regard, but not too much, for Diter's pattern. I placed a ladder on the stage and spread out on the floor around it a number of books, magazines, and newspapers. Then I mounted the ladder to its top, dropped the cardboard, and read whatever words were visible through the holes. I repeated this action several times.[280]

Roth's idea of a *Dichtungsmaschine* was realized again in different form shortly before his arrival in the New York in 1964, when his *Poem Machine* was published in the February issue of the Fluxus newspaper *cc V TRE.* There, accompanying a photograph of the crown of Roth's bald head were the instructions: Cut hole in head along dotted line to produce Diter Rot's 'Poem Machine.'"[281] [Figure 2.17]

Noting the considerable number of Fluxus works that incorporate openings of various kinds, art historian Natilee Harren has speculated that the importance of the figure of the hole may be located in its essential resistance to representation; "For Fluxus artists the hole was anti-illusionistic, anti-significatory, brutally concrete."[282] More broadly, Harren argues that "the idea of the concrete was to become a fundamental – if not *the* fundamental – precept of Fluxus, the primary means by which the art-life-divide, which had preoccupied generations

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[279] Ibid

[280] Ibid. The spelling of Roth's name here reflects the artist's stylistic simplification his name in the late 1950s and early sixties. For more on this see Bernadette Walter, "diter rot," in *ROTH TIME,* 42.

[281] See Natilee Harren, "Fluxus and the Transitional Commodity," in *Art Journal,* vol. 75, no. 1 (2016), 58.

[282] Harren, "Fluxus and the Transitional Commodity," 60.

of avant-garde artists, would finally be breached."[283] Harren's thesis of the centrality of the concrete to Fluxus is important to the present project, in that it allows a greater understanding of Dieter Roth's participation in Fluxus and the logic of the trajectory of his work from Concrete art to process-based works.

Natilee Harren's thesis is reinforced by historians Wilfried Dörstel, Rainer Steinberg and Robert von Zahn's account of pre-Fluxus history and their description of Concrete art as the most significant existing framework for experimental art in Europe in the postwar period.[284] As Dörstel, Steinberg and von Zahn point out, the first Fluxus performances in Europe spoke directly to, and were distinctly informed by, this context.[285] Importantly, however, if the European tradition of Concrete art provided a model of anti-individualism that suited young artists looking for an alternative to Abstract Expressionism or *art informel* in the early 1960s, its recourse to idealist, universalizing, philosophy proved unpalatable to many of the younger generation, including Dieter Roth as I have argued.

In George Maciunas's account it was the concept of the concrete that united the various works presented at the first concert he organized in Europe, held at Rolf Jährling's Galerie Parnass in Wuppertal on 9 June 1962 under the title "Après John Cage." In a text

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[283] Natilee Harren, "Objects Without Object: The Artwork in Flux, 1958-1969" (PhD diss., University of California, Los Angeles, 2013), 99, accessed Feb. 2016, ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global.
[284] Dörstel, Steinberg and Von Zahn, "The Bauermeister Studio: Proto-Fluxus in Cologne 1960-62," 56-60. Similarly emphasizing the significance of Concrete art, Alistair Rider describes the Swiss artist and designer Max Bill's winning of the international prize for sculpture at the first Sao Paulo Biennial in 1951 as ushering in "the period of greatest engagement with concrete aesthetics on both sides of the Atlantic." See Alistair Rider, "The Concreteness of Concrete Art," in *Parallax,* vol. 21, no. 3 (2015), 340.
[285] Ibid.

written by Maciunas for the occasion and read in German by Arthur C. Caspari at the opening, the concrete is defined as a form of "art-nihilism," fundamentally opposed to the traditional notion of art, and in direct relation to nature: "Anti-art is life, is nature, is true reality – it is one and all."[286] A few years later, Fluxus artist Dick Higgins would offer his own definition of the concrete, similarly emphasizing the concept's relation to physical reality: "'Concrete' means: 'Real, no ideal; Of or pertaining to immediate experience; physical, not abstract or general.'"[287] As these definitions indicate, the notion of the concrete, inherited from Concrete art,[288] underwent a significant reconceptualization in Fluxus. The emphasis on the sensual immediacy and concrete materiality of painting as an object – succinctly captured in Theo Van Doesburg's statement that "nothing is more concrete, more real than a line, a colour, a surface"[289] – is extended, in Fluxus, to include the ephemeral materiality of real phenomena, of subjects and objects situated outside of the traditional art object and in constant flux; the flight of butterflies in La Monte Young's *Composition 1960*

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[286] George Maciunas, "Neo-Dada in Music, Theater, Poetry, Art," (1962) in *What's Fluxus? What's Not! Why,* 89-90. Earlier, in this essay, Maciunas writes: "Neo dada… or what appears to be neo dada manifests itself in very wide fields of creativity. […] Almost each category and each artist however, is bound with the concept of Concretism ranging in intensity from pseudo concretis, surface concretism, structural concretism, method concretism (indeterminacy systems), to the extreme of concretism which is beyond the limits of art, and therefore sometimes referred to as anti-art, or art-nihilism." Ibid, 89.

[287] Dick Higgins, *Jefferson's Birthday / Postface* (New York: Something Else Press, 1964): 83-4. Quoted from Harren, "Objects without Object," 99.

[288] As Alistair Rider notes, the word "concrete" originally entered art discourse in 1920s post-revolutionary Russia. See Rider, "The Concreteness of Concrete Art," 340.

[289] Van Doesburg et al., "Art Concret. The Basis of Concrete Painting," 181.

#5 (1960), soap bubbles in Ay-O's *Rainbow No. 1 for Orchestra* (Date Unknown), or water dripping into empty vessels in George Brecht's *Drip Music* (1959).[290]

The most significant factor allowing for this extension of the concrete into a broader field of experience within Fluxus was the development of the Event score, by American artist George Brecht between 1959 and 1962, which has in the last few decades come to be recognized – most significantly through the research and writing of Liz Kotz and Julia Robinson – as a crucial innovation representing the first moment of a conceptual turn in postwar artistic practice.[291]

As both Kotz and Robinson have noted, Fluxus Event scores bear a structural affinity to the readymade, both models operating as an index pointing to a wide referential field. Crucially, this function entails, as Kotz points out, a shift in authority from the artist/author to the receiver: "Brecht's extension of the Duchampian readymade model to include not only objects but also temporal and perceptual phenomena derives from Cage's aesthetics of 'indifference,' in which meaning is constructed by the listener or receiver, not the artist or 'author.'"[292] Art historian Hannah Higgins' account of Fluxus history underscores the significance of this shift, prioritizing the experiential dynamics of Fluxus works, and the active role they demand of the viewer. However, while Kotz's and Robinson's accounts address the interactive nature of Fluxus work from a post-structuralist framework,

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[290] See Ken Friedman, Owen Smith and Lauren Sawhyn, eds., *The Fluxus Performance Workbook* (Performance Research e-Publications, 2002).

[291] See Liz Kotz, "Post-Cagean Aesthetics and the 'Event' Score," in *October,* vol. 95 (Winter 2001), 54-89; Liz Kotz, "Language Between Performance and Photography," in *October,* vol. 111 (Winter 2005), 3-21; Julia Robinson, "From Abstraction to Model: George Brecht's Events and the Conceptual Turn in Art of the 1960s," in *October,* vol. 127 (Winter 2009), 77-108.

[292] Kotz, "Language Between Performance and Photography," 10.

emphasizing the Event score's triggering of conceptual cognitive processes,[293] Higgins prioritizes Fluxus works' direct address to an embodied viewer.[294]

The fundamental importance of the relational and experiential dynamic of Fluxus works has been repeatedly commented on. More particularly, several scholars – Hannah Higgins included – have argued that in their inclusion of not only visual, but haptic, auricular, olfactory and gustatory elements, Fluxus works dissolve the traditional distinction between subject and object on which Western philosophy is historically based and challenge the discursive foundations of the critical establishment of art history.[295] Accounts such as Higgins's that emphasize the sensual, experiential dynamics of Fluxus work and their direct address to the viewer's body – to the sense of touch, hearing, taste and smell – complicate considerably Kotz's and Robinson's theorization of the Fluxus Event as a first step towards the conceptual turn in postwar artistic practice.

Significantly, Natilee Harren's focus on the concept of the concrete in Fluxus aims to dissolve the apparent contradiction between Fluxus's sensual and cognitive dynamics. Harren describes the Fluxus Event score as one part of "a two-pronged strategy which aimed for the radical reconceptualization of form into a dialectical twinning of the abstract and

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[293] In her analysis of the linguistic structure of Fluxus Event scores, Julia Robinson declares: "Through the score, Brecht asserts the conceptual nature of the denotative function of language – precisely the relationship between signifier and signified – using it as the matrix for engaging a subject. The score's material object (or referent) is never completed, or *depicted,* by the artist; it is supplied by the reader, each time it is read." Robinson, "From Abstraction to Model," 95-96.

[294] See Higgins, *Fluxus Experience*, 20-68.

[295] See, e.g. Higgins, *Fluxus Experience;* Kristine Stiles: "Between Water and Stone. Fluxus Performance: A Metaphysics of Acts," in *In the Spirit of FLUXUS,* ed. Elizabeth Armstrong et al. (Minneapolis: Walker Art Museum, 1993), 62-99, Exhibition catalogue; Natasha Lushetich, *Fluxus: the practice of non-duality* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2014).

concrete."[296] Importantly, as Harren notes, "Fluxus strategies were developed precisely to critically *resist* the dematerialization and virtualization of the artwork and the sign at the earliest moment of the cultural shift we now understand as postmodernism."[297] Furthermore, this resistance, she argues, was grounded in Fluxus artists' critical attempt to de-link art from the capitalist reification of objects.[298]

In addition to the mobile format of the Event score, Fluxus practice was, as Harren notes, "deeply intertwined with an engagement with objects – objects of a certain kind, seen as avatars of 'the concrete.'"[299] The other "prong" of Fluxus's two-fold strategy, these objects – whether mobilized through performance or gathered for private exploration in a Fluxkit or Fluxbox multiple – are typically unspectacular, cheap, everyday objects that serve a particular function within the context of Fluxus performances, Events or multiples, and are easily interchanged. Furthermore, as Harren notes, they are gathered and mobilized specifically to resist the process of mediation or representation. This is achieved, Harren argues, firstly through the useless and "tasteless" character of the objects contained in Fluxkits, which resist the capitalist process of value accumulation.[300] And secondly, through

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[296] Harren, "Objects Without Object," 97. Harren also notes that "Brecht's turn to more and more capacious language would be, in other words, all the more to allow the concrete, actual, material circumstances of each individual realization to shape the final outcome of the piece." Ibid, 97.

[297] Ibid, 233.

[298] Ibid, 118.

[299] Ibid, 97-98.

[300] Harren writes: "Fluxus objects collapse the categories of commodity and capital in their aggressive literalization of the Marxian notion that a thing may only realize its value when it is kept in circulation. However, unlike capitalist exchange, this is one in which value does not accumulate. It is rather an anti-accumulatory exchange that deliberately perpetuates loss. The rear-guard strategy of the

their frequent evocation of processes of penetration, passing through and taking in, which calls the subject's attention to the "absolute material presence of the 'thing-at-hand,'"[301] as well as the constant threat of its loss.[302] In so doing, they alert the viewer, finally, to the absolute material concreteness of the human body and its inevitable deterioration and eventual disappearance, thus decentering the subject's relationship to the object.[303]

Dieter Roth's Material

Despite their differences, both post-structuralist and phenomenological accounts of Fluxus posit that indeterminacy enters into the work of art primarily through the active engagement and participation of the human subject with the artwork as an object, whether that engagement is perceived as primarily embodied or cognitive. This framework cannot account, however, for the dynamics at play in Dieter Roth's biodegradable works from the 1960s onward. Significantly, these rely explicitly on the activity and production of nonhuman beings, forces and matter. Roth's manifold mold pictures, for instance, are continually transformed through material processes and the activity of micro-organisms**,** such as bacteria and yeast, while his self-portrait *P.O.TH.A.A.VFB. (Portrait of the artist as Vogelfutterbüste [birdseed bust],* 1970), [Figure 2.18] made from a mixture of chocolate and

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Fluxbox was to be bad art (trashy and/or tasteless), bad sculpture (fingered up), and a bad commodity (useless and always-already obsolete)." Ibid, 183.

[301] Ibid, 26

[302] In framing Fluxus resistance to the reification of the art object in terms of an insistence on the concrete but ephemeral material presence of the "thing-at-hand," Harren – perhaps inadvertently – associates her thesis with Martin Heidegger's critique of the reification characteristic of modern society and philosophy. In any case Heidegger remains conspicuously absent from Harren's account.

[303] See Ibid, 26-26 and 173; Harren, "Fluxus and the Transitional Commodity," 45-69.

birdseed and mounted in open air, was intended to be consumed and digested by birds and thus, ultimately, entering and dispersing into the larger surrounding ecosystem.

Like Fluxus works, Roth's biodegradable works resist reification through their explicitly material yet ephemeral concreteness. However, there is a crucial difference in the way that these works function. Fluxus works – both Events and Fluxkits – have been described as collapsing the distinction between subject and object for the sake of bringing the viewer into a sensual, interactive, social, relationship with material things, whether "dead" or "alive." The works are "activated" by the viewer's cognitive and sensual engagement with the work. In contradistinction, Dieter Roth's biodegradable works reveal the artwork's material intertwinement and interaction with other nonhuman entities and beings, an engagement independent of the human being. In other words, in looking at – and smelling, and feeling – Roth's biodegradable works the viewer becomes aware that the artwork's form is the effect of an ongoing process that expands long past his or her engagement with it.

As I have argued, Roth's incorporation of biodegradable materials into his practice was grounded in his rejection of the idealist and moralist premises of Concrete art, and more broadly of the German philosophical and aesthetic tradition. Furthermore, I have argued that Roth came – partly through his confrontation with Iceland, its environment and history – to identify the heart of that tradition as the distinction of nature from culture, and of animals from human beings, and that it is in explicit opposition to this distinction that Roth's destruction of language (in the *Literaturwürste*) and his broader incorporation of biodegradable matter into the art object must be understood.

That the material play inaugurated by the introduction of foodstuffs and other biodegradable matter into the artwork was understood by Roth in relation the concept of

nature – and implicitly, its opposition to culture – is, I believe, confirmed by his statement to reporter Ingólfur Margeirsson in 1978: "Sour milk is like landscape, everchanging. That is how works of art should be; they should change like man, grow old and die."[304] Both landscape and matter is figured as alive by Roth, in the same sense as the human being. By extension, the human is exposed as radically material and transient.

Fluxus "Moralism" and Dieter Roth's Animals

In 1963, Roth proposed, through the mediation of Danish gallerist Addi Köpcke, that George Maciunas produce a Fluxus edition of his *Literaturwürste.*[305] Maciunas, who had just returned to New York from Europe, was at the time compiling *Fluxus 1* (publ. 1964), the first in a series of Fluxus anthologies or yearboxes, composed of a mailing crate with envelopes filled with various small objects, event scores and documentations. For reasons unknown, Maciunas refused Roth's idea. However, as a letter from Maciunas to Dick Higgins, written on 22 August 1966 attests, this did not amount to a rejection of Roth's work or its potential inclusion in future Fluxus publications. Maciunas writes: "[you say] 'you did not drain people away from Fluxus.' I agree, that you did not drain people – but only their works, which is the same thing (Ben Patterson, Ayo, Watts- Manifesto, Brecht essay, Diter Rot who had promised collaboration 2 years ago, but has changed his mind since, etc.,

[304] Ingólfur Margeisson, "'Ég dreg bara kvaðratrótina.' Dieter Rot listamaður segir frá," in *Þjóðviljinn,* September 3, 1978, 10 and 22, accessed July 2016, http://timarit.is/view_page_init.jsp?issId=222345&pageId=2862627&lang=is&q=%C9g%20dreg%20bara%20kva%F0ratr%F3tina.

[305] Dobke, "Literaturwurst," 74.

etc.)."[306] Roth seems, then, to have begun to distance himself from the official project Fluxus, headed by Maciunas, sometime between 1963 and 1966.

In many ways Roth's work is aligned with Fluxus. Roth shared with Fluxus artists the fundamental goal, firstly, of developing artistic strategies that evade an easy distinction between the subjective and objective – rejecting both the view of art as a representation of the artist's inner subjectivity and of an external objective reality – and, secondly (and relatedly), of evading the artwork's reification as commodity. Furthermore, he utilized some of the same methods as Fluxus artists towards the achievement of these goals; for instance, the figure of the hole, chance procedures, the incorporation of gustatory, olfactory, auditory and haptic elements into the work of art, and the mobilization of the tasteless, the abject and the bodily. Nevertheless, Roth's work also contradicts some of the elements typically identified as characteristic of Fluxus work. Most crucially, Roth's work defies the tendency of Fluxus work towards what is variously described as "simplicity," "specificity," "concentration," and "minimalism."[307]

Many Fluxus works, especially those who received Maciunas' official approval, exhibit a degree of formal and structural simplicity which is completely alien to Dieter Roth's art. Significantly, this is often linked to many Fluxus artists' interest in the spiritual teachings of Zen Buddhism, introduced primarily through John Cage.[308] George Brecht's

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[306] George Maciunas, Letter to Dick Higgins, August 22, 1966, in *What's Fluxus? What's Not! Why,* 176.

[307] See Dick Higgins, "Fluxus: Theory and Reception," in *The Fluxus Reader,* ed. Ken Friedman, 217-236; Ken Friedman, "Fluxus and Company," in *The Fluxus Reader,* ed. Ken Friedman, 237-253.

[308] See e.g. Stiles, "Between Water and Stone," 62-99; Lushetich, *Fluxus: The Practice of Non-Duality*; Smith, *Fluxus: The History of an Attitude*; Daniel T. Doris, "Zen Vaudeville: A Medi(t)ation in the Margins of Fluxus," in *The Fluxus Reader,* ed. Ken Friedman, 91-135.

Fluxus Events are often taken to be paradigmatic of the concentrated, minimalist, and disinterested character of Fluxus work. Like John Cage's non-intentional compositions, Brecht's Events rely on an idea of passive, non-interfering observation or impersonal un-emotional action.

In contradistinction, Roth's turn away from representation insists on active expression. Crucially, however, artistic "expression" is reconfigured by Roth as a deeply material process, and in terms of material interactions not unique to the human being, thus undermining the traditional notion of the art object as the product of a uniquely human process of cognitive self-reflection in which the human being distances itself from the natural world. At the heart of this difference, is, I believe, Roth's rejection of the ideological distinction of the human being from the animal, and by extension of culture from nature. Roth's refusal and inversion of these terms, foundational to western aesthetics, can be gleaned in two comments the artist made in and on the interface of his work with Fluxus.

In an interview published in Fluxus artist Robert Filliou's 1970 book *Teaching and Learning as Performing Arts,* Filliou – who understood his book as part of an extended project of defining the principles of what he called a "poetical economy," meant to help resolve the socioeconomic problems introduced by late capitalism – asked Roth to contribute his thoughts on the social and economic role of creativity. Roth responded with an observation on the uniquely human ability for, and obsession with, representation:

> We are human beings, you know, we are these people who imagine always, that they always can put something out of themselves. We always believe there is a life outside ourselves. Animals would never believe this. For a pig... I could imagine, if I were a pig, I couldn't even see a book, everywhere would be pig, pig, pig... See, we have this fantastic fun to write a book, where we behave as if we have more words than one. And the animals, they don't even write books. If

> they would write books, I think, they wouldn't go far. Each animal would put its name and would tell the publisher how big the book should be... So ... the pig writes the word "pig" 20 Million times. And they would have the most marvelous book, because this would describe their lives thoroughly, and funnily even.[309]

Nine years later, when asked about his relationship to Fluxus, Roth commented on John Cage: **"**Oh, he's a better artist than I am. Yes. But I think he's a moralist and I'm not. That is I don't tell people what's good or bad, or something."[310] He went on to add: "I'm not going to let anybody tell me not to be unmoral. Why shouldn't we be pigs? Why shouldn't I experience the fall? Why shouldn't I be allowed to express it, why shouldn't I be silly? It's all in the context of so-called art so it doesn't hurt anybody."[311] It would seem to me that Roth came increasingly to understand the German ideal of culture, and of the human, as *inhumane,* and that by extension its opposite, the natural and the animalistic, came to be interpreted by Roth as more *humane.*

It is in the context of this turn that Roth's complicated relationship to Fluxus can be understood. If Cage understood non-intentionality in terms of a spiritual practice of "letting go" of the instinctual drives of the ego, for George Maciunas these terms were largely circumscribed by a political project of the rejection of capitalist individualism.[312] Roth's

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[309] Robert Filliou, *Teaching and Learning as Performance Arts* (Cologne: Verlag Gebr. Koenig, 1970),
153.

[310] Vischer, "Roth Time: A Retrospective," 15.

[311] Ibid.

[312] In *Fluxus News Letter* number 5, published on 1 January 1963, Maciunas demanded that all Fluxus authors should give exclusive rights for their past, present, and future material to Fluxus. See Higgins, *Fluxus Experience*, 77.

refusal to let his work be subsumed under this political project can, I believe, be understood in the same terms as his rejection of Cage's moralism, as rooted in Roth's adamant resistance to any and all philosophical, religious or political ideology.

Several comments made by Roth on the development of his artistic practice testify to his deep aversion to ideology. Speaking with artist Richard Hamilton in 1974, Roth framed the development of his artistic practice and his rejection of Concrete art in terms of his gradual recognition of an authoritarian and inhumane attitude inherent in these art forms. He further positions Concrete art within a broader field of existence, as an attitude or a way of being, related to a broader authoritarian tendency within Germanic culture.[313] He would expand further on his impressions of the repressive character of Germanic culture two years later:

> I take it that the German children are all simply repressed. I know that, too, from my own experience. And once they're free, once the repression let's off, they hit back, and since in Germany the repression is performed on the parent's side by moral outpourings or is very heavily veiled with verbalisms, the struggle, this unequal struggle between the old and the young, they likewise begin to defend

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[313] Talking to Hamilton, Roth described his early artistic efforts in characteristically self-deprecating terms, as based on a subconscious, almost animalistic, impulse to beat his elders at their own game (thus distancing himself from the supposed rationality and lofty ideals associated with Concrete Art): "I was not only impressed with their work and what they actually did, but also I was afraid of a kind of abstract beings in Switzerland that would, I felt, impose on anybody in the world a kind of strict, geometrical, inhuman pressure. […] It was not so much a way of going into art, a research in the field of art or in the field of printing, or the field of writing, but it was [a] fight always against the people that I admired or that I feared, stylistically speaking." Richard Hamilton and Dieter Roth. "The Little World of Dieter Roth," Broadcast 23.1.1974, BBC, Radio 3. Quoted from Etienne Lullin and Emmett Williams, *Collaborations: Dieter Roth, Richard Hamilton / Relations – Confrontations,* with a foreword by Vicent Todoli (London: Edition Hansjörg Mayer, 2003), 35.

> themselves verbally, which leads to all this system-building. That's roughly how I saw it. Or think of it now.[314]

Implicit in Roth's comments is a consistent concern with freedom and individuality, a position which is likely related to his early life experiences which, like those of so many of his generation, were deeply coloured by the trauma of the second world war as well as the political environment in Germany leading up to it.[315] Roth's recognition of the inhumanity of the German ideal of culture and of the human can be understood, I believe, in the context both of his childhood experiences and his confrontation with Icelandic culture in the postwar period.

Roth's aversion to political and philosophical "system-building," and more crucially perhaps, its dissemination and imposition upon others, seems to me to have increasingly informed his whole artistic practice after 1960, as well as his attitude towards and methods of

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[314] Irmelin Lebeer-Hossmann, "Dieter Roth Interview von Irmelin Lebeer-Hossmann (Hamburg 28.-30. September 1976)." Quoted from Dobke, *Dieter Roth in America*, 21. Roth's comment follows a discussion of his time at Die Kunstakademie Düsseldorf, where he taught alongside Joseph Beuys, and his negative views of the student movements there which Roth describes as "an outburst of stupidity and impudence." Ibid.

[315] As a boy Roth participated in the compulsory paramilitary training of the Hitlerjugend (the Hitler Youth), the Pimpfe (Cubs), and as his son Björn has recounted, the Nazis had picked Roth out from his peers as an especially gifted child and wanted to enroll him in their training academies, designed to nurture future Nazi Party leaders. See Musikforschung Basel, "Selten gehörte Sprache: Björn Roth über Dieter Roth," Vimeo, accessed April 2015, https://vimeo.com/103991081. Because Roth's father was a Swiss national, however, Roth's parents were able to prevent their son from this fate, by sending him to Switzerland during the summer months of 1939, 1941, 1942 and 1943, through the private Swiss foundation Pro Juventute. Following the bombardment of several German cities in 1943, Roth was separated from his parents, staying with his adoptive parents, the Wyss family, who also took in Jewish and Communist refugees, most of whom were artists or intellectuals. See Dirk Dobke and Bernadette Walter, "Beginnings," in *ROTH TIME,* 18.

teaching.[316] Significantly, as in his rejection of the terms of representation, Roth framed his rejection of political ideology by an evocation of the twin concepts of the human and its other, the animal.[317] However, while Roth's aversion to political and ideological system-building was at the heart of his rejection of Maciunas's political ambitions for Fluxus, this did not translate into a total rejection of Fluxus, as is evidenced by his long-standing friendship and collaborative relationship with Fluxus artists Emmett Williams and Robert

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[316] Roth was infamous for his teaching methods, which included giving all students' the second-best grade in an effort to encourage their independent thought. Roth described his approach to teaching with the phrase "non-teaching as teaching." Speaking with Irmelin Lebeer-Hossmann in 1976, Roth explained his attitude to teaching with reference to his aversion to students' expression of admiration through mimicry which he seems to have experienced as not only as bothersome but actually threatening to his own identity: "I don't understand these people, or I don't feel that they're emulating me or paying me a compliment – they are hard on my tracks in order to steal into my house and force me out of it. If he was stronger he would murder me as it were. What I mean is: I have that feeling." Lebeer-Hossmann, "Dieter Roth Interview von Irmelin Lebeer-Hossmann (Hamburg 28.-30. September 1976)." Quoted from Dobke, *Dieter Roth in America*, 21.

[317] As I have noted, in 1974 Roth described his impression of abstract art – and the "abstract beings" of Switzerland more broadly – in terms of an inhumane pressure towards precision and purity of form. Two years later, in 1976, Roth described his youth in Germany in *Ein Lebenslauf von 46 Jahren* (A curriculum vitae of 46 years). There he writes: "Roth toiled and trembled for thirteen flattened years in that empire of barking, beating, strangling, snatching Tartars, both males and females. He lived in a constant downpour of blows from stick or fist, in a hail of bitching – near and far – bullying hordes of cannibals everywhere, a quaking, quivering *bunch of dogs pissing in their pants*, clobbered and cowed, quaking and quivering, jerking off in shitty sheets, he cringed through four of those thirteen years of screeching bombs and whistling grenades." Dieter Roth, "Ein Lebenslauf von 46 Jahren," in *Sammlung Cremer. Sammlungskatalog Landesmuseum Münster* (Münster: Landesmuseum, 1976), Collection catalogue. Quoted from Dobke and Walter, "Beginnings," 18. [My emphasis]

Filliou. This, and Roth's fluid position between the U.S. and Iceland would have a significant impact on the development of artistic practice within SÚM from 1965.

SÚM and Fluxus

On 17 May 1965 – shortly before the opening of *SÚM I* and the establishment of the SÚM collective – the small Reykjavík society was presented with an artistic event unlike any it had ever experienced. Fluxus artists Nam June Paik and Charlotte Moorman commenced their two-month tour of Europe with a concert in Lindarbær, a small concert hall in the city. Paik had previously presented his *action music* on a tour of Scandinavia in 1961, at Galerie 22 in Düsseldorf in 1959 and at the studio of Mary Bauermeister's in Cologne in 1960, as well as in a series of concerts all over Europe organized and presented under the name of Fluxus.[318] However, while these events had established Paik's reputation within artistic circles, in 1965 his work must have been unknown to the majority of the Icelandic audience.

In Reykjavík Paik and Moorman performed works by Paik, American composers John Cage and Earle Brown, and Italian composer Giuseppe Chiari. In addition, they premiered a composition by Dieter Roth. Titled *Vögguvísa 4 við Kristmann Guðmundsson* (*Lullaby 4 to Kristmann Guðmundsson*), the score for Roth's work consisted of a book by Kristmann Guðmundsson, an Icelandic author whose romantic novels, many written in Norwegian, had gained international recognition – with each alphabetical letter calling for a specific tone, prescribed by Roth.[319]

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[318] See e.g. Petra Stegman, ed., *'The Lunatics are on the Loose...': European Fluxus Festivals 1962-1977* (Potsdam, Germany: DOWN WITH ART!, 2013), Exhibition catalogue.

[319] See "Öll hljóð jafn rétthá - Flúxusfólk í heimsókn hjá Musica Nova," in *Þjóðviljinn,* May 16 1965, 12, accessed May 2015,

The performance included Moorman bursting balloons, breaking glass, blowing whistles and diving into a barrel full of water, as well as repeatedly hitting Paik both with her hands and her bow, and dramatically breaking the glass of a landscape painting with a hammer.[320] The inclusion and destruction of a landscape painting seems to have been uniquely arranged for the Icelandic context. The performance completely bewildered the Icelandic audience. One moment of the concert, when "the Korean exposed his yellow behind," as one reporter put it, and proceeded to play the piano with his bare bottom, seems to have been particularly shocking to the Reykjavík audience [Figures 2.19-2.25].[321] Another critic referred to the event as "garbage from the trash cans of big cities."[322] The racist and xenophobic tone of the discussion aside, the audience reaction is somewhat understandable in light of Icelanders' inexperience with experimental art of this type, blending music, visual art and performance. After all, the experimental theatre and music of the historical avant-garde had completely bypassed Iceland.[323] It furthermore reflects common attitudes in Iceland in the 1950s and sixties toward the flood of modern, largely American, popular culture – of jazz music, popular magazines, Hollywood movies and American television –

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http://timarit.is/view_page_init.jsp?issId=216029&pageId=2779397&lang=is&q=%F6ll%20jafn%20r%E9tth%E1.

[320] See "Búksláttur og uppstigningur úr öskutunnu á tónleikum," *Tíminn,* May 19, 1965, 16 and 14, accessed May 2015, http://timarit.is/view_page_init.jsp?issId=238863&pageId=3258709&lang=is&q=og%20og.

[321] "Tónleikarnir hjá Musica Nova," in *Fálkinn,* June 8, 1965, 6-9, accessed May 2015, http://timarit.is/view_page_init.jsp?issId=295680&pageId=4384765&lang=is&q=Musica%20Nova.

[322] Þorkell Sigurbjörnsson, "Rusl," in *Vísir,* May 18, 1965, 6, accessed May 2015, http://timarit.is/view_page_init.jsp?issId=183325&pageId=2377517&lang=is&q=RUSL%20Paik.

[323] See Hjartarson, "The Early Avant-Garde in Iceland," 615-630.

that was coming into Icelandic society in the aftermath of WWII; such "garbage" being perceived as threatening to the moral fabric and identity of the nation.[324]

Paik's and Moorman's concert was organized by Icelandic composer Atli Heimir Sveinsson and presented by Musica Nova, a municipal organization of young musicians devoted to supporting contemporary music.[325] Atli Heimir had studied at the State Academy in Cologne, Germany, from 1959 to 1963 and attended summer courses in Darmstadt where he studied with Karlheinz Stockhausen and became acquainted with Paik.[326] However, Paik and Moorman's decision to kick off their tour on this small island in the Northern Atlantic Ocean was most likely influenced to a greater extent by the artists' friendship with Dieter Roth.

After SÚM's foundation in 1965, SÚM artists continued their project of the translation of avant-garde practices into the Icelandic context. Expanding their practice and activities, they took up several of the crucial precepts and tactics of Fluxus, experimenting with the adoption of artistic formats developed by Fluxus artists, while confronting the ideological and institutional framework for art and culture in Iceland. In what follows I discuss SÚM artists adoption of chance procedures, Fluxus Events and Happenings, and the artist multiple.

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[324] See the first chapter of this dissertation.

[325] Árni H. Ingólfsson, "Clothing Irons and Whisky Bottles – Creating an Icelandic Musical Avant-Garde," in *A Cultural History of the Avant-Garde in the Nordic Countries 1950-1975,* ed. Ørum and Olsson, 273-290.

[326] Ibid.

Chance Procedures and Anti-Form

In September 1968 Dieter Roth participated in the second outdoor sculpture exhibition held by the Reykjavík School of Visual Arts. His contribution consisted of three unremarkable and barely noticeable objects. Lying in the grass on Skólavörðuholt was a box filled with chocolate, glass and iron titled *Box for Picture Cultivation* (1968) [Figure 2.26], a pile of envelopes, and various items from Roth's studio which he camouflaged by spray-painting it in the exact same rusty red as the gravel underneath, repeating the gesture from the Reykjavík School of Visual Art exhibition seven years prior. Behind the glass pane covering the front of Roth's *Box for Picture Cultivation*, visitors could discern the form of a mountain molded in chocolate and left to rot, an obvious reference to the classic ideal of the Icelandic landscape tradition. The contribution of Roth's close friend and collaborator Magnús Pálsson to the same exhibition demonstrates his adoption of some of the fundamental tenets of Roth's practice post-1960.

On the grassy hill in Skólavörðuholt, Magnús presented a sculpture titled *Kjóll* (*Dress*, 1968) [Figure 2.27], made from an old dress that had been stuffed with paper and soaked in plaster. The paper removed from within, only the bulging and creased form of the dress remained. Magnús's clothing sculptures – more of which were exhibited at his first solo-exhibition a few weeks later – have come to be known collectively as *Bestu stykkin* (*The best pieces,* 1965) [Figure 2.28], a title derived from Roth, who named the least presentable one *Langlangbesta stykkið* (*The top-notch absolute best piece*), the next *Langbesta stykkið* (*The absolute best piece*) and so on.[327] They are also known in Iceland as *Frúöld* (*Lady Century*), a title composed from the Icelandic *frú* (lady) and *öld* (century), which when

[327] English translation of titles is my own.

combined sound similar to *hrúgöld*, a plural form of *hrúgald,* meaning mass, cluster, or agglomeration.[328] The inversion of values in the titles given by Roth, Magnús's choice of material – found "everyday" items such as his mother's old dresses and the cheap, brittle and weak substance of plaster – and his half-hazard working methods, all signaled the artist's rejection of classical aesthetics, and the notion of high art as virtuosic mastery over material; a rejection undoubtedly encouraged by the example set by Roth's change of practice in the years prior.

As I have argued, for Roth the subversion of the traditional values of fine art was accompanied by a critical transgression of the traditional boundaries of culture and nature. While there is no sign of Magnús Pálsson's conscious adoption of such philosophical concerns, Fluxus's fundamental rejection of humanist ideals is emblematically captured in his *Best pieces.* While some of Magnús's "agglomerations" were quite shapely and erect, others limped down to the ground, sometimes amounting only to a heap of hardened material on the floor. The use of clothing as the building material for the sculptures invokes, but ultimately leaves absent, the human body, creating an eerie feeling of a nonhuman presence, and of the erasure of the human from the artwork.

Shortly after the outdoor sculpture exhibition, on the 21 September 1968, the first solo-exhibition of work by Magnús Pálsson opened at Ásmundarsalur í Reykjavík. There Magnús exhibited his clothing sculptures, along with miniature sculptures under glass, painted reliefs, silk-screen prints, wallpaper strips with photocopied drawings, and four artist

[328] Translation of the Icelandic title *Frúöld* into English is my own.

books created from newspaper [Figure 2.29].[329] As one critic noted, the exhibition functioned more like a theatrical presentation than a typical art exhibit, the overall effect and the atmosphere created being more important than individual works,[330] a result probably of Magnús's theatrical background and his training in the art of stage design.[331]

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[329] Laufey Helgadóttir, "Leikreglur hendingarinnar," in *Íslensk listasaga frá síðari hluta 19. aldar til upphafs 21. aldar,* vol. IV, ed. Ólafur Kvaran, 35-43.

[330] See "Leikhús myndlistanna," in *Vísir,* Sept. 28, 1968, 6, accessed July 2015, http://timarit.is/view_page_init.jsp?issId=184148&pageId=2390213&lang=is&q=leikh%FAs%20Leikh%FAs.

[331] Magnús studied stage design at the Crescent Theatre School of Design, in Birmingham, England, 1949-51. 1953-54 he studied fine art at the Icelandic College of Arts and Crafts (Myndlista- og handíðaskóli Íslands), and at the Akademie für Angewandte Kunst in Vienna 1955-56. In 1961, Magnús participated in the founding of the the experimental theater group Gríma (Mask), alongside actors Erlingur Gíslason, Þorvarður Helgason and Kristbjörg Kjeld, playwright Guðmundur Steinsson, and Vigdís Finnbogadóttir who, in 1980 was elected President of Iceland, thus becoming the world's first democratically elected female president. between 1961 and 1970 Gríma put on plays by modern avant-garde playwrights such as Jean-Paul Sartre, Jean Genet, Samuel Beckett and Bertolt Brecht, as well as plays by modern Icelandic playwrights, including Dieter Roth's brother-in-law, Oddur Björnsson. Roth designed the group's logo, and in 1964 SÚM artist Jón Gunnar Árnason was employed by the group constructing set designs for its production. See "'Gríma' sýnir 'Læstar dyr' eftir Sartre í Tjarnarbíói," in *Morgunblaðið,* Nov. 11, 1961, 3, accessed July 2015, http://timarit.is/view_page_init.jsp?issId=111733&pageId=1339230&lang=is&q=Gr%EDma%20s%FDnir%20L%E6star%20dyr%20Sartre; "'Biedermann og vargarnir' í Tjarnarbæ," in *Þjóðviljinn,* March 27, 1962, 3, accessed July 2015, http://timarit.is/view_page_init.jsp?issId=217358&pageId=2795378&lang=is&q=Biedermann%20og%20vargarnir%20og; Gríma," in *Frúin,* July 1, 1962, 10-11 and 21, accessed July 2015, http://timarit.is/view_page_init.jsp?issId=375797&pageId=6114387&lang=is&q=FR%DAIN; "Gríma frumsýnir 'Frjálsa framtakið' á sunnudagskvöld," in *Tíminn,* Oct. 30, 1965, 2, accessed July 2015, http://timarit.is/view_page_init.jsp?issId=134025&pageId=1713096&lang=is&q=FRAMTAKI%D0%20Gr%EDma; "Gríma sýnir Gleðidaga í Lindarbæ," in *Tíminn,* Nov. 23, 1965, 2, accessed July

In an interview published ten years later, Magnús described the wallpaper and the silk-screen prints he exhibited in 1968 as the result of his interest in aleatory methods of creation: "I create these rules of play and draw the image according to them, in order to rid the image of a given structure. I was trying to let something else take over, like a game or an open system of chance. To try to rid myself of what I had learned in school."[332] Thus, as Magnús explained, the wallpaper, titled *Ferð* (*Journey*, 1966) [Figure 2.30], was created by continuously feeding india-ink drawings through an ammonia copy machine,[333] so that the drawings overlaid in various ways creating supposedly random compositions.[334] Magnús's employment of the notion of games, and the use of rules of play as a strategy to undermine traditional notions of authorship, links his practice to Fluxus. For, as the artist and Fluxus scholar Owen F. Smith has noted, play was integral to Fluxus, not solely because of the numerous references to games and gags of all sort found in Fluxus works but more significantly as "a kind of model for open-ended discourse that stresses relations rather than production and communication of discrete pieces of information."[335] Magnús, who shared a

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2015, http://timarit.is/view_page_init.jsp?issId=134109&pageId=1989471&lang=is&q=Gr%EDma%20Gle%F0idaga; Ingólfsson, "Æviatriði – Biography," 83-85.

[332] Kristmundsson and Harðarson, "Viðtal við Magnús Pálsson," 7.

[333] An ammonia copy machine is a type of printer popular among architects for the creation of large-scale blueprint plans.

[334] In this same interview, Magnús also describes ideas for happenings or events that he had in the early 1960s but never materialized, and the documentation of which was lost in a fire at Magnús's studio. Among them, was an event in which thirty to forty horses (Magnús's original conception called for donkeys rather than horses) were led on stage in a darkened theater. The performance would then consist of any sounds and commotion created as the horses began to move around the stage and interact. See Kristmundsson and Harðarson, "Viðtal við Magnús Pálsson," 3-13.

[335] Owen F. Smith, "Playing with Difference: Fluxus as a World View," in *Fluxus Virus, 1962-1992.*

studio space in Reykjavík with Roth from late 1960 or early 1961 until the latter's departure to the U.S. in 1964, would have been intimately aware of Roth's involvement with Fluxus, and the significance of Fluxus to Magnús's own work in the mid- to late-1960s is emphasized by the artist himself, in the interview from 1978 as well as in subsequent comments on his work.[336]

Magnús's entropic agglomerations also evoke American artist Robert Morris's description of a new type of sculptural practice, in the essay "Anti-Form," published in *Artforum* in April that same year. Importantly, for Morris, the incorporation of chance – often achieved through the use of soft, fragile or unstable materials – into sculptural practice was rooted in artists' rejection of the idealist premises of modern art.[337] While the notion of "anti-form" obviously cannot have been a factor in the conception or making of Magnús Pálsson's agglomerations, I would posit that it is not unlikely that in 1968 Magnús understood his work in similar terms as those described by Morris, that is, as a rejection of the idealist premises of the modern aesthetic conception of the artwork. Magnús could have adopted such concerns through his introduction to Dieter Roth, as well as and by extension, to the work of Fluxus artists and artists associated with Nouveau Réalisme.

Shortly after the opening of Gallery SÚM, on 18 March 1969, the SÚM collective presented its second group exhibition, titled simply *SÚM II.* It included work by nine group members as well as by Magnús Pálsson and Dieter Roth. Magnús exhibited wallpaper strips

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[336] Asked about artistic influences, Magnús mentions Robert Filliou, Emmett Williams, George Brecht, Al Hansen, Wolf Vostell, Nam June Paik and LaMonte Young, all of whom were at some time affiliated with Fluxus. See Kristmundsson and Harðarson, "Viðtal við Magnús Pálsson," 8.
[337] See Robert Morris, "Anti-Form," (1968) in *Continuous Project Altered Daily: The Writings of Robert Morris* (Cambridge, Mass.; London, U.K.: The MIT Press, 1993), 41-46.

titled *Object-endurfæðing* (*Object-rebirth,* 1969**)** printed with images of headless, limbless bodies; the human form fragmented and objectified, "reborn" as object. Roth contributed a picture made of chocolate and his *Lyktarorgel* (*Smell organ*, 1965) [Figure 2.31]. Composed of cardboard tubes hung together on ropes from a stick – like a pan-flute – each tube emitted its own individual smell, like the tones of the musical instrument. In its address to the audience's sense of smell and its evocation the aural, the organ testifies to Roth's rejection of modern aesthetics' strict limitations of media and prioritizing of the visual over other senses, a negation central to Fluxus's extension of the concrete into everyday, ephemeral and embodied experience.[338]

The local press, however, seized on Sigurður Guðmundsson's *Galti 69* (1969) [Figure 2.32] as proof of the ridiculous lengths that young artists would go to in their reinvention of art. Gathered in one corner of the gallery, Sigurður presented an unassuming heap of hay with a coverage spread on top of it – as if waiting to be bound or perhaps having just been untied – the hay tumbling out onto the floor from underneath. Beside the haycock was a sign that read "A NICE GIRL AND A BOY," injecting the mound of hay with sexual connotations through the innuendo of a "romp in the hay." In an interview with a local paper the artist declared: "Farm fields are an outdoor sculpture-exhibit all summer."[339] That the

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[338] In her discussion of the function of taste and smell in Fluxus works, art historian Hannah Higgins has commented on the art historiographical problems that arise when analyzing such works, which as she notes cannot be adequately dealt with as a communication system, like language: "For unlike words, smells offer a primary form of experience; they occur 'in between the stimulus and the sign, the substance and the idea.'" Higgins, *Fluxus Experience*, 45.

[339] "'Listrænn' hestburður af heyi kostar 30 þús," in *Tíminn,* March 19, 1969, 12 and 10, accessed July 2015,

ultimate form which the pile of hay took was dependent less on the artist's creative efforts than the play of the material properties and the force of gravity again evokes Robert Morris's notion of "anti-form," while Sigurður's declaration – broadening the context of art to include the material complexity of everyday life – also links his work to Fluxus. In light of Sigurður's comment, the artwork "in itself" – the physical presence of the mound of hay in the space of the gallery – might be understood to function, as the readymade and the Fluxus Event, like an index, pointing the viewer's attention outside of the gallery space, to the farm fields surrounding Reykjavík. As such, Sigurður's haycock reveals a very particular, local, Icelandic understanding of the postwar everyday, one still informed largely by the rural and the agricultural.

Finally, one year later, the contribution of Sigurður's brother, Kristján Guðmundsson, to the fourth outdoor sculpture exhibition at Skólavörðuholt drew considerable public attention.[340] While referencing the ancient tradition across the Northern Atlantic of using stones to mark one's travels across vast terrains of land devoid of cultural markers and monuments, the permanence of Kristján Guðmundsson's *Vörðubrot* (*Ruined Cairn,* 1970) [Figure 2.33] is undermined through the artist's use of bread instead of stone. As time passed, and the sculpture naturally began to decompose, it was deemed a hazard to public health and was removed by the authorities shortly after the exhibition opening, an event

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http://timarit.is/view_page_init.jsp?issId=247863&pageId=3366520&lang=is&q=listr%E6nn%20hestbur%F0ur.

[340] In 1970 the outdoor sculpture exhibition on Skólavörðuholt was presented as part of the first Reykjavík Art Festival, and included work by SÚM members Kristján Guðmundsson, Magnús Tómasson, Jón Gunnar Árnason, and Dieter Roth contributed a work on paper. See Ragnarsdóttir and Guðnadóttir, *Útisýningarnar á Skólavörðuholti 1967-1972*, 124-145.

which prompted SÚM to write a public letter to the Reykjavík Health Department, published in *Tíminn* (Time) on 3 July. Accusing the authorities of censorship, the artist collective pointed out the irony of city authorities expressing concern about pollution from Kristján's work, when in the previous year they allowed the multinational corporation Rio Tinto to build an aluminum plant in Straumsvík, on the edge of the city.[341]

As a report in the monthly journal *Spegillinn* (The Mirror) pointed out, an exhibition of works by Dieter Roth, a close associate of SÚM artists, which opened at the Eugenia Butler Gallery in Los Angeles earlier that spring, under the title *Staple Cheese (A Race)*, had been threatened with the same fate but ultimately been allowed to stand.[342] Roth's exhibition consisted of an installation of thirty-seven suitcases stuffed full of various unwrapped cheeses and left to rot.[343] Each day, one suitcase was opened for the audience to view – and smell – inevitably also attracting larvae, maggots and flies, and filling the gallery space with

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[341] See "Hætta fyrir heilbrigðið. Opið bréf frá SÚM til heilbrigðisyfirvalda, og annarra, sem telja sér málið skylt," in *Tíminn,* July 3, 1970, 3 and 15, accessed June 2015, http://timarit.is/view_page_init.jsp?issId=262751&pageId=3684109&lang=is&q=fyrir%20heilbrig%F0i%F0%20S%DAM.

[342] See "Brauðið og osturinn," in *Spegillinn,* August 1, 1970, 27, accessed June 2015, http://timarit.is/view_page_init.jsp?issId=293517&pageId=4340547&lang=is&q=Brau%F0i%F0%20og%20osturinn.

[343] As Roth explained, it was his impression of Emmett Williams's "cheesy" exhibition, which opened at the Eugenia Butler Gallery shortly before, that inspired his exhibition. Williams's exhibition continued in tandem with *Staple Cheese (A Race),* at Roth's request. For a more detailed discussion of the exhibition see Dirk Dobke, "Staple Cheese (A Race)," in *ROTH TIME,* 130-131. In an interview with Ingólfur Margeirsson in 1978, Roth also related his idea of the exhibition to a popular German saying that goes "Who's left this suitcase here?," used when someone breaks wind. See Ingólfur Margeirsson, "'Ég dreg bara kvaðratrótina,'" 10, 22. Translated and excerpted in *Theories and Documents of Contemporary Art,* ed. Stiles and Selz, 348.

an overwhelming stench which seems to have imprinted itself in the memory of those who visited the exhibition.[344]

Like Dieter Roth's biodegradable works, Kristján Guðmundsson's subversion of the sculpture in *Ruined Cairn* relied on the activity of fungi and animals as well as natural elements such as rain and wind to actuate the process of decomposition, while Magnús Pálsson's plaster agglomerations owe much of their variability to the fickleness and fragility of plaster as a material. As in Roth's biodegradable work, what is highlighted by Kristján and Magnús – and Sigurður Guðmundsson's extension of the artwork into the rural and agricultural – is the artwork's materiality, not as an autonomous object, but as an active, performative and fundamentally unstable agglomeration, which undermines the artwork's supposed mediating function as a representation.

SÚM Events and Happenings

In the interview from 1978, mentioned above, Magnús Pálsson claims that, in the early 1960s, shortly after his introduction to Roth, he was working on a number of ideas for Happenings and Events. He does not clearly differentiate Fluxus Events from Happenings and seems to treat the two terms as interchangeable. As he describes in the interview, one of his scores called for thirty to forty horses (Magnús's original conception called for donkeys rather than horses) to be led onto the stage of a darkened theater. The ensuing performance would then consist of any sounds and commotion created as the horses began to move

[344] See e.g. Matt Stromberg, "Art of the Possible: A Reappraisal of the Eugenia Butler Gallery" (January 7, 2015), *KCET.org.,* accessed June 2018, https://www.kcet.org/shows/artbound/art-of-the-possible-a-reappraisal-of-the-eugenia-butler-gallery.

around the stage and interact. None of Magnús's ideas were realized, however, and no documentation remains of them, as they were destroyed in a fire at the artist's studio.[345]

Thus, it was not until 1965 that Icelanders were introduced to the Fluxus Event as an artform. Shortly prior to Nam June Paik and Charlotte Moorman's concert at Lindarbær, Atli Heimir Sveinsson organized a performance of experimental music at the same venue accompanied by an exhibition of "graphic music" at Café Mokka in Reykjavík. The exhibition – which was curated by Hreinn Friðfinnsson, a young artist who would soon become one of the founders of SÚM – featured scores by Karlheinz Stockhausen, John Cage, Sylvano Bussotti, Mauricio Kagel, Luciano Berio, Toshi Ichiyanagi, as well as Icelandic composer Magnús Blöndal Jóhannsson and Atli Heimir himself. Works by the same composers were presented by Atli Heimir at the concert in Lindarbær in February.[346] Documentation of the exhibition at Mokka in 1965 is scarce and the concert presented concurrently at Lindarbær does not appear to have made the same impact as Paik and Moorman's concert shortly thereafter.

Other members of SÚM did not try their hands at the conception or performance of Happenings or Events until after the establishment of Gallery SÚM in 1969. In mid-April

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[345] See Kristmundsson and Harðarson, "Viðtal við Magnús Pálsson," 3-13.

[346] See "Frumflutt verk eftir íslenzkt tónskáld," in *Þjóðviljinn,* February 14, 1965, 12, accessed June 2015, http://timarit.is/view_page_init.jsp?issId=224886&pageId=2905486&lang=is&q=verk%20frumflutt%20verk%20eftir; "Sýning í Mokka," in *Morgunblaðið,* February 26, 1965, 13, accessed June 2015, http://timarit.is/view_page_init.jsp?issId=112768&pageId=1364287&lang=is&q=s%FDning%20%ED%20Mokka; "Nýstárleg sýning opnuð í Mokka," in *Þjóðviljinn,* Feb. 26, 1965, 12, accessed June 2015, http://timarit.is/view_page_init.jsp?issId=226327&pageId=2928776&lang=is&q=Mokka%20S%FDning%20s%FDning%20opnu%F0.

1969 Gallery SÚM presented two nights of Happenings. On the 12th of that month, SÚM member Þórður Ben Sveinsson presented his *Gúmmífrelsi* (*Rubber Freedom*, 1969) [Figure 2.34], and the following day the gallery's guests witnessed a work by Kristján Guðmundsson, titled *Ó! Kei? (Oh! Kay?,*1969).[347] Judging from accounts published in local papers both events might be better described as performances than Happenings, as no interaction is recorded as having taken place between the performers and the audience and no action was required on part of audience members at all.[348]

Gúmmífrelsi had been performed by Þórður Ben shortly prior, on 9 March 1969, in his hometown of Vestmannaeyjar, an island located off the south coast of Iceland. The performance at Gallery SÚM began with Þórður stringing ropes across the gallery, from four posts, to create an arena within which various items, including plastic bins, a floor mop, a map of Iceland printed on a card, three large cods and about a dozen capelin, were enclosed. Þórður and his wife Karólina then entered the ring and began interacting with these items, performing various actions or tasks under the blaring of popular songs emitting from three tape-recorders. They would, among other things, sew buttons onto the cods, wrap the fish in

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[347] Gallery SÚM's diary, which is preserved at the archives of the Living Art Museum, notes that Þórður Ben's *Gúmmífrelsi* was performed twice on 12 April, first at 4pm and again at 9pm, and that each performance lasted about forty to fifty minutes. About 130 people attended these performances. Kristján Guðmundsson's *Ó! Kei?,* presented on 13 April, lasted about thirty-three minutes and was attended by about thirty people. See SÚM, Gallery SÚM Diary, 1969. The Living Art Museum Archives, Reykjavík.

[348] See J. Th. H., "Íslensk 'uppákoma' við Vatnsstíginn," in *Þjóðviljinn,* April 15, 1969, 6, accessed June 2015, http://timarit.is/view_page_init.jsp?issId=226417&pageId=2930190&lang=is&q=vi%F0%20Vatnsst%EDginn; "Þorskurinn jarðsunginn í skeleik," in *Tíminn,* April 15, 1969, 16 and 14, accessed June 2015, http://timarit.is/view_page_init.jsp?issId=247885&pageId=3366818&lang=is&q=%ED.

rags and arrange them into buckets along with Icelandic flags and flags of the American Red Cross, crush a set of red roses with a hammer, smear a small statue of the Blessed Virgin with red lipstick before "dressing" it in a rubber condom, wash the map of Iceland with wet rags. The performance also included a "funeral" for the fish under the Icelandic national anthem.[349]

Though the exact meaning of Þórður and Karólína's symbolic actions is ambiguous, *Rubber Freedom* seems to have been intended as a confrontation with Icelandic identity and the nation's economic, political and cultural dependency on foreign powers. In comparison, Kristján Guðmundsson's *Oh! Kay?* was decidedly minimal, and deliberate void of the political, religious and cultural symbolism of Þórður's work. Under a sequence of colored lights (in the primal colors of yellow, red, and blue) and the deep droning tone of an electric organ, Kristján dragged – as it appears, in a decidedly simple fashion and without any theatrics – an empty paper bag along the floor of the gallery.[350] A fundamentally painterly concern with the effect of color on sensation and perception informs Kristján's work. Formalist connotations of color's "absolute" qualities are avoided, however, by Kristján through the expansion of the artwork into the space of the gallery and the introduction of movement and sound.

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[349] "Rabbað við Þórð Ben Sveinsson um myndlist og fleira. Kjörorðið er: Framfarir, gæði," in *Fylkir,* March 7, 1969, 1 and 4, accessed June 2015, http://timarit.is/view_page_init.jsp?issId=352893&pageId=5599504&lang=is&q=Rabba%F0%20vi%F0%20%DE%F3r%F0%20Ben; J. Th. H., "Íslensk 'uppákoma' við Vatnsstíginn," 6; "Þorskurinn jarðsunginn í skeleik," 16 and 14.

[350] "Þorskurinn jarðsunginn í skeleik," 16 and 14.

Adopting the format of the Fluxus Event score, Kristján Guðmundsson's *Performables & Other Pieces – Objects / Poems, Music, Events* [Figures 2.35-2.46], from 1970, is composed of ten cardboard cards with printed text, drawings, stamps and various materials attached. Collected and presented in a simple wooden box, it is reminiscent of *Water Yam*, the collection of Event scores by George Brecht published by George Maciunas in 1963. It was exhibited at Kristján's solo-exhibition, titled *Sculpture,* at Gallery SÚM in April 1970.[351]

Like Brecht's scores, some of the cards in Kristján's *Performables & Other Pieces* include direct instruction for simple actions. For instance, *Sugar Event,* the score for which reads: "Sugar Event: (cover the word sugar with sugar)" [Figure 2.39]. Underneath, a pencil-drawn arrow points the reader's attention down the card, towards the word *sugar*, typed and glued to the cardboard, directing the reader to replace the symbolic textual representation with the "real" thing, thus inaugurating her physical, sensual interaction with the material of sugar – its texture, smell and taste. Others combine text with material objects, suggesting correspondence between the two, and/or phenomena outside of the artwork's frame. For instance, one card contains a piece of recording-tape glued to the cardboard vertically, with the word *Sky* printed on a piece of white paper attached above, and the explanation "(recording-tape dots loaded with sound of rain falling from grey sky)" below [Figure 2.41]. Requiring no direct, tactile or physical engagement, this score nevertheless engages the reader's physical senses indirectly, triggering not only various conceptual associations, but

[351] See Kristján Guðmundsson, April 11 – May 1, 1970. Sculpture: poetry – music – event (Icel. Kristján Guðmundsson, 11. apríl – 1. maí 1970. Skúlptúr: ljóð – músík – object – event. 1970). Gallerie SÚM Papers, Unfiled [Icel. óskráð]. The Archive of Artist-Run Initiatives. The Living Art Museum, Reykjavík, Iceland.

also, possibly, emotions or sensations related to memories of the experience of witnessing grey skies and hearing the sound of rain falling.

The suggestion – indicated by the subtitle *Objects / Poems, Music, Events* – of considering natural everyday perceptual phenomena like rain as music, signals Kristján's adoption of John Cage's theories of non-intentionality and his practice of the creation of states of immersion, crucial to Fluxus artists' extension of the Duchampian readymade to frame everyday experience as art.[352] It is, furthermore, demonstrative of SÚM artists' adoption and experimentation with the artist multiple, another artistic format central to Fluxus.

Artist Multiples and the Democratization of Art

SÚM artists' adoption of the format of the artist multiple follows from the presentation of several such works by Fluxus artists at Gallery SÚM in 1969. SÚM's third group exhibition, *SÚM III,* opened on 13 September 1969. It was billed as an "international art exhibition" and presented works by eleven Icelandic artists and seventeen foreign artists, most of whom were associated with Fluxus, including George Brecht, Robert Filliou, Ben Vautier, Joseph Beuys and Daniel Spoerri. [Figure 2.47] To accommodate the exhibition, the space of the gallery was extended into the hallway and the yard outside. There, greeting visitors upon their arrival was a three-meter tall sculptural replica of a Molotov cocktail by Róska, who had arrived from Rome to participate in the exhibition.[353] The contributions of other SÚM members

[352] For more on this see Robinson, "From Abstraction to Model," 77-108; Kotz, "Post-Cagean Aesthetics and the 'Event' Score," 54-89.

[353] According to SÚM member and author Einar Guðmundsson, Róska had initially proposed to haul a bus into the gallery yard, soak it in gasoline and light it up, an idea which caused uproar among

varied greatly in scope and material and included sculpture, found objects, painting, assemblages and installations. The contributions of Fluxus artists consisted primarily of artist multiples; small, simple, easily reproduced objects or assemblages that were inexpensive and easily transported.[354] They included Joseph Beuys's *Intuition* (1968),[355] Daniel Spoerri's *Attention Œuvre d'Art* (*Attention Artwork*, 1968) and Robert Filliou's *Création Permanente* (1969), a work of characteristic simplicity, in which Filliou explored what he called the "principle of equivalence" by positing a general equation between things "well made," "badly made" and "not made."[356]

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other, less politically inclined artists in the group and was subsequently rejected. See Guðmundsson, "Barist gegn afturhaldi og tregðu," 8-10.

[354] Roth's longtime friend the Romanian-born Swiss Fluxus artist Daniel Spoerri is credited with introducing the term "multiple" into art discourse with his publishing initiative Edition MAT (*Multiplication d'Art Transformable*), begun in 1959. The first Edition MAT included works by Yaacov Agam, Pol Bury, Marcel Duchamp, Karl Gerstner, Man Ray, Jesus-Raphael Soto, Jean Tinguely, Victor Vasarely and Dieter Roth, who contributed a black-and-white version of his *book* (1958-59), consisting of eighteen loose cardboard pages with no binding, into which Roth manually cut vertical, horizontal, and diagonal slits of varying lengths. See Walter, "Books," 48-49; "What are multiples?," Pinakothek der Moderne, Munich, acccessed June 2018, http://pinakothek-beuys-multiples.de/en/what-are-multiples/.

[355] Beuys's multiple was produced in thousands of copies by Wolfgang Feelisch's publishing house, *VICE-Versand* in Remscheid in North Rhine-Westphalia, Germany. The upper line, which is shorter and bounded by short horizontal pencil strokes on each end, was intended as a symbolic indication of the determinacy of rational thought, while the lower line, which extends from one side of the box and remains open at the other, evokes the more open-ended and indeterminate route of intuition. See Joseph Beuys, *Jeder Mensch ist ein Künstler: Gespräche auf der documenta 5/1972* (Frankfurt am Main & Berlin: Ullstein Sachbuch, 1988). Quoted from: "Intuition," Pinakothek der Moderne, Munich, accessed June 2018, http://pinakothek-beuys-multiples.de/en/product/intuition/.

[356] Robert Filliou, *The Secret of Permanent Creation,* ed. Anders Kreuger (Antwerp: M HKA; Milan: Mousse Publishing; New York: Artbook D.A.P., 2017), 44-76; Anna Dezeuze, "Robert Filliou, Génie

Sometimes mass produced but often hand-assembled from various ordinary, unremarkable found objects and distributed through mail-order for very low prices, multiples were designed to circumvent the traditional gallery system and to democratize art. The same ideal of art's democratization was foundational to Þórður Ben Sveinsson's *Ræktunarsvæði nr. 3* (*Cultivation Area no. 3,* 1967), presented at the first outdoor sculpture exhibition at Skólavörðuholt in 1967, which I discussed in the previous chapter. Listed under the name Sun-Trip-Company (S.T.C.O.) – a company founded and directed by Þórður with the goal of providing art "services" to the public – visitors to the exhibition could order their own "cultivation areas" to be set up at their home at their own convenience. As Þórður explained, in an interview published in the weekly paper *Fylkir* (Old Norse name meaning "chief") two years later, the company – which the artist did not expect to be profitable – provided various artistic and literary services to the public, including the provision of various sculptures for private use, including a "morning sculpture" (Icel. "morgunskúlptúr"), "W.C. sculpture" and "bedroomsculpture" (Icel. "svefnherbergisskúlptúr").[357]

While SÚM never embarked on the collective production and distribution of multiples like Fluxus, individual members did experiment with the format. For instance, as I have noted, Kristján Guðmundsson. Like Kristján's *Performables & Other Pieces* (1970), Jón Gunnar Árnason's *Cellophony* from 1972 [Figure 2.48] is clearly inspired by John Cage's expansion of the concept of music, as well as the development of the Fluxus Event

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sans talent. Musée d'art modern Lille Métropole, Villeneuve d'Ascq, 6 December 2003 – 28 March 2004," Exhibition Review published in *Papers of Surrealism,* no. 2 (Summer 2004), 1-10, accessed September 2016, https://www.research.manchester.ac.uk/portal/files/63517386/surrealism_issue_2.pdf.

[357] "Rabbað við Þórð Ben Sveinsson um myndlist og fleira," 1 and 4.

score into instruction pieces, such as Yoko Ono's *Instructions for Paintings,* produced for an exhibition at the Sogetsu Art Center in Tokyo in May 1962 and later published in printed form, along with other instruction pieces by Ono, in her self-published *Grapefruit* (1964). Jón Gunnar's work consists simply of a bundle of cellophane in a paper cylinder with plastic caps on each end. Instructions for the work's "activation" through performance are printed on paper glued to the capsule and read: "1. Take the cellophane out of the tube, crumble it and put back into the tube. 2. Wait a minute. 3. Take the cellophane out and put it on the table and listen. Cellophony. This concert is based on the fact that when sound and concentration integrate into one feeling you begin to hear sounds which are more important than what you are listening to." As Peter Osborne has recently argued, the instruction piece can be understood as the "first form or genre of conceptual art."[358] More specifically, Osborne marks Yoko Ono's *Instructions for Paintings* as the "first wholly language-based works of visual art."[359] However, as he notes, by opening the artwork onto an infinity of possible activities and relations, Ono's instructions – and Fluxus Events more generally – also contradict Joseph Kosuth's definition of conceptual art as an "analytical proposition" concerned with an internal and autonomous process of self-reflectivity.[360]

That SÚM never embarked on collective production of artist multiples is most likely explained by the general restrictions that follow from the small size of Icelandic society and the limited institutional framework for art in Iceland, specifically the relative lack of a traditional profit-driven gallery system. Nevertheless, SÚM's "miniature" exhibition at

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[358] Peter Osborne, *Conceptual Art* (London; New York: Phaidon, 2002), 21.

[359] Ibid, 22.

[360] Ibid, 32.

Gallery SÚM in 1971, discussed in the previous chapter, and the experimentations of individual SÚM artists with the format of the multiple was premised on their interest in democratizing art by offering the public small and affordable art objects for purchase. Furthermore – and like their adoption of the text-based format of the Event score and its extension into action – on the artists' efforts to undermine and evade the conscription of the artwork into a capitalist system of value accumulation by the creation of works of art from inconspicuous, everyday cheap material.[361]

As I have shown, in the years directly following the establishment of SÚM in 1965 and in the first years of Gallery SÚM's operation, SÚM artists took up and experimented with both of the central formats of artistic practice developed within Fluxus; the Fluxus Event score and the Fluxus multiple, or Fluxkit. SÚM artist's translation of Fluxus practices into the Icelandic context, however, was mediated by Dieter Roth and marked by his materialist take on the reconceptualization of the concrete within SÚM.

Conclusion

Fluxus's extension of the readymade into the ephemeral concrete reality of everyday experiences was premised on their rejection of the reification of the art object and of social relations under capitalism. This of course, is also one of the crucial premises of the

[361] All objects displayed at SÚM's "miniature exhibition" on 4 Dec. 1971 were for sale for a modest prize. They included paintings, drawings, ceramics, plaster sculptures, reliefs, knitted objects, weaving, and text-based works by nineteen artists, including Magnús Pálsson's "landscape hats," discussed in the previous chapter. See "Jólabazar listamanna," in *Tíminn,* Dec. 23, 1971, 2, accessed June 2015, http://timarit.is/view_page_init.jsp?issId=264087&pageId=3715281&lang=is&q=LISTAMANNA%20j%F3labazar.

conceptual practices that developed in Europe and America in the late 1960s and early 1970s and the supposed "dematerialization" of the art object. However, while Fluxus was a significant precursor to conceptual art, it also challenges the conceptual framework through which conceptual art has typically been understood. As Natilee Harren recognizes, the reification of the artwork under capitalism functions precisely through processes of de-materialization and virtualization. In direct opposition to this, Fluxus works draw attention to the material presence of the art object, while simultaneously opening the artwork up to its environment, thus rejecting its supposed autonomy and distance from the vulgar sphere of everyday life and politics. Central to this opening up of the artwork is the introduction of chance both in the production and reception of the artwork, and the collapsing of the functions of the artist and the viewer. As I have noted, the introduction of non-visual elements into the artwork within Fluxus, and Fluxus works' direct address to the viewer's physical senses has been theorized as enacting a radical dissolution of the traditional distinction between subject and object. And yet, in failing to account for and theorize the active role of nonhuman entities, beings, and materials in Fluxus work, both post-structuralist and phenomenological accounts of Fluxus ultimately uphold this same distinction: it is only through the active engagement of the human subject that the mute and passive object is mobilized.

In contrast, I have argued that through his incorporation of biodegradable materials, Dieter Roth extended the material presence of the artwork to such an extent as to completely undermine the traditional distinction of the spheres of culture and nature, allowing for the active and independent engagement of nonhuman entities, beings, and materials with the art object. Significantly, this had a crucial ethical dimension, related to Roth's recognition of the

complicity of the conceptual distinction of culture from nature in perceptions of humanity and inhumanity, and of the project of modernity in colonial domination. This was brought on, at least in part, by Roth's confrontation with the "underdeveloped" environment and culture of Iceland.

Roth's de-differentiation of nature and culture had an immediate impact on the work of several SÚM artists and significantly shaped their translation of the practices of Fluxus into the Icelandic context, as I have demonstrated in my discussion of Magnús Pálsson's, Kristján Guðmundsson's and Sigurður Guðmundsson's subversion of the stability of the art object through the incorporation of unstable and natural materials. Furthermore, as I will show in the subsequent chapter, it would continue more indirectly to mark the development of artistic practice within SÚM, as SÚM artists extended their practice into a global artistic sphere in the 1970s.

Chapter 3. Romantic Conceptualism, or the Rematerialization of the Artwork

> My attitude is rather more agrarian than artistic. It involves sowing, farming, and harvesting. And even if the result isn't art by definition, one has to do the work.
>
> - Sigurður Guðmundsson, 2004[362]

As recent scholarship has demonstrated, the characteristics and the historical genealogy of so-called "conceptual art," or practices associated with the broader term "conceptualism," are much more complex, geographically expansive and varied than once assumed. Both terms remain historically and theoretically underspecified. Alexander Alberro, for instance, has noted that "conceptualism during the mid to late 1960s was a contested field of multiple and opposing practices, rather than a single, unified artistic discourse and theory."[363] Yet, in its broadest definition, Alberro comments, "the conceptual in art means an expanded critique of the cohesiveness and materiality of the art object, a growing wariness toward definitions of artistic practice as purely visual, a fusion of the work with its site and context of display, and an increased emphasis on the possibilities of publicness and distribution."[364] In addition, conceptualist negations of the modern aesthetic conception of the artwork are distinctly associated with a self-reflexive interest in and exploration of the properties of language, and of various other systems of representation and structures of relation.

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[362] See Lily van Ginneken, "Situations: Photo Works by Sigurður Guðmundsson," in *Dancing with the Horizon,* ed. Kristín D. Jóhannesdóttir (Reykjavík: Crymogea, 2014), 15.

[363] Alexander Alberro, "Reconsidering Conceptual Art, 1966-1977," in *Conceptual Art: A Critical Anthology,* ed. Alexander Alberro and Blake Stimson (Cambridge, MA and London, UK: The MIT Press, 1999), xvii.

[364] Ibid, xvii.

For Eve Meltzer, the "scientistic and seemingly disaffected mode of rendering the visual field," often associated with conceptual practices, emerges out of conceptual art's interface with what she calls the "structuralist imaginary," or more specifically, the (post-)structuralist "dream of the information world;" a fantasy of the world as an information system, inspired in part by information and systems theories.[365] As Meltzer demonstrates in her study *Systems We Have Loved: Conceptual Art, Affect, and the Antihumanist Turn,* published in 2013, the work of many prominent European and American conceptual artists can be understood to react both affirmatively and critically to the "baseline claim" of this imaginary, defined by Meltzer as the notion that "only within sign systems were the individual and the social comprehensible as such, and that, more profoundly still, the world itself could not be, indeed *was not,* without the sign."[366] While for some this signaled the promise of social revolution, for others it was a nightmare.[367]

Meltzer's study offers a critical counterbalance to Benjamin Buchloh's highly influential account of the character and significance of conceptual art, which traces its origins

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[365] See Eve Meltzer, *Systems We Have Loved: Conceptual Art, Affect, and the Antihumanist Turn* (Chicago & London: The University of Chicago Press, 2013), 29-69.

[366] Ibid, 55.

[367] Meltzer quotes American artist Robert Smithson essay "The Establishment," published in an Italian publication titled "The Challenge of the System" (It. "La sfida del sistema") in 1968, in which Smithson writes: "[the system] is a nightmare from which I am trying to awake." Robert Smithson, "The Establishment," in *Robert Smithson: The Collected Writings,* ed. Jack D. Flam (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1996), 97-99. Quoted from Meltzer, *Systems We Have Loved,* 66. Furthermore, she notes Robert Morris's statement "Everywhere the *signified* assaults and overwhelms the signifier," which overturn the foundations of (post-)structuralism. See Rosalind Krauss, "Robert Morris: Around the Mind/Body Problem," in *Art Press,* no. 193 (July/August 1994), 32. Quoted from Meltzer, *Systems We Have Loved,* 66. [Meltzer's emphasis].

to a minimalist "aesthetic of administration" and postminimalism's extension into a "critique of institutions."[368] In this account, the mimicry of "the operating logic of late capitalism and its positivist instrumentality" is eventually surpassed by the development of the same tactics into tools for a critique of this logic, and of the institutions and structures of knowledge and power that frame and determine art. Whereas Buchloh's account favours the revolutionary potential of this so-called "linguistic turn" of art, however, Meltzer's account highlights its opposite effect, in threatening to "alienate the sign from its referent, the subject from the world," a threat that she sees registered both in artists' statements and the affective dimensions of the work of key figures such as Robert Morris, Mary Kelly and Robert Smithson, as well as lesser-known figures such as the Iranian-born American artist and architect Siah Armajani.[369]

In the scholarship on Icelandic art, the work of SÚM members Sigurður Guðmundsson, Kristján Guðmundsson and Hreinn Friðfinnsson – and the relocation of these artists, in 1970, from Reykjavík to Amsterdam – is typically figured as crucial for the translation of conceptual practices into Icelandic art, as well as for the introduction of contemporary Icelandic art into the supposedly global arena of art in the 1970s.[370] In many

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[368] See Buchloh, "Conceptual Art 1962-1969," 105-143.

[369] Meltzer*, Systems We Have Loved*, 20.

[370] As Sophie Cras points out in her essay "Global Conceptualism? Cartographies of Conceptual Art in Pursuit of Decentering," the optimistic narrative of the art world's globalization, prominent in the discourse on conceptual art from the 1960s, was in fact "actually very localized: in its vast majority it was held by those who belonged to none other than the New York art scene, and who could afford to travel places." Sophie Cras, "Global Conceptualism? Cartographies of Conceptual Art in Pursuit of Decentering," in *Circulations in the Global History of Art,* ed. Thomas DaCosta Kaufmann, Catherine Dossin and Béatrice Joyeux-Prunel (Oxon; New York: Routledge, 2016), 169.

ways the work of Sigurður, Kristján and Hreinn matches broad characterizations, such as Alexander Alberro's above, of the conceptual practices that emerged in Europe and the United States in the late 1960s and early 1970s: they expand the frame of the artwork, its object status and the role of the spectator while testing traditional notions of artistic agency, and they adopt the "disaffected," "scientistic" (anti-)aesthetic typical of conceptual art.[371] However, the work of these artists also stands in

[371] The first use of the English term "conceptual art" in Icelandic journalism appears in an article on various contemporary art practices in the weekly journal *Vikan,* in 1970. There the term is in brackets after the Icelandic *viðtökulist,* which translates directly as "reception art," and is used to refer to an unnamed exhibition recently held in Hamburg, Germany, in which - the author explains – only drafts and ideas of art works were presented, but no "finished" works. See dþ, "Ó, hvílík list!," in *Vikan,* July 2, 1970, 27-29 and 43-44, accessed May 2015, http://timarit.is/view_page_init.jsp?issId=298907&pageId=4463298&lang=is&q=Conceptual%20art. The Icelandic term more generally used for conceptual art today – *hugmyndalist* (idea art) – does not make its debut until four years later, when it is used to describe work at Gallery SÚM, on loan from the Centro de Arte y Comunicación (CAYC, English: The Art and Communication Centre) in Buenos Aires. See "'Hugmyndalist' í SÚM," in *Þjóðviljinn,* May 18, 1974, 3, accessed May 2017, http://timarit.is/view_page_init.jsp?issId=220075&pageId=2826901&lang=is&q=S%DAM%20%ED%20S%DAM%20%ED%20%ED; "Hugmyndalist – hjá SÚM," in *Tíminn,* May 19, 1974, 17, accessed May 2017, http://timarit.is/view_page_init.jsp?issId=262978&pageId=3687770&lang=is&q=S%FAm; "Hugmyndalistasýning í SÚM og á Mokka," in *Alþýðublaðið,* May 21, 1974, 9, accessed May 2017, http://timarit.is/view_page_init.jsp?issId=235100&pageId=3208677&lang=is&q=%ED; "Argentínsk sýning hjá SÚM," in *Morgunblaðið,* May 25, 1974, 19, accessed May 2017, http://timarit.is/view_page_init.jsp?issId=115866&pageId=1452697&lang=is&q=s%FDning%20Argent%EDnsk%20s%FDning%20hj%E1. A few days later, the English "concept-art" was used in an article about the work of SÚM artists and others at Nikolaj Church in Copenhagen. See Tryggvi Ólafsson, "Íslensk list H_20," in *Þjóðviljinn,* May 28, 1974, 8-9, accessed May 2017, http://timarit.is/view_page_init.jsp?issId=221038&pageId=2840609&lang=is&q=%F3lafsson%20%EDslensk%20list.

explicit opposition to the philosophical premises of much European and American conceptual art, at least in so far as it has been understood to be affirmatively bound to a (post-)structuralist project of the inclusion of both culture and nature into a totalizing vision of the world as a sign system.

Sigurður Guðmundsson's *Untitled* (*Ice-philosophy*) from 1971 [Figure 3.1] is exemplary, both of SÚM artists adoption of the (anti-)aesthetic of conceptual art and their resistance to the (supposed) (post-)structuralist negation of material reality.[372] Composed of six black-and-white photographs attached to a single white page, with a short, handwritten text underneath, this work document the artist's attempt to not only construct and write a "philosophy" of his own, but to propagate it. However, crucially, this process is construed by Sigurður not as a uniquely human linguistic or conceptual activity, but rather as a series of complex material processes, involving both human and nohuman actors. As the text below the photographs states, the work describes how Sigurður's philosophy "became a part of human beings and their surroundings." Following this declaration is the artist's breakdown of events. After writing and simplifying his philosophy to six sentences, Sigurður set out to create letter moulds of the text, filling them with water and then freezing, before transporting

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[372] Poststructuralist theory does not, in fact, completely disregard materiality. Michel Foucault's account of biopolitics, for instance, links discursive practices to the materiality of the body. However, as the feminist theorist and theoretical physicist Karen Barad has argued, Foucault "fails to offer an account of the body's historicity in which its very materiality plays an *active* role in the workings of power." Karen Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning* (Duke University Press, 2007), 65.

the frozen "philosophy" by bike to a gallery space.[373] He then laid out his philosophy on the floor of the gallery, where it quickly melted and was dispersed into the environment within and outside the gallery space, thus entering a natural cycle of evaporation, condensation, sublimation, precipitation, transpiration, runoff, and infiltration, through a series of complex interactions with both human and nonhuman bodies.

Untitled (Ice-Philosophy) can be constructively compared to Hans Haacke's *Condensation Cube* (1963-65), a work which Buchloh takes as exemplary for the development of conceptualist critiques of institutions. Both works, of course, center on the natural phases of water and expand the parameters of the artwork into its immediate environment, while directly implicating the spectator. For Buchloh, Haacke's work "moves away from a specular relationship to the object altogether, establishing instead a bio-physical system as a link between viewer, sculptural object, and architectural container."[374] In so doing, Buchloh argues, Haacke's work replaces "the once revolutionary concept of an activating 'tactility' in the viewing experience by a move to bracket the phenomenological within the determinacy of 'system,'"[375] thus inaugurating a critique of cultural institutions as systems of power.[376] While Sigurður's *Untitled (Ice-philosophy)* similarly negates the

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[373] Sigurður Guðmundsson's *Untitled Ice-Philosophy* (1971) was exhibited at Now Construction in Amsterdam in 1971. See "Sigurður Guðmundsson – biography," Galerie van Gelder, accessed July 2016, http://www.galerievangelder.com/artists/sgudmundsson3.html.

[374] Buchloh, "Conceptual Art 1962-1969," 134.

[375] Ibid, 134.

[376] Luke Skrebowski has challenged Buchloh's account of Haacke's work and his division of the artist's practice into two distinct phases; "on one side, the 'mature – i.e. political works,' and on the other, those earlier projects that emphasized 'physiological, physical, and biological processes' and that often used technology as a means to create or evoke them." Luke Skrebowski, "All Systems Go: Recovering Hans Haacke's Systems Art," in *Grey Room,* no. 30 (Winter, 2008), 59. As he notes,

traditional definition of artistic practice as purely visual, it does not share Haacke's "bracketing" of so-called artistic phenomena within social or institutional systems. Instead of locating the artwork within the closed system of the architectural "container" – and thus, ostensibly, within the space of institutional control – Sigurður's work extends the parameters of the artwork (and that of language) into the broader surrounding biosphere. Significantly, as well, for its situation within the broader cultural imaginary of the (post-)structuralist "dream of the information world" which Meltzer's associates with conceptual art, language is figured by Sigurður not as free-floating "information," but as a material configuration and as a part of an integrated network of material relations.[377]

Buchloh's argument that a final departure from systems-aesthetics in Haacke's work can be discerned in the artist's *Polls,* does not stand under scrutiny. For in fact, "Haacke actually continued to explore physical and biological systems in an important series of ecologically concerned works that were executed concurrently with the majority of his polls…" Ibid, 60.

[377] Meltzer does not distinguish clearly between structuralist and poststructuralist theories. As she explains, she understands poststructuralism as part of the "same 'adventure,' to use Étienne Balibar's word. Structuralism was in fact already poststructuralism, anticipatory of its direction; poststructuralism, in turn, still remains essentially structuralism at work." Meltzer, *Systems We Have Loved*, 14. Meltzer refers here to Étienne Balibar's "Structuralism: A Destitution of the Subject?," published in *Differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies,* vol. 14, no. 1 (2003), 1-21. In addition, Meltzer uses the phrase "the antihuman turn" to frame her project, "rather than simply 'structuralism,' 'poststructuralism,' or even 'postmodernism,'" explaining that "the term more capably ropes together the nuances of all three with the twentieth-century shift away from humanism." Meltzer, *Systems We Have Loved*, 18-19. My argument, in the following, that the work of Sigurður Guðmundsson, Kristján Guðmundsson and Hreinn Friðfinnsson responded critically to what Meltzer calls the "dream of the information world," is not dependent on and does not support Meltzer's conflation of structuralist and poststructuralist theory. However, I find her account of the significant influence of this cultural imaginary – the widespread understanding of both structuralist and poststructuralist theories as tied to an aesthetics of information and to the fantasy, or nightmare, that "the world is nothing more than the effect of its signifier, and therefore could be transformed on

In what follows I argue that, contrary to Lucy Lippard's and John Chandler's controversial claim, made in 1968, that conceptual practices entailed a "dematerialization" of the art object,[378] the work of Sigurður Guðmundsson, Kristján Guðmundsson and Hreinn Friðfinnsson can more accurately be understood in terms of a "rematerialization" of the artwork. Of course, Lippard and Chandler's essay met swift critique at the time of its publication. As British artist Terry Atkinson, a member of the *Arts & Language* group, noted in a letter-essay addressed to Lippard and dated 23 March 1968, all the works referred to by Lippard and Chandler were, although not art objects in the traditional sense, in fact "matter in one of its forms, either solid-state, gas-state, liquid-state."[379] Further, as Atkinson pointed out, "It certainly does not follow that because an object is invisible, or less visible than it was, or is less visible than another object, that any process of dematerialization has taken place."[380] My argument that the work of SÚM artists Sigurður, Kristján and Hreinn entails a rematerialization of the artwork, relies, in part, on the common-sense objections articulated by Atkinson, that matter is not inert and fixed but fundamentally dynamic. I extend this, however through a consideration of the history and practice of the transnational artist network Fluxus and its impact on Icelandic art, as well as the significant legacy of romantic thought in the discourse on art and national identity in Iceland.

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every level – economic, political, aesthetic – by *effecting* it at the level of the sign" – on the framing, reception and historical understanding of conceptual art convincing and argue that it shaped the emergence of conceptualist art practices within SÚM. Ibid, 55.

[378] See Lucy Lippard and John Chandler, "The Dematerialization of Art (1968)," in *Conceptual Art*, ed. Peter Osborne (London; New York: Phaidon, 2005 (2002)), 218-220.

[379] Terry Atkinson, "Concerning the article 'The Dematerialization of Art,'" in *Conceptual Art: A Critical Anthology*, ed. Alberro and Stimson, 53.

[380] Ibid.

What emerges out of my consideration of the work of Sigurður, Kristján and Hreinn is a sense of matter not only as dynamic and unstable but also active and agentive. In characterizing matter as agentive I follow American feminist theorist and theoretical physicist Karen Barad's definition of agency, not as a property of a pre-existing subject but an enactment, a material practice of drawing and reworking boundaries, through exclusions: "Agency is a matter of making iterative changes to particular practices through the dynamics of intra-activity (including enfoldings and other topological reconfigurings)."[381] As I will demonstrate, the work of Sigurður, Kristján and Hreinn consistently figures discursive practices, language and thought as deeply intertwined with sense perception and with material practices, thus undermining the dichotomies on which both the crude characterization of conceptual art as "dematerialized" and the fantasy of the information world rested.

In its focus on the relation of nature and culture, of thought and material reality, the work of Sigurður, Kristján and Hreinn is frequently characterized as "poetic" and "romantic," both by the artists themselves and by Icelandic and international critics and scholars. Such designations function primarily to situate their work in a discursive opposition to the so-called "analytical" qualities of certain dominant forms of conceptual art, most often associated with the practice of American artist Joseph Kosuth and the *Art & Language* group. In this framing of their work, I argue, the continued influence of the notion of dematerialization is revealed. Perhaps the appeal of this notion lies in the support it lent to the optimistic ideal of a decentered art world. It also has an obvious metaphorical resonance with the (post-)structuralist imaginary, as described by Eve Meltzer. For, like the notion of

[381] Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway,* 214.

"information" – the central precept of this imaginary which framed the presentation and reception of conceptual art in the late 1960s and early 1970s – dematerialization entails the suggestion that the artwork has become radically detached from material reality, a free-floating, virtual entity in a system of structural difference, divorced both from material form and subjective lived experience. In what follows I argue that the theory of dematerialization sets up a false dichotomy between the "intellectual" work of so-called "analytic" conceptualism and a "naïve," "romantic" conceptualism of the Icelandic artists, thus functioning ultimately to localize and marginalize their work. The falsity of this dichotomy is revealed through an analysis of their work and an examination of the logic and context of SÚM artists' employment of the terms "romantic" and "poetic."

"Children of a Different Environment:"[382] *SÚM IV* and the Globalizing and Localizing Impetus of SÚM

SÚM's fourth group exhibition, titled *SÚM IV,* which opened at the Fodor Museum – a branch of the Stedelijk Museum – in Amsterdam on 19 March 1971, figures as a crucial marker of the increased international reach of Icelandic art in the postwar period [Figure 3.2]. Just two years prior, on 15 March 1969, the Stedelijk had presented the first survey exhibition of the postminimalist artistic trends sweeping Europe and the United States, titled *Op Losse Schroeven: situaties en cryptostructuren* (transl. in the English catalogue of the time as *Square pegs in round holes*) and curated by Wim Bereen.[383] The museum's

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[382] Tryggvi Ólafsson, "Frásögn af SÚM IV í Amsterdam (ekki algildur gæðadómur)," in *Þjóðviljinn*, April 28, 1971, 6-7 and 9.

[383] Op Losse Schroeven opened two weeks prior to Harald Szeeman's *Live in Your Head: When Attitudes Become Form (Works – Concepts – Processes – Situations – Information)* at the Kunsthalle

presentation of the work of SÚM artists at this point in time was, thus, not insignificant and marked the first official introduction of SÚM artists to an international audience and into a global milieu of experimental art.

On display at *SÚM IV* were over one hundred works realized in various media – including drawings, paintings, collages, photographs, text, sculptural objects and installations of various materials – by seventeen artists, twelve of which were Icelandic.[384] In addition to members of the SÚM collective, participating artists included Fluxus artists Robert Filliou and George Brecht, both of whom had previously contributed to the group-exhibition *SÚM III* at Gallery SÚM in Reykjavík in 1969.[385] In general the work presented at *SÚM IV*

Bern, and several months prior to Kynaston McShine's *Information* exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art, New York. For further discussion of these exhibitions see e.g. Christian Rattemeyer, *Exhibiting the new art: 'Op losse schroeven' and 'When attitudes become form' 1969* (London: Afterall; Distributed outside Europe by D.A.P./Distribitued Art Publishers, 2010).

[384] In a document written in Amsterdam in May 1971, Sigurður Guðmundsson claims that one-hundred and thirty-two works were exhibited at *SÚM IV*, while Tryggvi Ólafsson's account notes that the exhibition presented one-hundred and eighty works. See Sigurður Guðmundsson, SÚM IV held at Fodor Museum and Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam March [19] – April 25, 1971 (Icel. SÚM IV haldin í Fodor Museum og Stedelijk Museum í Amsterdam [19]. Mars – 25. apríl 1971). Document detailing the preparation and production of the exhibition *SÚM IV* at the Stedelijk Museum. 1971. Gallerie SÚM Papers, Box 3/5, Folder J. The Archive of Artist-Run Initiatives. The Living Art Museum, Reykjavík, Iceland; Ólafsson, "Frásögn af SÚM IV í Amsterdam (ekki algildur gæðadómur)," 7. The catalogue for *SÚM IV* lists one-hundred and thirty-two works, thus seemingly confirming Sigurður's account, but, notably, no works by George Brecht are listed. See *SÚM IV*.

[385] Brecht's contributions to *SÚM IV* are not listed in the exhibition catalogue. Rather, photo-copies of typed instructions for Brecht and Filliou's *Game of the Conditional* – reminiscent of the Surrealist cadavre exquis – published in *Games at the Cedilla; or the Cedilla Takes Off* in 1967, are presented alongside several of Brecht's early Event scores, collected in the artist book *Water Yam*, published in 1963. Filliou presented *The Vocational Game* (1970). See *SÚM IV*.

demonstrated SÚM artists' adoption of postwar avant-garde practices, including the extension of the artwork into "environments" or installations, Happenings or performative "actions," multiples, Event scores, and photographic and text-based works. However, while the main curator of *SÚM IV,* the Dutch art historian Gijs van Tuyl, emphasized the international relevance of the work of the Icelandic artists, the exhibition's reception in the Netherlands and in Iceland was marked by a clear tension between such a designation and speculations on the significance and effect of SÚM artists' peripheral geographical and cultural origin.[386]

The Reception of *SÚM IV*: Romanticism and Icelandic Nationalism

The invitation to exhibit at the Stedelijk in 1971 was a significant feat for the group of young, largely unknown artists from the geographical and cultural margins of Europe – a fact that SÚM stressed to the Icelandic press,[387] using the opportunity to critique the lack of

[386] An article on *SÚM IV*, published in the Icelandic daily newspaper *Vísir*, quotes van Tuyl as saying, at the opening reception for *SÚM IV*: "The exhibition is not held because it is a specifically Icelandic phenomena, but as a contribution to international art." In the original: "Sýningin er ekki haldin vegna þess, að hún sé sérfyrirbrigði frá Íslandi heldur sem framlag til alþjóðlegrar listar." SB, "Súmmarar opna í Stedelijk í Amsterdam: Koma í kjölfarið á Matisse og Picasso," in *Vísir*, March 24, 1971, 1, accessed November 2016, http://timarit.is/view_page_init.jsp?issId=237661&pageId=3237619&lang=is&q=S%FAmmarar%20opna%20%ED%20%ED.

[387] See "Íslenzk nútímalist – Súm 4 stór sýning í Amsterdam," in *Þjóðviljinn*, Feb. 10, 1971, 12, accessed November 2016, http://timarit.is/view_page_init.jsp?issId=220064&pageId=2826767&lang=is&q=%EDslenzk%20n%FAt%EDmalist%204.

institutional interest and support of their work in Iceland.[388] However, the reception of *SÚM IV* in Amsterdam and in Iceland was less enthusiastic than they had hoped. Publicity on the exhibition was limited, with the Dutch media showing little interest in it.[389] One of the few critical reviews of the event, published in the popular weekly newspaper *Elsevier Weekblad* on 10 April 1971, began by locating Iceland squarely outside of the world of art: "Iceland. The first association is that of a cold, barren, empty country and certainly not of the Walhalla of the arts."[390] The author then went on to speculate about the outdated character of Icelandic

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[388] Sigurður Guðmundsson explains, in a document written in Amsterdam in May 1971, and preserved in the archives of the Living Art Museum in Reykjavík, that the invitation to exhibit at the Stedelijk came about after the Dutch artist Anton Rooskens – who had visited Iceland to exhibit alongside other Dutch painters in Gallery SÚM in December 1969 – brought the catalogue for *SÚM III* (discussed in the previous chapter) back to the Netherlands and mailed with a letter of introduction to all the major Dutch museums. Following this introduction, Jean Leering – the director of Stedelijk van Abbemuseum in Eindhoven – contacted Sigurður requesting further information about SÚM. Nothing came of Sigurður's meeting with Leering however, who expressed his interest in the work of Kristján Guðmundsson and Jón Gunnar Árnason but thought the collective lacked consistency. In June 1970 Sigurður reached out to the head conservator of the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam, Wim Beeren, who brought him in contact with Edy de Wilde, the museum's director. See Guðmundsson, SÚM IV held at Fodor Museum and Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam March [19] – April 25, 1971.

[389] As Sigurður Guðmundsson recounted, *SÚM IV* came about after Sigurður's correspondence with curator Wim Beeren and Edy de Wilde, the Stedelijk's director, during the summer and fall months of the year prior. As Sigurður tells it, de Wilde had originally suggested the exhibition take place at the Stedelijk Museum in November 1971, but as SÚM members were eager for an earlier date it was decided to hold the exhibition at the Fodor Museum instead, a decision which Sigurður expressed some regret over, likely surmising that the location had some effect on the low attendance it received. See Guðmundsson, SÚM IV held at Fodor Museum and Stedelijk Museum.

[390] International and yet not good (Dutch. Internationaal en toch niet goed). Photo-copy of a review of *SÚM IV* by Ron Kaal, published in the Dutch *Elseviere Weekblad* on 10 April 1971. 1971. Gallerie SÚM Papers, Box 3/5, Folder J. The Archive of Artist-Run Initiatives. The Living Art Museum, Reykjavík, Iceland.

art: "If there is such a thing as Icelandic art, one would expect it to be of a folkloristic nature. But, according to the exhibition of Icelandic artists in the Fodor Museum, Icelandic art is as internationally oriented as the Dutch one."[391] If the critic conceded that the work of SÚM artists undermined the image of Icelandic culture as remote and antiquated, this did not guarantee their success in his eyes, as the title of the article – "International and yet not good" (Dutch: "Internationaal en toch niet goed") – indicates.

While several Icelandic newspapers reported on *SÚM IV* in the weeks leading up to its opening, no serious critical reviews of the exhibition were published.[392] The only descriptive account of the exhibition was written by a member of SÚM and one of the exhibiting artists, painter Tryggvi Ólafsson, and published in the socialist newspaper *Þjóðviljinn* (The National Will) on 28 April 1971. Paradoxically, despite declaring it SÚM's intention to "try to convince foreigners that modern culture exists on the Saga island,"[393] Tryggvi situates the work of SÚM artists in explicit opposition to modern culture, inscribing it within a romantic nationalist framework. In an obvious reference to Marshall McLuhan's theories of modern technologies and media as extensions of human nervous systems, Tryggvi writes: "The techno-nervous system of industry, which has transformed people's perception, is not as relevant to the Icelander as the nature in which he lives, at least not as relevant as it

[391] Ibid.

[392] This was probably the result of the general lack of scholarly and critical framework for art in Iceland at the time, as well as of the hegemonic position of abstract painting in the postwar period. Art critics, writing for local newspapers, were typically artists themselves, allowing for obvious conflicts of interest. I discuss the institutional framework for art and the dominant position of abstract painters in the postwar period in Chapter 1 of this dissertation.

[393] Ólafsson, "Frásögn af SÚM IV í Amsterdam (ekki algildur gæðadómur)," 7.

is to the citizens of mainland Europe."[394] This positioning of Icelandic art and culture outside of urban, (post-)industrial modernity, and Tryggvi's description, in the same article, of Icelandic artists as "children of a different environment" than the foreign artists presented at *SÚM IV,* must be understood in the context of Icelandic nationalism.[395] And thus further, in the context of Icelanders' historical political subjugation under the Danish colonial Empire as well as the country's wartime occupation by British and American military forces, and the continued presence of an American military force in Iceland in the postwar period, discussed in the first chapter of this dissertation.[396]

As I have noted, SÚM's position in relation to Icelandic nationalism and the artists' relationship to the romantic nationalist ideology that defined the discourse on art and culture in Iceland in the postwar period is ambiguous and complicated. On the one hand SÚM artists subscribed to some of the terms of nationalist discourse, in particular the necessity of maintaining cultural distinction in the face of the onslaught of American mass consumer culture and U.S. attempts to influence Icelandic politics and its cultural and economic

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[394] In the original: "Tækni-taugakerfi iðnaðarsvæðanna, sem hefur þýtt breytingar á ýmsum skynjunum fólks, skírskotar ekki jafn beinlínis til Íslendingsins og náttúran sem hann lifir í, a.m.k. ekki eins sterkt og á íbúa meginlandsins." Ólafsson, "Frásögn af SÚM IV í Amsterdam (ekki algildur gæðadómur)," 7. An article published in the left-leaning periodical *Samvinnan* (The Cooperation) one year prior to SÚM IV, on 1 August 1970, introduced Marshall McLuhan's theories to Icelanders. See Ernir Snorrason, "Marshall McLuhan eða goðsagan endurvakin," in *Samvinnan*, August 1, 1970, 42-43, accessed November 2016, http://timarit.is/view_page_init.jsp?issId=291757&pageId=4292753&lang=is&q=Marshall%20McLuhan%20e%F0a%20Go%F0sagan%20Snorrason.

[395] Ólafsson, "Frásögn af SÚM IV í Amsterdam (ekki algildur gæðadómur)," 7.

[396] For a discussion of Icelandic nationalism, its context in Iceland's colonial history, and its impact on the discourse and practice of art in Iceland, see the first chapter of this dissertation.

relations. Significantly, from within the framework of romantic nationalism – and particularly the theories of Johann Gottfried Herder – this cultural difference was understood as directly and intimately bound to Iceland's natural environment and ecosystem. On the other hand, SÚM artists were highly critical of the reification and idealization of nature within the tradition of landscape painting, which they implicitly understood as bound to a capitalist mode of production and consumption.

Tryggvi's paradoxical framing of *SÚM IV* firstly, as an attempt to demonstrate the international relevance and contemporaneity of Icelandic art and secondly, as reflective of Icelander's situatedness outside of the technologically mediated, administrated experience of urban modernity can, I believe, be understood by examining it in the context of cultural nationalism, as defined by John Hutchinson. For as Hutchinson notes, cultural nationalists often build on critiques of modernity emerging from within the centers of "the West" to reposition their own communities, not as "primitive" or "under-developed" but as "progenitors of modern progress."[397] As I discussed in the first chapter of this dissertation, Iceland's lack of urbanization and industrialization came to be redefined, within eighteenth and nineteenth-century romantic critiques of modernity, as a positive source of intellectual freedom, creativity and moral superiority; a notion which Icelandic nationalists implicitly built on, emphasizing Icelander's supposed closeness to nature. While Tryggvi's positioning of SÚM work does not entail such conjecture of ethical superiority, it is nevertheless indebted to romantic critiques of capitalist industrialization. It is also within this ideological framework that Tryggvi is able to position Icelandic art as simultaneously modern and antithetical to the experience of modernity, thus negating the idea – which frames the review

[397] Hutchinson, *The Dynamics of Cultural Nationalism*, 37.

of *SÚM IV* in *Elsevier Weekblad* discussed above – that Icelandic society's peripheral structural status within the global capitalist geopolitical order necessarily entails a lack of civilization or cultural stagnation.

Romanticism and the Question of Representation

Tryggvi Ólafsson's account of *SÚM IV* includes the first use of the adjective "romantic" in a discussion of SÚM work that I am aware of.[398] Commenting on Hreinn Friðfinnson's

[398] The designation was later taken up by art historian and critic Aðalsteinn Ingólfsson. An article by Aðalsteinn, published in the *Dagblaðið* (The Daily Paper) on 28 August 1978, includes a uniquely sustained discussion of the difference between romantic conceptualism and analytic conceptualism. His description is vague, but he writes: "On the one hand there are those who are a bit romantic and they have, without hesitation, cited their own consciousness and behavioural patterns and have performed works that e.g. catalogue specific activities over a specific time period. […] And then there are those that are more orthodox and try to perform works in an almost impersonal way, to get rid of the self as far as possible and often by some outside formula, whether it is of a formal, behavioural or social origin." Aðalsteinn Ingólfsson, "Fílabeinsturninn og furður hugans. Um konsept-list og sýningu Helga Þorgils í Gallerí SÚM," in *Dagblaðið,* August 28, 1978, 13, accessed Dec. 2016, http://timarit.is/view_page_init.jsp?issId=227733&pageId=3079199&lang=is&q=F%EDlabeinsturninn%20og%20fur%F0ur%20og. Aðalsteinn goes on to describe "romantic" conceptualism – which he also calls "poetic" – as more expressive, playful and imaginative, and more socially engaged than the analytic conceptual art, of which he takes Joseph Kosuth's work to be exemplary. Ibid. SÚM member Þórður Ben Sveinsson also described himself as a Romantic in an interview with Aðalsteinn, published that same year. See Aðalsteinn Ingólfsson, "Ljóð uppi á sykurpíramíða – Þórður Ben heimsóttur í Dusseldorf," in *Dagblaðið,* Oct. 25, 1978, 15, accessed Dec. 2016, http://timarit.is/view_page_init.jsp?issId=227791&pageId=3080589&lang=is&q=%E1%20sykurp%EDram%ED%F0a. And Ólafur Lárusson, a member of the next generation of artists who had exhibited at Gallery SÚM and was among the founders of the Living Art Museum in 1978, described his work as "neo-romantic" in 1979. See FI, "Um lifandi listsköpun og pótintátaþjóðfélag: 'Menn komast í lykilaðstöðu í menningarmálum og hleypa engum að,'" in *Tíminn,* March 6, 1979, 12-13, accessed

"environments" [Figure 3.3] – installations made of various materials including wood, dirt, sand, shiffon, rope, mirrors and more – Tryggvi describes them as originating from a "romantic feeling," which he associates, rather indistinctly, with the artist's exploration of the concepts of time and space.[399] Similarly, Tryggvi finds in Sigurður Guðmundsson's interpretation of the artist's "location in space and time" – in photographic works presented at *SÚM IV* – an affiliation with the romantic tradition of landscape painting.[400]

Sigurður Guðmundsson exhibited four large-scale black-and-white photographs at *SÚM IV*; the first of a great number of staged photographic works created by Sigurður between 1970 and 1982 that have come to be known collectively as *Situations.* Inserting himself into various environments, in the earliest *Situations,* exhibited at *SÚM IV,* Sigurður is depicted posing, alone or alongside his brother Kristján, with various items and cartoon-like thought and speak bubbles attached to his head and/or extending from his mouth. In each of these works, questions of the conditions of representation, mediation and communication are

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Dec. 2016, http://timarit.is/view_page_init.jsp?issId=272626&pageId=3921836&lang=is&q=R%E6tt%20vi%F0%20%D3laf%20L%E1russon.

[399] Tryggvi writes: "A homesickness or a longing for the determination of time and space, distance between places etc. pervades Hreinn's work (e.g. Landscape Piece)… Hreinn's work originates from a very romantic feeling." In the original: "Eins konar heimþrá eða leit að ákvörðun í tíma og stað, fjarlægð milli staða o.s.frv. er sterkt í myndum Hreins (sbr. Landslagsmálverk)… eru verk Hreins af mjög rómantískri tilfinningu runnin." Ólafsson, "Frásögn af SÚM IV í Amsterdam (ekki algildur gæðadómur)," 6-7.

[400] Tryggvi writes: "Sigurður Guðmundsson exhibits both old and new work. His newest pieces are large photographs, that are related to landscape pictures and interpret his own location in time and space." In the original: "Sigurður Guðmundsson sýnir gömul verk og ný. Nýjustu verk hans eru stórar ljósmyndir, sem eru í ætt við landslagsmyndir, túlka tíma og stöðu hans sjálfs." Ibid.

highlighted through the conjunction of Charles Peirce's three categories of signs; the index, the icon and the symbol.

In *Realization* (Dutch: *Realisatie,* 1970-71) [Figure 3.4], Sigurður is depicted, in profile, standing with both hands extended in front of him, cradling a lightbulb. From his open mouth extends a speech bubble, on which the word *BULB* is written in bold letters, and from his head a thought bubble with the iconic representation of a lightbulb inscribed on it. Examining the image, the viewer soon notices that the thought bubble is fastened to the artist's head by what appears to be a metal headband. Looking carefully, she realizes that, likewise the speech bubble emerging from the artist's mouth is part of the "original" scenario – or *situation* – captured by the photograph, and not drawn onto it *ex post facto* as one might assume at first glance, given the thick outlines surrounding their borders, a typical trope of cartoons and animations. This prompts in the viewer a recognition, firstly of the concrete, materiality of Sigurður's arrangement. Secondly, the viewer is pushed towards a recognition of the constructed and material nature of the photograph itself. By further probing the image's content – comparing Sigurður's simultaneous representation of the lightbulb in symbolic and iconic terms with the indexical trace of the "real" lightbulb in the photograph itself – the viewer comes to confront the fundamental incommensurability of the signifier and the signified, and of language, representation and reality. Finally, for some of the visitors of *SÚM IV,* these terms were further problematized by Sigurður's live presentation of *Realization* through a performance of seven "actions" at the Fodor Museum on the evening of 23 April 1971.[401]

[401] Also presented at the Fodor Museum that evening were performances by Þórður Ben Sveinsson, Kristján Guðmundsson, Róska and the Dutch artist Pieter Holstein. Little information on these

Like Joseph Kosuth's well-known *Proto-Investigations* from the mid-1960s – which combine objects, photographs, and enlarged photostats of dictionary definitions – Sigurður Guðmundsson's *Realisatie* relies on "the tripartite division of the aesthetic signifier."[402] However, whereas Kosuth's work is often interpreted – in light of his own statements and the subsequent trajectory of his work – as structurally equating the terms of the object, linguistic sign and the photograph, Sigurður's *Realisatie* undermines such an equation by making the viewer aware of the material circumstances of the photograph's production. As Liz Kotz has argued, "Kosuth's work would seem to serve as the template for the kind of Conceptual art that aims, in Buchloh's terms, 'to replace the object of spatial and perceptual experience by linguistic definition alone.'"[403] Kotz finds an alternative conception of language, not as static, tautological structure but performative and "event-like," in Fluxus artist George Brecht's Event scores.[404] This latter conception of language as performative, and functional also characterizes Sigurður's performative activation of *Realisatie* at the Fodor Museum, as well as several of his other works from the early 1970s, as I will demonstrate shortly.

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performances is available. A copy of a press release from the Municipality of Amsterdam on 20 April 1971, preserved in the archives of the Living Art Museum in Reykjavík, lists the performances in Dutch: "1. Sigurður Guðmundsson, Realisatie, relatie tussen gedachten en daden in 7 fragmenten; 2. Th. Ben Sveinsson, Ballet; 3. Kristján Guðmundsson, Mona Lisa; 4. Pieter Holstein, Tegenwoordigheid van geest of Gedane zaken nemen geen keer, toneelstukje gespeeld door de kunstenaar; Pauze; 5. Róska, visuele manifestatie." Municipality of Amsterdam. Súm-evening (Dutch Súm-avond). 1971. Photo-copy of a press-release issued for the exhibition *SÚM IV* at the Stedelijk Museum 1971. Gallerie SÚM Papers, Box 3/5, Folder J. The Archive of Artist-Run Initiatives. The Living Art Museum, Reykjavík, Iceland.

[402] Buchloh, "Conceptual Art 1962-1969," 117.

[403] Kotz, "Language Between Performance and Photography," 9

[404] Ibid, 10.

However, language is also consistently figured by Sigurður as deeply material, as is exemplified by his *Untitled (Ice-philosophy,* 1970), discussed in the introduction to this chapter.

Tryggvi Ólafsson's association of Sigurður Guðmundsson's *Situations* with the romantic tradition of landscape painting is, on the one hand, remarkable for its oversight of the artist's interference in precisely that tradition, through his querying of the terms of representation and his negation of direct, unmediated, subjective experience and expression. It also overlooks the broader context of SÚM artists' critical engagement with the tradition of landscape painting in the years prior, discussed in the first chapter of this dissertation. Nevertheless, Tryggvi's description is insightful in its recognition of the artists' engagement with a philosophical problem at the core of German romantic philosophy; namely that of the conditions and limits of the relationship between the human subject and the natural environment, and between being and knowing. As I will demonstrate, these essential questions figure prominently not only in the work of Sigurður but also his brother Kristján, as well as their fellow SÚM member Hreinn Friðfinnsson.

Rematerialization

As I discussed in the previous chapter, the emergence of contemporary art in Iceland through SÚM was significantly shaped by SÚM artists' translation of Fluxus practices and precepts into the Icelandic context, a process which, crucially, is marked by the Swiss-German artist Dieter Roth's critique and extension of the Fluxus project. Furthermore, as I have demonstrated, the translation of contemporary art practices into Iceland through SÚM is uniquely configured through the artists' confrontation with the Icelandic tradition of

landscape painting and the concomitant romantic nationalist discourse which provided its ideological grounding. In what follows, I briefly examine the implications of this specific framework for the emergence of conceptual practices in SÚM.

Fluxus's Critique of Reification

Art historian Natilee Harren's articulation of the concept of the "concrete" within Fluxus is constructive for the dissolution it allows of the apparent contradiction between Fluxus works' sensual and cognitive dynamics, which has plagued attempts to theorize Fluxus practice and history.[405] Furthermore, her characterization of the project of Fluxus in terms of a critical resistance to the "dematerialization and virtualization of the artwork and the sign at the earliest moment of the cultural shift we now understand as postmodernism," has obvious significance for any study of the historical legacy of Fluxus in the emergence of conceptual art, and specifically for my analysis of the work of Sigurður, Kristján and Hreinn.[406] For Harren, both Fluxus Event scores and Fluxus objects resist dematerialization and virtualization by bringing the viewer into a direct, interactive, sensual and social relation with concrete yet ephemeral material entities. This is achieved, she argues, through the indexical function of Fluxus Event scores on the one hand, and, on the other hand, through the useless and "tasteless" character of Fluxus objects and their frequent evocations of processes of penetration and flux.

Crucially, Fluxus artists' resistance to dematerialization was premised on their critique of the commoditization of the art object under capitalism. In a discussion of George

[405] See discussion in the previous chapter.

[406] Harren, "Objects Without Object," 233.

Brecht's Event scores – particularly his *Exercise* (April 1963) – Harren makes an insightful, if somewhat peculiar, statement, describing the score as an effort to "de-link the definition of art from the reification of objects and their isolation from the chaotic stream of the everyday."[407] Her use of the term "reification" here is somewhat counterintuitive. In *History and Class Consciousness: Studies in Marxist Dialectics,* first published in 1923, György Lukács defined reification as a process whereby objects come to mediate human relations and the performance of the human labourer is in turn objectified, or "spacialized." Commenting on the commodity-structure of capitalist societies, Lukács writes: "Its basis is that a relation between people takes on the character of a thing and thus acquires a 'phantom objectivity,' an autonomy that seems so strictly rational and all-embracing as to conceal every trace of its fundamental nature: the relation between people."[408] He goes on to comment on the implications of this for conceptual perception, noting that: "Thus, time sheds its qualitative, variable, flowing nature; it freezes into an exactly delimited, quantifiable continuum filled with quantifiable 'things' (the reified, mechanically objectified 'performance' of the worker, wholly separated from his total human personality): in short, it becomes space."[409] Under capital, relations between human beings are thus mediated through objects in a process of displacement, where the value of human labour is transferred onto the product, the commodity. Marx uses the term "fetishism" to describe this process of displacement.[410] Reification then relates to the displacement of human relations and power

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[407] Ibid, 118.

[408] György Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness: Studies in Marxist Dialectics,* trans. Rodney Livingstone (Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 1968), 83.

[409] Ibid, 90.

[410] See Marx, *Capital: Volume I.* Book One: The Process of Production of Capital, 102-121.

dynamics onto an inert object. Intriguingly, however, this is not how Harren mobilizes the term in her discussion of Fluxus, for as we note, in her account, the object itself is the place of this projection. Whereas Lukács speaks of things in themselves as inert, passive, mute – the object only acquires agency through the process of the human being projecting a sense of value onto it – Harren's comment evokes and relies on a radically alternative conception of the object, although she fails to articulate it clearly.

Critically Fluxus's resistance to reification involves a radical redefinition of the (art) object, not as a mute and passive, independently existing entity with inherent attributes, but rather as material flux; matter is figured as dynamic and relational. This project is announced by George Brecht in his essay "Chance-Imagery," first published in 1957. It is worth quoting Brecht's formulation of "chance-imagery" at some length here, for the correspondence it establishes between human and nonhuman constructs, as well as between material and conceptual constructs:

> Here I would like to introduce the general term "chance-imagery" to apply to our formation of images resulting from chance, wherever these occur in nature. (The word "imagery" is intentionally ambiguous enough, I think, to apply either to the physical act of creating an image out of real materials, or to the formation of an image in the mind, say by abstraction from a more complex system.) One reason for doing this is to place the painter's, musician's, poet's, dancer's chance images in the same conceptual category as natural chance-images (the configuration of meadow grasses, the arrangement of stones on a brook bottom), and to get away from the idea that an artist makes something "special" and beyond the world of ordinary things. An Alpine peak or an iris petal can move us at times with all the subtle power of a "Night Watch" or one of the profound themes of Opus 131. There is no a priori reason why moving images should originate only with artists. This leaves "art" to mean something

> *constructed,* from a starting point of pre-conceived notions, with the corollary that as art approaches chance-imagery; the artist enters a oneness with all of nature.[411]

Significantly, Brecht's radical equation of nonhuman and human productivity seems to have gone unexamined in the critical literature on Fluxus, wherein elements of chance – crucial to the resistance of reification – are typically figured in terms of human activity and sensation, whether cognitive or physical.

In an effort to theorize Fluxus works' two-fold cognitive and sensual dimensions, Natilee Harren coins the term "transitional commodity," which she builds on the notions of the "fetish" and the "grotesque body," as well as Marxist theorization of the commodity-structure. Focusing on the interactive character of Fluxus objects and their frequent evocations of bodily functions and material processes, Harren describes their function as "transitional commodities," in the following way: "They engender an interrelation between subjects and objects that is constantly in flux, exposing the beholder to danger and newfound freedom with the knowledge that we are beholden to, enchanted by, and formed by our objects as much as they provide us with a logic that exceeds them."[412] She goes on to state: "Infantile interaction was encouraged as a means of loosening the stranglehold of the symbolic in order to access a prelinguistic, presymbolic engagement with brute material things."[413] While perceptive in its analysis of the bodily and scatological references of many Fluxus works, Harren's definition of Fluxus objects as "transitional commodities" overlooks Brecht's radical proposition of the liveliness and agency of what she calls "brute material things." While she allows for the possibility that human subjects can be "enchanted" by

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[411] Brecht, *Chance-Imagery,* 12.

[412] Harren, "Objects Without Object," 180.

[413] Ibid, 181.

objects – at one point she also evokes the Heideggerian notion of the "thing-at-hand" although she does not mobilize that directly in her analysis – she fails to comprehend the more radical position taken by Brecht.

As William Pietz's important account of the history of the concept of the fetish reveals, it has a distinctly Eurocentric and racist origin. In his series of essays on "The Problem of the Fetish" published between 1985 and 1988,[414] Pietz theorizes that "the fetish, as an idea and a problem, and as a novel object not proper to any prior discrete society, originated in the cross-cultural spaces of the coast of West Africa during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries."[415] Further, as he notes, "The discourse of the fetish has always been a critical discourse about the false objective values of a culture from which the speaker is personally distanced."[416] More specifically, the notion of the fetish emerges out of a racist European discourse on West-African animist beliefs, in which the attribution of purpose and intentionality to natural objects and anthropomorphic personification of impersonal material entities becomes understood as characteristic of "pre-rational," "premodern" societies,[417] and later on, in Immanuel Kant's philosophy of aesthetics, as evidence of lack of morality and true freedom.[418] In George Brecht's "Chance-Imagery," however, this notion of the fetish is

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[414] William Pietz, "The Problem of the Fetish, I," in *RES: Anthropology and Aesthetics,* no. 9 (Spring, 1985), 5-17; William Pietz, "The Problem of the Fetish, II," in *RES: Anthropology and Aesthetics,* no. 13 (Spring, 1987), 23-45; William Pietz, "The Problem of the Fetish, IIIa," in *RES: Anthropology and Aesthetics,* no. 16 (Autumn, 1988), 105-124.

[415] Pietz, "The Problem of the Fetish, I," 5

[416] Ibid, 14.

[417] See Pietz, "The Problem of the Fetish IIIa," 121-122.

[418] See William Pietz, "Fetish," in *The Art of Art History: A Critical Anthology,* 2nd ed, ed. Donald Preziosi (Oxford; N.Y.: Oxford University Press, 2009), 110.

explicitly undermined through the analogy of human cultural production with presumably unplanned, fortuitous productions of nonhuman beings and entities.

In the previous chapter I argued that Dieter Roth's practice post-1960 can extend our understanding of Fluxus's critique of reification, into a critical de-differentiation of nature and culture, figuring nonhuman matter, entities and beings not only as ephemeral and dynamic, but as active and agentive. It is on this same basis, and in their revelation of matter as dynamic, active and agentive, that the work of Sigurður, Kristján and Guðmundur can be described as rematerializing the artwork. Such a project is, as I will demonstrate, inherently critical of the traditional notion of representations as neutral mediators between the subject and object, the knower and the known. Furthermore, and relatedly, it critically interrupts the notion of an essential distinction between cognition, sensation and emotion. In this, it is both indebted to and critical of romantic thought.

The Natural Origin of Language and Herder's "Quasi-Empirical" Theory of Concepts

As I noted in the first chapter of this dissertation, romantic philosophy and romantic nationalism has a complex relationship to the concept of nature. While the rise of landscape painting is tied to the spread of nationalist ideology in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and romantic critiques of the Enlightenment, the re-conception of the relationship of humans to nature in the work of eighteenth-century philosopher Johann Gottfried Herder also, paradoxically, undermines the reification of nature on which the modern conception of landscape is founded. In what follows I will briefly consider Herder's theory of language and conceptualization, in order to explicate crucial elements of the mobilization of the term "romantic" within SÚM.

An important principle of Herder's theory of language is the notion that thought is essentially dependent on and bounded by language – that "one can only think if one has a language, and that one can only think what one can express linguistically" – an idea which Herder shares with his mentor, Immanuel Kant.[419] However, significantly, Herder rejects Kant's postulation of universal *a priori* laws of thought. Instead of meaning or concepts being derived from universal principles, autonomous to language, Herder posits that concepts arise through language, in word-usages.

Furthermore, as I have discussed in the first chapter of this dissertation, in the *Treatise on the Origin of Language* (1772), Herder puts forth a theory of the natural origin of language, in which language arises out of an active, sensorial engagement with the immediate natural environment. This theory relates to the third principle of Herder's philosophy of language: that thinking is intimately bound up with perceptual and affective sensation. As Michael N. Forster explains:

> Herder holds a quasi-empiricist theory of concepts according to which sensation is the source and basis of all our concepts, but (a) the converse is also true, and (b) we are also able to achieve something *like* non-empirical concepts by means of metaphorical extensions from the empirical ones, which two qualifications leave it the case, though, that all of our concepts ultimately depend on sensation in one way or another.[420]

As Forster notes, the first two principles of Herder's philosophy of language, that thought is dependent and bounded on language, and that meaning or concepts arise out of word usage, directly contradict the model of thought, meaning and language that predominated during the

[419] See Forster, *Herder's Philosophy,* 18.

[420] Ibid, 19.

Enlightenment, which conceived of thought and meaning "in a sharply dualistic fashion as (at least in principle) autonomous and separable from whatever material, perceptible expressions they may happen to receive in language, and of language as merely a means to their memorization and communication that is inessential to their actual existence."[421] Forster speculates that while the two initial principles are likely to be widely accepted, the third principle – which he describes as Herder's "quasi-empiricist" theory of concepts – is more likely to meet with considerable skepticism from philosophers today. Defending Herder's third principle, Forster begins by differentiating it from earlier empiricist theories of concepts, such as those of Locke and Hume as well as in the pre-critical work of Kant.

As Forster explains, Herder's theory has "two special features which distinguish it from these earlier theories."[422] Firstly, Forster notes, Herder maintains that the principle of concepts' dependence on sensations also works in the other direction. That is, if concepts arise out of sensual engagement with the material world, it is equally true that "the process of language- and concept-acquisition transforms the nature of a person's sensations."[423] Secondly, Herder believes that we are able to construct non-empirical concepts, by means of metaphorical extension. Forster goes on to defend Herder's third principle in some detail, the arguments of which I shall not reiterate here.[424] However, it is important to note that

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[421] Ibid, 19. Furthermore, as Forster notes, versions of these principles can be found in Herder's earlier writing, such as the *Fragments* (1767-8). Ibid, 20.

[422] Ibid, 35.

[423] Ibid, 35-36

[424] Forster's defense of Herder's third principle can be found in Ibid, 65-67.

Herder's thesis of the natural origin of language does not constitute a "naïve realism" and that Herder rejects any simplistic equation of meanings with referents.[425]

In fact, Herder's quasi-empirical theory of concepts offers an important alternative to (post-)structuralist models of the relationship of human thought to reality, one which allows for a consideration of the importance of lived experience, corporeal practice, and biological substance as well as conceptual structures, and which permits for an understanding of the profound intertwinement of culture and nature, of the human and the nonhuman. Herder's thought is also, however, severely compromised by contradiction, the most important of which arguably arise from his theory of history as a teleological progressive realization of "humanity" and "reason." In what follows I argue that the work of SÚM artists Sigurður Guðmundsson, Kristján Guðmundsson and Hreinn Friðfinnsson can be understood to build on, but extend, the theoretical de-differentiation inaugurated by Herder between culture and nature and the human and the nonhuman. Herder's theory of language opens up an important avenue for understanding the complex relationship between the conceptual and the material figured in the work of Sigurður, Kristján and Hreinn.

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[425] As Forster notes, this rejection is discernible in Herder's writing from an early period. For instance, his *Fragments* and the *Treatise* "already imply such a rejection, and develop several quite compelling arguments for it… And Herder later articulates it more explicitly in the *Ideas* as follows: 'No language expresses things [*Sachen*] but only names. Also no human reason therefore has cognition of things but it has only characteristic marks of them which it signifies with words.'" Ibid, 30.

Poetry and the Materiality of Language

On 22 July 1972, Gallery SÚM presented a solo-exhibition of works by Sigurður Guðmundsson. There, the artist exhibited fourteen "poems" – thirteen Icelandic and one Dutch – each of which consisted of a pairing of objects and text.[426] One of these arrangements, titled *Bækur-lækur* (*Books-brooks,* 1972) [Figure 3.5], consisted of five books placed on a shelf alongside a photograph depicting a small stream of water running along grassy banks in an undisclosed location. The objects were selected and gathered by Sigurður on the basis of the arbitrary linking of two words through rhyme.[427] The act of rhyming implicitly foregrounds the material, auditory and functional properties of language over and above its conceptual associations. In insisting on the materiality of language, Sigurður reveals its failure as a representation, as a neutral mediation between the knower and the known.

Ljóð (Að elta fólk og drekka mjólk) (*Poem (Following people and drinking milk),* 1972*)* [Figure 3.6] from the same year documents in six black-and-white photographs Sigurður's act of following seemingly random people – including an elderly lady wearing a traditional tail-cap (Icel. *skotthúfa*) – around downtown Reykjavík while drinking milk from a triangular milk carton. Although akin to Vito Acconci's *Following Piece* (1969)*,* realized in New York three years prior, in that both artists submit to pre-given schemas in an effort to

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[426] Sigurður Guðmundsson exhibition of poems, Gallery SÚM July 27 – August 5 [1972] (Icel. Sigurður Guðmundsson sýning á ljóðum, Galerie SÚM 27.7 – 5.8 [1972]). 1972. Gallerie SÚM Papers, Unfiled [Icel. óskráð]. The Archive of Artist-Run Initiatives. The Living Art Museum, Reykjavík, Iceland.

[427] See "Myndlist í ljóðum," in *Þjóðviljinn*, July 27, 1972, 3. accessed Dec. 2016, http://timarit.is/view_page_init.jsp?issId=224651&pageId=2901892&lang=is&q=%ED%20myndlist.

distance their work from the notion of subjective expression, Sigurður's concerns also differ significantly from Acconci's. Acconci's work documents patterns of social behaviour, in a manner that has at least the appearance of science. This is visualized in the artist's inscription of the routes of random subjects travelling through the city, as well as in a detailed textual and diagrammatic account of the schematic conditions of his performance, the social positions and relationship between Acconci as "agent" and his "subjects," and the various quantities of time each performance took.[428] In comparison, no such "scientific" interest in quantification informs Sigurður work. Rather, like his *Bækur-lækur* from the same year, Sigurður's work materializes the random and somewhat absurd connections created between material things through rhyme, but this time with the added dimension of (perceivable) movement and social interaction. If Acconci's goal is the production of "objective" knowledge about the social behavior of the subjects of his "study," Sigurður seems to eschew all such possibility.

Sigurður Guðmundsson's poems insist on the material, concrete, but performative qualities of language. By so doing they resist and trouble the traditional idea of language as representation; as a neutral mediation between the human subject and object, the knower and the known. This was rooted, I believe, in the artist's absorption in the previous years, of Fluxus artists's critique of reification and their resistance to representation. However, Sigurður's treatment of language and its relation to material reality can, as I will show, also be understood from within the framework of Herder's romantic theory of language as derived from human being's sensual interaction with material reality.

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[428] See Vito Acconci, "Following Piece (1969)" MoMA, accessed Sept. 2018, https://www.moma.org/collection/works/146947.

Punctuation Marks, and Discursive Materiality

Sigurður's experiments with the materialization of language in his "poems" laid the ground for the artist's exploration of one of the crucial devices of written language; the punctuation mark. The photographs *Pavement, street* (1973) [Figure 3.7] and *Earth, water* (1974) [Figure 3.8] both depict an oversized comma, inserted as the titles indicate, in the first instance, between pavement and street and in the second between the bodies of water and earth. Crucially, as in Sigurður's *Realisatie,* this "inscription" takes place within the phenomena captured in the photographs, rather than on the photograph as a material object, thus drawing the viewer's attention to both the material and constructed character of the depicted objects.

Punctuation marks are symbols that are used to increase clarity and aid comprehension of written language. They can also be understood as material apparatuses used to distinguish between words, clauses or phrases in written language. As lexicographer Eric Partridge notes in his introduction to a chapter devoted to the comma in his 1953 study of punctuation marks, the practice of the comma "does not seriously differ from the theory implied by the etymology: *comma,* the Latin translation of Greek *komma,* related to *koptein,* to cut, means literally 'a cutting,'…"[429] The comma, then, enacts a cut within the phenomena of written language, allowing for the distinction of independent words, clauses or phrases.[430]

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[429] Eric Partridge, *You Have a Point There: A Guide to Punctuation and Its Allies* (London; New York: Routledge, 2015 (1953)), 13.

[430] My description of punctuation marks as material apparatuses here is informed by Karen Barad's definition of apparatuses as "boundary-drawing practices – specific material (re)configurings of the world." Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway,* 140. Significantly, Barad describes apparatuses (as material practices) as enacting an "agential cut" which allows for the determination and separation of

Expanding on this insight, *Pavement, street* and *Earth, water* might be described as visualizing Herder's third principle of the philosophy of language; his quasi-empirical theory of concepts. Sigurður's work brings to the surface the active, iterative and mutually constituted role of the material and the conceptual, by playfully raising the question of which came first, the material or the conceptual distinction of pavement/street and earth/water. While we might theorize, from the framework of Herder's philosophy of language, that Sigurður's work visualizes the way that conceptual frameworks transform the nature of a person's sensations and perceptions of the world, the opposite position, that it demonstrates the origin of language and concepts in the sensation of real, material differences, might also be defended. Finally, of course, the comma indicates both separation and continuity. On this basis, Sigurður's work might be said to point to the artificiality of the conceptual differentiation between the "things" within the fields of matter depicted, as well as – through a comparison of the two works – to the artificiality of the distinction of nature from culture.

The artist book *Punktar/Periods* (1972) [Figures 3.9-3.10] by Sigurður's brother, Kristján Guðmundsson, also takes linguistic punctuation marks as its subject matter. The book consists of three pages, each of which contains a large irregularly shaped blot of ink. They are, in fact, as a short text on the title page indicates, period marks from Icelandic novelist Halldór K. Laxness's poems, selected and magnified by Kristján. Through the act of magnifying the period marks, Kristján is able to expose not only their concrete materiality, but also their origin in the active material interaction between paper and ink, their "event-

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independent "things" from the ontological indeterminacy of larger phenomena – a function which is uniquely highlighted in the etymology of the word "comma."

like," unintentional and performative character being highlighted in the irregularity of their contour.

Nevertheless, if periods – like commas – are material practices, as symbols of emptiness they also signify the immaterial, that which lies outside of language or in between language. Comparing Kristján's periods to another materialization of silence in one of the seminal works of Fluxus history, John Cage's *4'33''* (1952), might allow us to understand Kristján's work, then, not only as a materialization of written language but as pointing towards concrete external reality. That is, if the function of Cage's silence was to "make space" for the listener's engagement with concrete environmental sounds, perhaps Kristján's periods operate similarly to point the reader towards an awareness of that which lies behind or in-between language.

The Icelandic Tradition of *Rímur* and the Poem as a System

In a recent account of Icelandic conceptualism, American art critic and poet Eva Heisler rightly notes the contextual significance of twentieth-century debates about literature, poetry and the Icelandic language – as well as the implication of these debates in nationalist discourse – to the work of SÚM members Hreinn Friðfinnsson and Kristján Guðmundsson.[431] From the Middle Ages until the nineteenth century, *rímur* (rhymes), a type of narrative poetry characterized by "a vast array of metrical gymnastics involving alliteration and internal rhyme as well as end rhyme," dominated Icelandic poetry.[432] As

[431] See Eva Heisler, "Soulful Mathematics: Poetry and Icelandic Conceptualism," in *Mosaic*, vol. 49, no. 2 (June 2016), 51-73.

[432] Kendra J. Willson, "Jónas and the Panther: Translation, Alliteration, and Icelandic Identity," in *Scandinavian Studies*, vol. 80, no. 3 (Fall 2008), 313-344. For a comprehensive account of the history

Heisler notes, because of the linguistic proficiency they require, *rímur* were widely considered critical to the preservation of the Icelandic language, and thus central to Icelandic national identity, with some even arguing Icelanders had a unique instinct for rhyming and alliteration.[433] The negative influence of such ideas on the reception of modernist poetry in Iceland in the postwar period can be fruitfully compared to the dominance of landscape painting and the associated ideals of romantic nationalism over the production and discourse of visual art in Iceland in the same period, exemplified by the reception of SÚM's inaugural exhibition, *SÚM I,* in 1965, as discussed in the first chapter of this dissertation.

Heisler's introduction of these debates serves as a general background for her discussion of the centrality of literature and poetry to Icelandic conceptualism, as well as the backbone of a more focused argument that the use of the term poetry in Kristján Guðmundsson's work is not an indication of subjective interiority, but rather "evokes linguistic repetition and units of measure," building on the tradition of *rímur.*[434] Heisler draws mostly on Kristján's later work from the 1980s and 1990s for her discussion of the artist's treatment of poetry "as a form of construction that relies on repetition and pattern,"[435] and his fascination with the "look" of measurement, that is with a technical, clean or "minimalist" appearance, which he shares with American and European conceptual artists

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and literary characteristics of rímur see Vésteinn Ólafsson and Sverrir Tómasson, "The Middle Ages," in *A History of Icelandic Literature*, ed. Neijmann. 55-63.

[433] See: Heisler, "Soulful Mathematics," 53.

[434] Ibid, 58.

[435] Ibid, 57.

working in the same period. However, a preoccupation with repetition and systematicity in fact marks Kristján's artistic production from his first solo-exhibition in 1968.[436]

Heisler's contextualization of Kristján's work is important for its repudiation of the association of poetry with the emotional and the subjective, and its stress on the shared aesthetic of Kristján work and that of better-known European and American artists. However, as I will demonstrate, Kristján's work – as well as that of his brother Sigurður and Hreinn Friðfinnsson – also consistently problematizes the traditional notion, usually marking exercises of measurement and quantification, of objective knowledge as the production of undistorted representations of some inherent properties of objects observed from an autonomous and distant subject position. The "scientistic" aesthetic of the work of Kristján, Sigurður and Hreinn does, in other words, not evince the artist's belief in the possibility of neutral observation by an autonomous humanist subject. However, neither does the artists' cancelling of the subjective voice signal their investment in a (post-)structuralist picture of

[436] At his first solo-exhibition, held at Café Mokka in Reykjavík in December 1968, Kristján Guðmundsson exhibited work which, although executed within the frame of painting can be described as primarily conceptual in its process of production. No contemporary accounts of the exhibition were published, but Kristján has described the works exhibited as the outcome of his systematic exploration of the possibilities offered by different combination of three items; "The exhibition revolved mainly around the use of three items. So one picture was called 'hand-light-rabbit,' and the next maybe 'rabbit-hand-light'… and so on, until all the possibilities had been exhausted. All the pictures featured an electric light. It was very flat and unartistic, a sort of 'reverse' imagination, and what it achieved was consistent with that – very little." Sigríður Nikulásdóttir, "Short biography," in *Kristján Guðmundsson,* 13. Like Magnús Pálsson's subscription to "rules of play," at his solo-exhibition in September of that same year (discussed in the previous chapter), Kristján's self-imposed restriction to the manipulation of three random elements was intended to undermine traditional concepts of authorship and artistic choice, central to notions of good taste and artistic production as expressive of the artists' subjective interiority.

the human subject as a mere *effect* of pre-existing, totalizing systems, a notion that characterizes what Eve Meltzer has called the dream of the information world.

Measurement and Metaphor

The 1970 exhibition *Information,* presented at the Museum of Modern Art in New York from 2 July to 20 September of that year, was introduced by curator Kynaston McShine as an international report of the work of artists that McShine considered to be "part of a culture that has been considerably altered by communications systems such as television and films, and by increased mobility."[437] More recently, the *Information* show has been described by art historian Eve Meltzer as a manifestation of the dream of the information world; the world as a total sign system.[438] American conceptual artist Dan Graham's contribution to the exhibition stands, in Meltzer's account, as a demonstration of the overwhelming authority of the signifier in this imaginary; of the impossibility of conceiving of the world "as *not* already signified, *not* already accounted for, *not* already measured by the field of differences."[439] Graham's work, which consists of a list of eleven statements that chart the distances of various locations to the artist's retinal wall, as measured on 31 March 1966, can more openly be interpreted either as an exemplary visual manifestation of the image of the world as an

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[437] Kynaston L. McShine, "Acknowledgements," in *Information,* ed. Kynaston L. McShine (New York: MoMA, 1970), 1, Exhibition catalogue, accessed Sep. 2017, https://www.moma.org/documents/moma_catalogue_2686_300337616.pdf.

[438] See Meltzer, *Systems We Have Loved*, 29-69.

[439] Ibid, 55-57.

information system, or as an ironic parody, implicitly exposing the fallacies of such a picture.[440]

Created one year after the *Information* show at MoMA, Sigurður Guðmundsson's photographic work *Concentratie* (*Concentration,* 1971) [Figure 3.11] takes up the same fantasy. *Concentratie* shows the artist sitting with folded arms by a table, on top of which lie various random objects. On the wall over his head hang a shirt and a small picture. He is depicted looking, with a neutral expression, straight forward, beyond the assortment of objects surrounding him. Extended from his nose to each object are bands of black string, seemingly fastened to the wall behind him. Mapping the artist's relationship to the things surrounding him – in a diagrammatic fashion rather than the symbolic manner of Graham's text – Sigurður's work nevertheless explicitly resists the western tradition of grounding epistemological premises in visual analogies: the subject's relationship to the objects surrounding him is measured not from the eye but the nose. While the gaze of Sigurður's eyes seems, at first, to indicate his total disinterestedness in his surroundings, the title of the work and the bands of string lead the viewer to an understanding of his deep concentration and sensual, bodily engagement with the environment.

As Meltzer argues, the primacy of the signifier as a marker of the structural order of reality and of human engagement with reality, in Dan Graham's work and in the *Information* exhibition more broadly, was achieved through a negation of sensation: "Information was indeed everywhere throughout the exhibition; as for sensation – it had dried up."[441] By comparison, despite its anti-aesthetic appearance, the work of Sigurður Guðmundsson,

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[440] See Dan Graham, "March 31, 1966," in *Information*, 56.

[441] Meltzer*, Systems We Have Loved,* 55.

Kristján Guðmundsson and Hreinn Friðfinsson, consistently insists on the primacy of sensation and its complex interrelation with cognition.

Kristján Guðmundsson's Metaphors

In the *Metacritique of the Critique of Pure Reason* (1799) – written in sharp opposition to Kant's critical philosophy – Herder argues that Kant's supposedly "pure" *a priori* concepts of the understanding, "are in fact all based on empirical concepts and arise from them through a sort of metaphorical extension."[442] More broadly, Herder affords the metaphor a fundamental role in language,[443] and thus in conceptualization, arguing that "all human language is fundamentally metaphorical."[444] In 1973 Kristján Guðmundsson was invited once more to exhibit at the Stedelijk Museum, but this time on his own. His exhibition, which opened in December 1973, presented a number of works that challenge the traditional understanding of representations as independent from the act of representing – as neutral mediators between the knower and the known – and insist on the material concreteness of representations, while using metaphor to point to the potential origin of concepts in sensual material interaction.

The bookwork, *Circles* (1973) [Figure 3.12] – created and published in conjunction with the Stedelijk exhibition – consists of three black-and-white photographs of circular ripples on the surface of water. As the short text accompanying the pictures indicates, each

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[442] Ibid, 68.

[443] In broad terms, metaphor can be defined as the practice of "thinking, talking about, or experiencing one kind of thing in terms of another." See L. David Ritchie, "Introduction," in *Metaphor* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 20.

[444] Forster, *Herder's Philosophy,* 68.

image is printed on a sheet of paper the weight of which equals the weight of the stone used to create the circle represented.[445] Significantly, the object of Kristján's work, then, is not only the surface form of the ripples of water depicted in the photographs, but also, and inseparably, the stone that caused them. Significantly, information about the object (the stone) is offered not solely in the visual terms of its indexical trace on the body of water, or the indexical mark of the broader phenomenological situation on the photographic film, but also through tactile stimuli, as the reader feels and compares the thickness of each sheet and compares the sense of pressure provided by the paper. By thus highlighting an important aspect of the concrete physical reality of the stone – its weight – Kristján simultaneously draws the reader's attention to the broader material circumstances of the event captured in the photograph, ultimately bringing into question the transparency of the photographic representation.

The relationship established by Kristján between the thickness of the paper and the weight of the stone can be described as metaphorical, simultaneously asserting a relationship of similarity and disparateness between each stone and the page said to correspond to it. It is in this mobilization of the function of metaphor, I would argue, that Kristján's work could be described as "poetic." However, as I hope to have made clear, this is an understanding of the

[445] Also exhibited at Kristján's solo-exhibition at the Stedelijk was *Circle* (1972), a black-and-white photograph similar to those reproduced in the bookwork Circles but created by throwing a cube into water. See Tineke Reijnders and Corinne Groote, "List of works (page 1 of 2) presented in Kristján Guðmundsson's solo exhibition at the Stedelijk Museum December 1, 1973 – January 13, 1974," The In-Out Center Archives, accessed April 2018, https://inoutcenterarchives.nl/artist/kristjan-gudmundsson/images/811.

poetic that has nothing to do with the subjective "expression" of an autonomous human subject.

Like *Circles*, Kristján's *Málverk af eðlisþunga plánetunnar Jörð* (*Painting of the Earth's Specific Gravity,* 1972-3) [Figure 3.13] – also exhibited at the Stedelijk in 1973 – insists on the primacy of the material, concrete reality of the artwork while simultaneously maintaining its relation to that which lies outside the field of art, through the function of metaphor. Kristján's work metaphorically captures the entire planet in painting, by matching the Earth's density (the ratio of its mass divided by its volume) to that of the painting's. As Icelandic art philosopher Gunnar J. Árnason notes: "Every single particle of the painting is equally important, whether in the front or the back, visible or invisible. The image on its surface is of no consequence, while what usually goes unnoticed, the physical properties of the support, are the most important features of the painting – its content."[446] In this self-conscious highlighting of the material, discursive structure of painting Kristján's work builds on the long tradition of modern art. However, in setting up a metaphorical relationship between the painting and the Earth – between the cultural and the natural – Kristján also explicitly refuses the modern insistence on the autonomy of the artwork, while simultaneously resisting the traditional notion of the artwork as a representation.

[446] Gunnar Árnason, "Drawing Lessons from Time – Kristján Guðmundsson," in *Frieze,* 6 June 1994, accessed April 2018, https://frieze.com/article/drawing-lessons-time.

Time and Space as Performative Constructs

Among the supposedly "pure" *a priori* concepts of the understanding posited by Kant, time and space figure prominently. As Paul Guyer and Allen W. Wood explain, in their introduction to the 1998 Cambridge edition of Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason,* Kant argues that "space and time are pure forms of all intuitions contributed by our own faculty of sensibility, and therefore forms of which we can have *a priori* knowledge."[447] Further, as they note, this leads Kant to the "paradoxical conclusion that although space and time are *empirically real,* they are *transcendentally ideal,* and so are the objects given in them."[448] As I have noted, Herder rejected this thesis, positing instead that all concepts arise either from empirical experience or from metaphorical extension from empirical experience. In several works by Kristján Guðmundsson and Hreinn Friðfinnsson, time and space are rendered not as absolute and abstract, but continually and performatively produced through material interaction, sensual perception and metaphorical extension.

In October 1974 a solo-exhibition of Kristján Guðmundsson's work, titled *Equal-Time Lines,* opened at In-Out Center in Amsterdam.[449] There, the artist exhibited a number of works in which he explores the concept of time through drawing. Among them a series of drawings collectively titled *Jafntíma línur* (*Equal-Time Lines,* 1974) [Figure 3.14],[450] which

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[447] Paul Guyer and Allen W. Wood, "Introduction to the *Critique of Pure Reason,*" in Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 7.

[448] Ibid, 7.

[449] Tineke Reijnders and Corinne Groote, "Equal-Time Line," The In-Out Center Archives, accessed June 2018, https://inoutcenterarchives.nl/equal-time-lines.

[450] Kristján's *Jafntíma línur* (*Equal-Time Lines,* 1974) were exhibited again at Gallery SÚM in Reykjavík one year later, in September 1975, alongside several other works in which Kristján explores the act of drawing. See e.g. Aðalsteinn Ingólfsson, "Línur hugans. Sýning Kristjáns

consist of straight lines of various lengths drawn with a fountain pen across a sheet of blotting paper. While the lines vary in length, the time Kristján spent drawing each is the same, hence the work's title. Thus, the greater the distance, the faster Kristján would move his pen across the page. This also means that the shorter the line, the thicker it is, as the blotting paper absorbs a greater amount of ink. *Equal-Time Lines* can thus be described as metaphorical visualizations of the relativity of space and time, as concepts emerging from performative material interactions. By setting up the simple parameter of the line as a measurement of time, Kristján is able to demonstrate in an elegant manner that our experience of time is intertwined with and affected by experience of space.

Hreinn Friðfinnsson's diptych *Staður – A Place* (1975) [Figure 3.15], similarly depicts time and space as relative, however, with an added consideration of the impact of subjective frames of mind, on the experience of space. Two identical photographs showing the same space from the same perspective – of a room viewed through a doorway – are hung side by side; underneath one Hreinn has written, in pencil: "A place of failure and disappointment;" under the other: "A place of hope and expectation." Here time, or change, is figured by the indication, in text, of the inflection of perception with emotion. And yet, narrative is refused; neither the photographs nor the accompanying texts give the viewer any indication of which came first, hope and expectation or failure and disappointment. Rather, they exist as two mutual potentials. Thus, *Staður* (*A Place,* 1975) might also be described as

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Guðmundssonar á Gallerí SÚM," in *Dagblaðið,* Sept. 22, 1975, 9, accessed Dec. 2016, http://timarit.is/view_page_init.jsp?issId=226818&pageId=3056983&lang=is&q=L%EDnur%20hugans.

evoking the virtual, not as a technologically produced realm of disembodied experience, but as abstract but real potential, created through metaphorical extension.

The virtual is similarly evoked by another diptych by Hreinn, titled *Síðar – After a While* (1976) [Figure 3.16]. In this work Hreinn combines photograph and text to indicate the passage of time, while simultaneously establishing a metaphorical relationship between the time of the photograph and the lived present moment of the viewer. Depicted, in a framed photograph, is a desk holding various inconspicuous items and materials, including a white piece of paper and a pencil, lit by a lamp and lying on the desk in front of a chair – as if someone had just got up from writing something. Displayed alongside the photograph is a framed sheet of paper, on which the statement "After a while, a shadow of a flying bird might pass across my hands" has been handwritten in pencil. It is, we are led to understand through our observation and comparison of the paper with the photograph beside it, the same piece of paper depicted in the photograph, as if transported from the past moment of the photograph to the present. In *Síðar* (*After a While*), movement – and thus time – is indicated, firstly, by the transposition and extension of the photographic representation into the present material reality of the viewer, and, secondly, as an abstract potential, in the text accompanying the photograph.

Finally, the virtual as abstract but real potential is also at the heart of another work by Hreinn described by curator Hans-Ulrich Obrist as "legendary."[451] In 1974 Hreinn placed an advertisement in the second issue of *Fandangos,* a magazine/newspaper developed by the

[451] See Hans U. Obrist, "Interview with Hreinn Friðfinnsson," in *Hreinn Friðfinnsson*, Edited by Melissa Larner (London: Serpentine Gallery, 2007), 51, Exhibition catalogue.

Colombian artist – and co-founder with Hreinn and others of the In-Out Center in Amsterdam in 1972 – Raúl Marroquín. It read:

> I collect personal secrets
>
> Please send yours to me, I am looking forward to learn them and I will keep them carefully.
>
> Hreinn Friðfinnsson
>
> Kerkstraat 413 Amsterdam Holland[452]

Despite its repetition in the third issue – this time with an exclamation mark following an all capitalized "SECRETS" – the artist received no response, a result probably both of the delicacy of the proposition and the underground nature of Marroquín's publication. The unuttered secrets remained virtual in their potential. However, when republished in Hans-Ulrich Obrist's and Agnès B.'s magazine *Le Point d'Ironie* in July 2009, Hreinn received hundreds of responses, in the form of envelopes, packages and boxes sent to his gallery in Reykjavík. The project was concluded six years later, with the exhibition "I collected personal secrets" (1972-2015), at the Kunstverein in Amsterdam 12 September – 7 November 2015. To retain their virtual state, and to keep his promise, the artist had his assistant shred all material sent his way without reading anything. Finally, the destroyed material remnants were bound together with a thick layer of bookbinder glue, to create a

[452] See Tineke Reijnders, "Hreinn Fridfinnsson and the In-Out Center," The In-Out Center Archives, accessed September 2018, https://inoutcenterarchives.nl/text/hreinn-fridfinnsson.

"monochrome painting;" virtual potential transformed into a soft, bulging mass of material.[453]

Nature-Culture and the Performativity of Matter

In contrast to Kristján Guðmundsson's "mathematical" – and hence, supposedly, cerebral, abstract and unaffected – poetics, Eva Heisler describes Hreinn Friðfinnsson's work as "lyrical" and flirting "with autobiography and romantic sensibility."[454] She explains this difference in terms of an indication of interiority, created in Hreinn's work largely through the projection of the artist's voice – his use of the personal pronoun *I* – and intimations of feeling. Although Heisler never uses the terms "subjective" or "expression" in her discussion of Hreinn's work, the implication is there, in her opposition of it to Kristján's "mathematical" poetry.

And yet, as Heisler admits, the impression of emotion in Hreinn's work is not always a product of the work itself. For instance, while the sentence "I have looked at the sea through my tears" – printed on a framed glass pane in Hreinn's *Substances* (1973) [Figure 3.17] – may conjure up for the viewer associations with romantic landscape painting and the strong emotional reactions associated with experiences of sublime nature, any such metaphysical notions are undermined by Hreinn's inscription "After a performance for one person and the sea," rendered in small handwriting at the bottom left side of the glass. For the latter statement replaces the indication of emotion in the former with a purely physical,

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[453] See Ibid; Tineke Reijnders, "Hreinn Friðfinnsson. Kunstverein Amsterdam," [Review] 02.11.2015, *Metropolis M,* accessed September 2018, http://www.metropolism.com/nl/reviews/23977_hreinn_fri_finnsson.

[454] Heisler, "Soulful Mathematics," 62.

bodily reaction to the effect of wind, water and other substances hitting the eye; the tears through which the viewing subject looks are less an indication of an emotional reaction to nature's perceived magnificence than the product of a physical, interactive process, as the human body produces its own substance in reaction to its direct intercourse with elements of the natural environment. Thus, Hreinn's *Substances* challenges the neutral objectivity of visual observation and the isolation of vision from other senses of the body. Further, Hreinn's suggestion of a mutual and shared performativity between human being and nature directly contradicts the distinction, and ontological distance, of the subject from its object, fundamental to western philosophy.

A number of works by Hreinn, Kristján and Sigurður are grounded in the notion of matter, not as mute, passive and pliable, but as performative and agentive. This notion is discernible, as I have argued, for instance in Hreinn's *Substances,* Kristján's *Punktar/Periods* as well as in Sigurður's *Pavement, street* and *Earth, water*. Returning to the notion of the rematerialization of the art object in the work of Sigurður, Kristján and Hreinn, in what follows I highlight the artists' evocations of matter as active, dynamic and agentive.

Projects for the Wind

Both Sigurður Guðmundsson's *A Project for the Wind, Drawing* (1971) [Figures 3.18-3.23] and *A Project for the Wind, Sculpture* (1971) [Figures 3.24-3.29] are conceptually premised on the notion of matter as agentive. Each work is composed of a series of six photographs and text, which document the artist's active surrender to a nonhuman natural force, that of wind. Submitting to one simple rule, of keeping his back to the wind, over a

period of four days Sigurður created a "drawing" by lining up stones in the grass and a "sculpture" by nailing pieces of wood to a wooden post, on a hill in Cornwall, England.

Hreinn Friðfinnsson's *Five Gates for the South Wind* (1971-72) [Figure 3.30] also relies on the active force of wind. Like Sigurður's projects, Hreinn's work documents – in fourteen black-and-white photographs – a performance, but this time one distinctly nonhuman. On south coast of Iceland, Hreinn erected five free-standing, white-painted, wooden gates, "for the south wind." As the photographs – which document the gates from various degrees of distance – show, however, on the date of Hreinn's completion of the gates and his documentation of their construction, the wind was decidedly uncooperative, stubbornly shifting from south to north and refusing to open the gates. As Hreinn recalls, he told no one of his project, left the gates as they were and never returned.[455] While it is likely that, at some point, the wind turned, and the gates were opened, this potential remains untold and undocumented, and thus – like the secrets the artist did not collect in 1972 – forever virtual.

Sigurður's and Hreinn's projects for the wind recall Dieter Roth's *Vindharpa* (*Windharp*) from 1961 [Figure 2.16], a work which marks the first public indication of Roth's turn from Concrete art and his rejection of the ideological premises of modern art. Furthermore, as I have argued, *Vindharpa* inaugurates Roth's critical de-differentiation of nature and culture, a project which would significantly mark his work in the coming years. As I have discussed, this was brought on by Roth's introduction, in the late 1950s and early 1960s, into a network of experimental artists associated with Fluxus and Nouveau Réalisme,

[455] Halldór B. Runólfsson, "Hreinn Friðfinnsson," in *Íslensk listasaga frá síðari hluta 19. aldar til upphafs 21. aldar,* vol. IV, ed. Kvaran, 182-183.

as well as his confrontation with Iceland and its location outside the geopolitical and cultural centers of Europe. Continuing this project of de-differentiation, Sigurður's and Hreinn's works undermine the traditional notion of art as an intentional and distinctly human activity, thus indirectly responding to Brecht's call for the production of "chance-imagery" and the radical erosion of the distinction of the human and the nonhuman, of culture and nature.

One of the crucial elementary tactics developed by humans to shelter themselves and their property from the forces of nature is to erect physical, material structures, the boundaries of which can be said to initiate a process of acculturation by establishing a difference between the interior, domestic realm of "culture" and the exterior, "wild" realm of nature. German media theorist Bernhard Siegert has argued that the gate is one such basal cultural technique (G. *Kulturtechnik*). In his book *Cultural Techniques: Grids, Filters, Doors, and Other Articulations of the Real*, published in 2015, Siegert defines cultural techniques as media – in the broadest sense of the term, as its application to the gate indicates – that "operationalize distinctions in the real."[456] Noting the Austrian philosopher Thomas Macho's definition of cultural techniques as techniques that involve symbolic work and entail a potential for self-reference, Siegert sets out, in his book, to expand the notion of symbolic acts.

Significantly, as Siegert stresses, cultural techniques "precede the distinction of nature and culture,"[457] as well as the associated distinction of humans from animals: "… the difference between humans and animals is one that depends on the mediation of a cultural technique. In this not only tools and weapons… play an essential role, but also the invention

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[456] Bernhard Siegert, *Cultural Techniques: Grids, Filters, Doors, and Other Articulations of the Real,* trans. Geoffrey Winthrop-Young (New York: Fordham University Press, 2015), 14.
[457] Ibid, 14-15.

of the door, whose first form was presumably the gate (*Gatter*)…"[458] At once material and symbolic, the gate – in its original construction with a herding fold – functions, Siegert argues, as a "medium of the coevolutionary domestication of animals *and* humans."[459] Further, the gate is connected to the establishment of law through the politics of land division and the creation of political, social and cultural insiders and outsiders.[460] Finally, Siegert notes, the gate – and its offspring, the door – is "intimately connected to the notion of the threshold, a zone that belongs neither to the inside nor the outside and is thus an extremely dangerous place."[461] In this articulation of the distinction between inside and outside, of sacred and profane zones, Siegert argues, the door may in fact "well be the first of all cultural articulations of space."[462] Building on Siegert's definition, Hreinn Friðfinnsson's *Five Gates for the South Wind* might be characterized as a subversive cultural technique, a material-symbolic act which undermines the distinction of the human from the animal, and culture form nature. For importantly, as Siegert notes, cultural techniques not only institutionalize sign systems and process distinctions but can also destabilize and liquidate boundaries. He writes: "Apart from cultures of distinction, we also have cultures of de-differentiation (what was once labeled "savage" and placed in direct opposition to culture). Cultural techniques do not only colonize bodies. Tied to specific practices and chains of operation, they also serve to decolonize bodies, images, text, and music."[463] In their autonomy from an accompanying fold or walls which

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[458] Ibid, 193.

[459] Ibid.

[460] Ibid, 194.

[461] Ibid.

[462] Ibid, 195.

[463] Ibid, 15.

would distinguish a space of interiority from the exterior "wild," Hreinn's gates work precisely to destabilize the boundary of nature and culture, by locating the human interior in the exteriority of nature.

The Rematerialization of Landscape

As I have argued, the rematerialization of the artwork in the work of Sigurður, Kristján and Hreinn can be understood as the product of their translation of Fluxus practices and precepts into the cultural context of postwar Iceland, as well as their confrontation with the romantic tradition of landscape painting. Several of Sigurður Guðmundsson's photographic *Situations* play directly with the tradition of landscape painting in ways that destabilize the traditional concepts of man and nature. For instance, *Landscape* (1977) [Figure 3.31] depicts Sigurður standing with wire strings laid over his head, extending out from his body and fastened to the earth on each side of his body, to create the silhouette of a mountain view, the classic ideal of Icelandic landscape painting. Here Sigurður's body becomes both the ground and the vehicle for the inscription and construction of the landscape, as an image.

In *Dancing Horizon* (1977) [Figure 3.32] Sigurður is seen attempting the impossible feat of balancing a wooden slat on his head in line with the horizon in an unknown and indistinguishable uniform sandy landscape. Through the impossible performance of keeping his body completely still, that is of rendering himself an object of representation – an impossibility that is delivered in visual terms in the extensions of Sigurður's limbs and in the diagonal line of the wooden slat which pierces the horizon behind him, as well as in the work's title, *Dancing Horizon* – Sigurður prompts in the viewer an awareness of the fluidity,

movement and transition of not only the human body, but also, by extension, the natural landscape surrounding him.

As Erwin Panofsky showed in his well-known and important study *Perspective and Symbolic Form*, originally published in 1924-1925 in the German "Die Perspektive als 'symbolische Form,'" the invention of linear perspective in the first half of the fifteenth century introduced a new relationship between the viewer and the world, in which the latter is transformed into mathematized pictorial space, as a uniform spatial continuum containing all various individual objects. Destabilizing the horizon Sigurður challenges the conceptualization and abstraction of space so integral to modernity, and the related isolation of vision and the divorce of cognition from all other senses of the body.

Conclusion

For Lippard and Chandler conceptual art's dematerialization of the art object was an effect of a process of art's "intellectualization" and artists' rejection of "the anti-intellectual, emotional/intuitive processes of art-making" which had characterized artistic production in the previous two decades.[464] Meanwhile, Sigurður Guðmundsson, Kristján Guðmundsson and Hreinn Friðfinnsson, have consistently suggested an emotional or intuitive basis for their practice.[465] The artists' evocations of subjective emotion or sensation, and the centrality of

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[464] Lippard and Chandler, "The Dematerialization of Art (1968)," in *Conceptual Art*, ed. Osborne (London; New York: Phaidon, 2005 (2002)), 218.

[465] See e.g. "Öll list og öll fegurð eru háð tímanum," 8-9 and 12; "*Án titils* – Rætt við Kristján Guðmundsson," in *Teningur,* May 1, 1987, 48-60; Kristín D. Jóhannesdóttir, "Rendez-vous: Sigurður Guðmundsson in conversation with Kristín Dagmar Jóhannesdóttir," in *Dancing with the Horizon,* ed. Jóhannesdóttir, 198-207.

nature to their work, have served as the justification of the characterization of their work as "poetic" or "romantic," and its juxtaposition with the so-called "analytic" conceptualism of Anglo-American artists. Furthermore, as I have noted, these designations have been explained in terms of the relative lack of industrial development in Iceland and the Icelandic people's purportedly direct relationship or engagement with the wilderness.

In discussions of the work of Sigurður, Kristján and Hreinn outside of Iceland, the terms "romantic" and "poetic" often prompt an inscription of naiveté, nostalgia or cultural backwardness, which function ultimately to position Icelanders on the periphery or outside of modernity. For instance, on the occasion of Hreinn Friðfinnsson's solo-exhibition at London's Serpentine Gallery in 2007, *The Observer's* art critic defined the artist as "a poet among artists" and described his work as exuding an emotionalism that she characterized as "unashamedly romantic."[466] This then led her to position Hreinn's work in a time passed, giving "odd substance to old ideas and emotions." On the same occasion, another critic writing in *Art Review,* talked about a "mystic dimension" and an "almost juvenile enthusiasm for inexplicable beauty" in Friðfinnson's work, which "sometimes approaches the naïve."[467] Accounts such as these repeat the historical marginalization of Icelandic art, for instance in the reviews of the 1951 exhibition of Icelandic art in Oslo, discussed in the first chapter of this dissertation, and in the Dutch review of *SÚM IV* in 1971, discussed above. I have argued that this narrative – which locates Iceland outside of the sphere of modern civilization – must be situated in the context of Iceland's longer political history and the mythical image of

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[466] See Laura Cumming, "Let's do the twist again," in *The Observer/The Guardian,* 29 July 2007, accessed Nov. 2017, https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2007/jul/29/art.

[467] See Coline Millard, "Hreinn Fridfinnsson," in *Art Review,* Oct. 1, 2007, 153, accessed Nov. 2017, https://artreview.com/magazine/2007/october_2007/.

Icelandic culture built up since the Early Modern period, discussed in the first chapter of this dissertation.

While I reject the association of the work of Sigurður, Kristján and Hreinn with a lack of intellectual rigor, with naïve realism and outdated notions of the artwork as the expression of the artist's subjective interiority – associations which are implicit in the distinction of their work from so-called "analytical" conceptual art – I do see their work as sharing with romantic philosophy a primary concern with the conditions and limits of the relationship between the human subject and the natural environment, and between being and knowing. As I have argued, the implicit association of the "romantic" and the "poetic" with naiveté and historical backwardness can only be described as unfounded, both in light of Herder's sophisticated theorization of the relationship between thought and language, and in light of the critical destabilization of the boundaries of nature and culture in the work of Sigurður, Kristján and Hreinn, a project which I have described as an effort towards the rematerialization of the art object. As I have argued, this was informed by the artists' translation of avant-garde critiques of representation and of the reification of the art object under capital into the Icelandic context, configured through a confrontation with landscape painting. Ironically, however, the marginalization of Icelandic conceptual art on the basis of its "romantic" and "poetic" character, also relies on Herder's concept of history as a teleological progression of "humanity" and "reason" out of nature. Herein lies the paradoxical legacy of romanticism, as it emerges in Herder's work, and the origin of the dialectical tensions which have informed and shaped the practice and discourse of art in Iceland since the early twentieth century.

As I have discussed in the first chapter of this dissertation, Herder's theory of the natural origin of language was crucial for the project of Icelandic nationalism. Critically, it is on this hisorical basis that SÚM artists' first take up the terms "romantic" and "poetic," as markers of cultural resistance to the dominance of a modern technocratic and urban perspective on the relationship of human beings to nature; a perspective which can be characterized in terms of the historical process of the mathematization of space, described by Erwin Panofsky, as the ground on which the "dream of the information world" – to use Eve Meltzer's phrase – was built. Such resistance must be understood, as I have argued, in the context of Icelandic nationalism and its relation to Icelanders' historical subjugation under the foreign political and economic power of the Danish Empire from 1380 to 1944, as well as Iceland's military occupation during WWII and the continued presence of an American military force in Iceland in the postwar period.

In my discussion of the influence of Lippard and Chandler's theory of dematerialization above, I speculated that its appeal and the continued force of its claims of conceptual art's association with an "intellectualization" on the basis of a de-linking from the material basis of art may be linked to its implicit association with the political ideal of a decentered, globalized art world. Despite the widespread influence of this idea, there is little evidence to support its realization in the 1960s and seventies. Contradicting this narrative and its institutional propagation – for instance in the 1999 exhibition *Global Conceptualism,* held at the Queens Museum of Art in New York – art historian Sophie Cras notes, for instance, that of the one hundred and sixty-four participants in *Documenta V* in Kassel in 1972, only one named their current place of residence as located outside of the U.S. or Western Europe. As Cras argues, there was in fact ample evidence to support the contrary claim made by

some artists, including the German-born Uruguayan artist Luis Camnitzer, that so-called "internationalism" of conceptual art was "actually a local form of ideology, linked to American imperialism, which acted as a disguise for the exportation of 'colonial contemporary.'"[468] It is, I believe, from a parallel position of anti-colonial, nationalist critique of American neocolonialism that Icelandic conceptual artists took up the labels of "romantic" and "poetic" in the 1970s. Critically however, as I have demonstrated, these labels cannot be understood as indicators of the artists' subscription to a naïve realism or the traditional aesthetic definition of the art object.

I have argued that SÚM artists seemingly paradoxical positioning of their work as situated both within and outside of modernity can be understood in the context of John Hutchinson's theory of cultural nationalism. In this context, SÚM artists' mobilization of romantic critiques of modernity can be understood as a critical strategy to reposition Icelandic art and culture not as "premodern" but decidedly "avant-garde." A crucial strategy employed in both anti-colonial and avant-garde critiques of modernity was the appropriation – and sometimes idealization of – so-called "premodern" or "primitive" cultural practices. In the next chapter I examine SÚM artists' evocations and support of Icelandic folk culture (Icel. *alþýðumenning*) and folk art (Icel. *alþýðulist*) in the context of Icelandic nationalism and the discourse of the avant-garde in Iceland.

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[468] Cras, "Global Conceptualism?," 176. The quote from Camnitzer derives from a paper originally presented to the Latin American Studies Association conference, Washington, D.C., in 1969. See Luis Camnitzer, "Contemporary Colonial Art," in *Conceptual Art: A Critical Anthology,* ed. Alberro and Stimson, 225.

Chapter 4. Folk Culture and SÚM: Nationalism, Anti-Colonialism and the Avant-Garde

… it is through the re-appearance of these low-ranking knowledges, these unqualified, even directly disqualified knowledges… a particular, local, regional knowledge… that criticism performs its work.

- Michel Foucault, 1976[469]

Culture never stands alone but always participates in a conflictual economy acting out the tension between sameness and difference, comparison and differentiation, unity and diversity, cohesion and dispersion, containment and subversion. Culture is never liable to fall into fixity, stasis or organic totalization: the constant construction and reconstruction of cultures and cultural differences is fuelled by an unending internal dissention in the imbalances of the capitalist economies that produce them.

- Robert C. Young, 1995[470]

SÚM's translation of avant-garde practices into the political and cultural context of postwar Iceland since the 1960s, and the extension of SÚM's practice into a "global" artistic sphere in the 1970s intersects, somewhat unexpectedly, with SÚM artists growing engagement with decidedly "local" themes and subject matter; with the Icelandic tradition of landscape painting and the discourse of art in Iceland, with Icelandic politics and national identity, and increasingly from the 1970s onwards, with what could be described as autochthonous Icelandic cultural traditions and beliefs. The latter is exemplified by Hreinn Friðfinnsson's photographic series *Sacred and Enchanted Places* (1972) [Figure 4.1]. The series consists of four works, each of which contains two black-and-white photographic images separated by printed text, and rendered in the unaffected, "scientistic" documentary style typical of late

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[469] Michel Foucault, "Two Lectures – Lecture One: 7 January 1976," in *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972-1977,* ed. Colin Gordon, trans. Colin Gordon et al. (New York: Pantheon Books, 1980), 82.

[470] Young, *Colonial Desire*, 50.

1960s and early 1970s conceptualism. In one, two images of supposedly unremarkable stones are separated by a textual report of human encounters with an enchanted rock in Ármúli in Reykjavík, a modern example of the ancient belief in nature spirits and elves or hidden people, popularly believed to inhabit and animate the landscape of Iceland, demanding respect in their communication with human beings and sometimes even interrupting human activity.

In the previous chapter I argued that SÚM artists' adoption of the terms "romantic" and "poetic" could be understood in the context of the legacy of romantic thought in Icelandic nationalism, as a reaction against the deceptive notion of conceptual art's "international" character – an ideology that was understood by some artists to support a form of American neocolonialism. With rapid political decolonization by the remaining colonial powers after 1945, the rise of the civil rights movement in the U.S. in the 1950s and sixties and increasing awareness of and opposition to U.S. military entanglement in the Vietnam war in the late 1960s, the complicity of the cultural complex known as European modernity in colonial and neocolonial domination was becoming increasingly apparent. In Iceland, the postwar period saw the rise of a Leftist nationalist discourse that allied itself with anti-colonial resistance worldwide. This is perhaps most clearly exemplified by the writing of the "atom poet" Sigfús Daðason in the early 1960s.[471] In the article "National Freedom and Socialism," published in the Socialist *Tímarit Máls og menningar* (The Magazine of Language and Culture, est. 1938), which Sigfús edited, in 1962, he wrote: "the economic structure of western civilization in the nineteenth century rested increasingly on the

[471] See discussion in the second chapter of this dissertation.

legalization of the bondage of a large portion of the population."[472] He went on to emphasize that the relative freedom and "civilization" of the western world was achieved by the exploitation of tricontinental countries, not only through slavery but more subtly through the creation of economic dependency. It is in this new, more subtle form of colonialism – propagated under the slogans of freedom and the open market – that the poet saw a parallel between Icelandic and Latin American relations to the U.S.[473]

A pioneer of modernist poetry in Iceland, Sigfús was among the founders of the Icelandic Anti-War Movement (Icel. Samtök hernámsandstæðinga, later Samtök herstöðvaandstæðinga). Established at a meeting in Þingvellir (Thing Fields) – a key symbol of Icelandic nationalism since the early nineteenth century – in 1960, the Anti-War Movement was a political opposition movement against American political and cultural involvement in Iceland in the postwar period, and most crucially, the ongoing presence of a U.S. military force in the country. Furthermore, proponents of the movement demanded the abdication of Iceland's membership in the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), established in 1949.

A distinct cultural elite of authors, artists and educators – several of which, though not all, were associated with Leftist politics – played a key role in postwar public demonstrations against the U.S. military presence and Iceland's membership in NATO. Like

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[472] In the original: "… efnahagsskipluag vestrænnar menningar á 19. öld fól í sér æ meir sem lengra leið löggildingu á þrælkun mikils hluta mannkynsins." Sigfús Daðason, "Þjóðfrelsisbarátta og sósíalismi," in *Tímarit Máls og menningar,* May 1, 1962, 101, accessed September 2017, http://timarit.is/view_page_init.jsp?issId=380839&pageId=6278458&lang=is&q=SIGF%DAS%20DA%D0ASON.

[473] Ibid, 99-118.

the leaders of nationalist and anti-colonial movements throughout the globe, these artists and critics looked to an imagined precolonial past in their efforts to imagine and craft an independent but modern Icelandic culture. As it had in the romantic nationalist movement of the nineteenth and early-twentieth century, the precolonial Golden Age described in the medieval Icelandic Sagas continued to occupy a central position in the cultural imaginary of Icelanders in the postwar period. Conservative nationalists tended to look to the Sagas as proof of Icelander's literary achievement – and thus, implicitly, of their relative cultural development compared to other former colonies. But in the late 1960s and seventies there was a marked increase in the public representation of Icelandic folk beliefs (Icel. *þjóðtrú*) and tales (Icel. *þjóðsögur*) as well as "pagan" or animistic beliefs, previously repressed by prominent cultural and political figures associated with the Icelandic Enlightenment of the late eighteenth and nineteenth century, along with growing interest in Icelandic vernacular culture.

It is in this broader context of the re-evaluation of Icelandic folk culture (Icel. *alþýðumenning*), and within the framework of Icelandic postwar nationalism and its alignment with anti-colonial resistance movements globally, that SÚM artists' evocations of folk belief and their positioning of their work in association with so-called folk culture should be understood. The former is exemplified by Hreinn Friðfinnsson's *Álagablettir,* discussed above. The latter can be discerned in exhibitions of the work of "naïve," untrained artists at Gallery SÚM, the inclusion of such work at SÚM exhibitions abroad, and SÚM's alignment with a movement for the research and preservation of Icelandic turf architecture. Crucially, this engagement with Icelandic folk culture and art emerges alongside SÚM

artists' positioning of their work in relation to the political and cultural goals of the Icelandic Anti-War Movement and its alliance with global anti-colonial struggles.

SÚM artists' explorations of the supposedly "archaic" traditions of Icelandic folk belief and of "naïve" folk art must also be placed in the context of avant-garde critiques of modernity. In fact, the apparent contradiction between SÚM's aspirations to relevance and participation in an increasingly "globalized" art world and their engagement with autochthonous beliefs and vernacular cultural traditions can, as I will argue, be resolved in light of their translation of avant-garde practices into the Icelandic context, which as I have argued in the previous chapters focused on a critical reconfiguration of the boundaries of culture and nature, and of the human and the nonhuman.

In this positioning of SÚM work in the context of Icelandic nationalism, anti-colonial resistance and the avant-garde, a number of significant problems arise. First, how to come to terms with the association of Leftist postwar Icelandic nationalism with anti-colonial resistance movements in the so-called Third World. This problem relates to the Janus-faced character of Romanticism and cultural nationalism: their double identity, firstly, as ideological constructs that provided conceptual ground for the continued objectification and mistreatment of populations around the globe, but also, secondly, as powerful tools for the interrogation of European civilization. In other words, the problem resides in how to figure the relationship of anti-colonialism to "internal" critiques of European modernity. The second problem is raised in positioning SÚM's engagement with Icelandic folk culture in relation to their translation of avant-garde artistic practices into Iceland. This consists in how to understand the mobilization of "archaic," "premodern" traditions within ethnic resistance movements in relation to avant-garde appropriation of "primitive" or "premodern" cultural

practices for an internal critique of European modernity. The case of SÚM is particularly apt for such a comparison, and for interrogating some of the assumptions that it unveils, because of Iceland's ambiguous geographical and cultural position, on the margins of Europe.

In my attempt to begin to answer these questions in the following I turn, firstly to nationalism scholar John Hutchinson's theory of cultural nationalism, and secondly, to the writing of British postcolonial theorist and historian Robert J.C. Young, particularly his explication of the complex relationship of notions of hybridity to historical European discourses on culture, civilization, race and modernity in his 1995 book *Colonial Desire: Hybridity in Theory, Culture, and Race.* Most crucially, Hutchinson's and Young's writing allow me to complicate the perception of nationalism and anti-colonialism as defensive, conservative and provincial movements and to reveal their complex relation to processes of transculturation.

Folk Culture, the Avant-Garde and the Icelandic Postwar Left

The late 1960s and early seventies saw a marked increase in the public representation of Icelandic vernacular culture, folk beliefs and paganism. Folkloristics was first taught at the University of Iceland (est. 1911) in 1972 and an unofficial organization dedicated to the preservation of ancient Norse pagan traditions and beliefs, the Ásatrú Fellowship (Icel. Ásatrúarfélagið), was established on the traditional First Day of Summer that same year, as Icelanders publicly and officially celebrated, for the first time, the marking of summer according to the Old Norse calendar. The Ásatrú Fellowship was officially founded a year

later.[474] Growing interest in vernacular Icelandic culture in the same period can be measured, for instance, in the pioneering research of artist Hörður Ágústsson into Icelandic architectural heritage, specifically the history and development of traditional Icelandic turf houses,[475] Icelanders' primary accommodation until the early twentieth century.[476]

Significantly, Hörður participated in the Anti-War Movement alongside many of Iceland's most prominent artists and writers, and in 1972 he was among the founders of The Turf Association (Icel. Torfusamtökin),[477] an association dedicated to the preservation of old timber houses in Reykjavík, as well as the preservation and research of Icelandic

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[474] The official establishment of the Ásatrú Fellowship in 1973 had been prepared by the mythologizing of Iceland's precolonial Commonwealth (Icel. *þjóðveldi*) era (930 – 1262) in the research, writing and public, state-funded, lectures of Iceland's most influential historian in the early half of the twentieth century. See Simon Halink, "Noble Heathens: Jón Jónsson Aðils and the problem of Iceland's pagan past," in *Nations and Nationalism,* vol. 23, no. 3 (2017), 463-483.

[475] See Hörður Ágústsson, "Af minnisblöðum málara," in *Birtingur,* January 1, 1963, 9-25, accessed May 2017, http://timarit.is/view_page_init.jsp?issId=343956&pageId=5389854&lang=is&q=Af%20minnisbl%F6%F0um%20m%E1lara; Hörður Ágústsson, "Af minnisblöðum málara," in *Birtingur,* June 1, 1963, 20-36, accessed May 2017, http://timarit.is/view_page_init.jsp?issId=343957&pageId=5389910&lang=is&q=Af%20minnisbl%F6%F0um%20m%E1lara; "Fyrirlestrar um torfhús," in *Tíminn,* Nov. 11, 1964, 2, accessed May 2017, http://timarit.is/view_page_init.jsp?issId=265514&pageId=3757854&lang=is&q=um.

[476] The construction of new turf-houses had been banned in the capital, Reykjavík, in 1894, but in rural areas turf-houses remained the primary accommodation well into the twentieth century. In 1910, turf-houses made up about 52 per cent of Iceland's residential buildings, by 1930 that number had gone down to 27 per cent and by 1960 turf-houses accounted for only 1 per cent of residential housing. See Anna L. Rúnarsdóttir, "Á tímum torfbæja: Híbýlahættir og efnismenning í íslenska torfbænum frá 1850," in *Skýrslur Þjóðminjasafns Íslands* 2007/1 (Reykjavík: National Museum of Iceland, 2007).

[477] Translation of the name of Torfusamtökin into English is my own.

architectural heritage more broadly. Established by a broad coalition of artists associations and members of the general public on the fifty-fourth anniversary of Iceland's sovereignty on 1 December 1972,[478] Torfusamtökin was named after a row of houses – the oldest of which were erected in the early nineteenth century – in central Reykjavík known as the Bernhöft turf (Icel. Bernhöftstorfan) that, in 1972, was slated for demolition. The name of the association also points, however, to the long tradition of turf architecture in Iceland.

The marked resurgence of interest in Icelandic vernacular culture and autochthonous beliefs in the postwar period and its association with Leftist politics, as I will demonstrate in the following, can be understood from within the framework of cultural nationalism, as defined by John Hutchinson, not simply as a conservative or isolationist movement but as a historically complex reaction to the antinomies of capitalist modernity.

[478] Founders of Torfusamtökin (The Turf Association, est. 1972) included all associations of the Federation of Icelandic artists (Icel. Bandalag íslenskra listamanna, est. 1928). See "Troðfullt í Sigtúni þegar Torfusamtökin voru stofnuð – að loknum útifundi var kosin fimm manna bráðabirgðastjórn," in *Þjóðviljinn,* Dec. 2 1972, 3-15, accessed Sep. 2017, http://timarit.is/view_page_init.jsp?issId=220617&pageId=2833728&lang=is&q=Tro%F0fullt%20%ED%20Sigt%FAni%20%FEegar%20Torfusamt%F6kin%20voru%20stofnu%F0.

Cultural Nationalism and the Political Crisis of the Postwar Period

John Hutchinson defines cultural nationalism as a recurring reaction to political crisis:

> In situations of political crisis, with the established national leaders increasingly remote from the people and helpless against an alien threat, there is frequently a revulsion from rationalist identities and a reversion to "deeper" traditional cosmic symbols. Under these circumstances a new generation of political leaders may emerge, adopting the communitarian strategies of the cultural nationalists to mobilize grass-roots organizations – modernist and traditionalists – behind a programme of national regeneration.[479]

The occupation of Iceland by British and later American military forces during WWII, Iceland's subsequent entry into NATO in 1949, and the Icelandic center-right government's signing of a bilateral defense agreement with the United States in 1951, can be understood in precisely these terms, as a serious political crisis for the newly independent nation of Iceland.[480] It is this crisis which inaugurated the recurrence of cultural nationalism in Iceland in the postwar period, the ultimate goal of which was not only political independence but, more importantly, cultural regeneration.

Significantly, as Hutchinson notes cultural nationalism can take both modernist and traditionalist forms. In what follows, I identify the rhetoric of the Anti-War Movement with the former tendency, of an essentially modernizing cultural nationalism. In order to differentiate the politics of the Anti-War Movement from that of conservative nationalists in the early-twentieth century, it is helpful to consider their views on the avant-garde.

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[479] Hutchinson, *The Dynamics of Cultural Nationalism*, 42.

[480] Iceland gained full independence from Denmark in 1944, during Denmark's occupation by Nazi forces, thus ending more than five-and-a-half centuries of Iceland's political subjugation under the Danish Empire, and later the Danish modern state.

The Avant-Garde, Folk Culture and Icelandic Cultural Nationalism

As I have discussed in the first chapter of this dissertation, the Icelandic reception of the avant-garde in the mid-twentieth century was split in two camps. While conservative nationalists tended to reject the avant-garde as symptomatic of the "degenerative" character of international modern civilization, others saw it as an ally in the fight against the un-civilizing influence of American capitalist mass culture. The former position is exemplified, as I have discussed, by the rhetoric of Jónas Jónsson from Hriflu. The latter can be discerned most clearly in the writing of Sigfús Daðason.

The rhetoric promoted by Jónas from Hrifla in the 1940s and fifties was significantly shaped by older debates about the avant-garde. More particularly, it bears the mark of notions of avant-garde art's "pathological" and "degenerative" symptoms. This attitude is also discernible in one of the earliest extensive discussion of the European avant-garde, which appears in a lecture held by Alexander Jóhannesson, professor of linguistics at the University of Iceland, and published in the semi-annual journal *Óðinn* (Odin) in 1920.[481] Prejudiced by the theories of Danish bacteriologist Carl Julius Salomonsen and British archaeologist Charles Hercules Read,[482] Alexander warns the Icelandic public of the undesirable, "pathological" mental effect of modern avant-garde art. What is at issue in Alexander's critique of the avant-garde particularly, is its aspirations towards the primitive.

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[481] Alexander Jóhannesson, "Nýjar listastefnur (Alþýðufræðsla Stúdentafjelagsins 9. Maí 1920.)," in *Óðinn,* Jan. 1, 1920, 41-45, accessed August 2017, http://timarit.is/view_page_init.jsp?issId=173617&pageId=2291925&lang=is&q=N%FDjar%20listastefnur.

[482] Benedikt Hjartarson discusses the context and reception of Salomonson's theories in his essay "The Early Avant-Garde in Iceland."

In addition to discussing expressionist, futurist and cubist painting, Alexander comments on literature produced by these movements, ironically providing the first Icelandic translation of an avant-garde poem; Francis Picabia's "Salive Américaine," originally published in the third issue of *Dada* in 1918, the title of which Alexander adopts from a Danish translation into Icelandic as "Ameríkanskur hráki" (D. "Amerikansk spyt").[483]

As Benedikt Hjartarson has commented, given the lack of avant-garde activity in Iceland at the time, Alexander's intention seems to have been to prevent the potential emergence of an Icelandic avant-garde, rather than to critique an existing one.[484] This interpretation is supported by Alexander's description – following his introduction of Picabia's poetry – of the poem "Futurískar kveldstemningar" ("Futuristic Evening Moods"), written by Icelandic poet and novelist Þórbergur Þórðarson under the pen-name Styr Stofuglamm and published in 1917, as "probably the only existing Futurist poem in Icelandic."[485]

In comparison, Sigfús Daðason understood the cultural renewal of the Icelandic nation as aligned with avant-garde critiques of capitalist modernity and the rise of mass consumer culture. In a speech held at the meeting for the establishment of the Icelandic Anti-War Movement at Þingvellir on 9 September 1960, and published in *Tímarit Máls og*

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[483] As Benedikt Hjartarson notes Alexander Jóhannesson's references are taken "almost exclusively" from two pamphlets published in relation to Salomonsen's public lecture at the University of Copenhagen in January 1919, in which Picabia's poem "Salive Américaine" appeared both in the French original and in Danish translation. See Hjartarson, "The Early Avant-Garde in Iceland," 617.
[484] Benedikt Hjartarson, "Dragging Nordic Horses past the Sludge of Extremes. The Beginnings of the Icelandic Avant-Garde (1906-1940)," in *The Invention of Politics in the European Avant-Garde (1906-1940),* ed. S. Bru and G. Martens (Amsterdam; New York: Rodopi, 2006), 242.
[485] Jóhannesson, "Nýjar listastefnur …", 43.

menningar that same month, Sigfús called for the creation of an independent modern Icelandic culture, rooted in autochthonous cultural traditions and heritage, warning his readers of the dangers of an uncritical appropriation of "Americanism" (Icel. ameríkanismi), or capitalist mass culture.[486] Sigfús writes:

> […] the folk culture [Icel. *alþýðumenningin*] is not only the justification but the precondition of our nationality. The precondition, because any higher culture is utterly unthinkable in Iceland without the solid ground of a folk culture. The nation is so small that the possibility of an autonomous high culture developing here is inconceivable. Therefore, it is not a paradox to say that the folk culture must be as central in our urban culture – in the urban culture we are tasked with creating – as it was in the old culture. Hence, the decline of folk culture which Americanism involves, is nowhere as dangerous as here; mass culture [Icel. *alþýðuómenning*] would sever the roots of higher culture here quicker than anywhere else.[487]

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[486] Sigfús Daðason, "Sjálfstæð nútímamenning eða sníkjumenning," in *Tímarit Máls og menningar,* Sept. 1, 1960, 252-257, accessed Sep. 2017, http://timarit.is/view_page_init.jsp?issId=380831&pageId=6277649&lang=is&q=Sigf%FAs%20Da%F0ason%20n%FAt%EDmamenning. The Icelandic term "alþýðuómenning" used by Sigfús could perhaps be translated directly into English as "folk barbarism," but I have chosen to use the more common "mass culture" as I believe it signals more clearly what Sigfús intends.

[487] In the original: "[…] alþýðumenningin er ekki aðeins réttlæting þjóðernis okkar heldur lífsskilyrði. – Lífsskilyrði, vegna þess að það er óhugsandi að hægt sé að halda uppi nokkurri æðri menningu á Íslandi án traustrar undirstöðu alþýðumenningar. Þjóðin er svo fámenn að ekki er hugsanlegt að hér þróist æðri menning sem væri sjálfri sér nóg. Þessvegna er það varla neitt öfugmæli að segja að alþýðumenningin þurfi að vera jafn mikilvægur þáttur í nútímamenningu okkar, - í borgarmenningunni sem fyrir okkur liggur að móta, - eins og hún var í hinni gömlu menningu. Þessvegna er það að sú hnignun alþýðumenningar sem ameríkanisminn ber í sér, er hvergi hættulegri en hér; alþýðuómenning mundi hér skera á rætur æðri menningar skjótar en í nokkru öðru landi." Ibid, 254.

Significantly, Sigfús understood the ultimate goal of this nationalist cultural renewal as the development of a "high" urban culture. Furthermore, as I will argue, Sigfús – the modernist poet – saw this project as intimately connected to an international avant-garde modernism critical of the effects of industrialization and technological advance on European modernity.

Sigfús stresses the importance of cultural renewal in an essay published three years later, in 1963. Criticizing what he calls the defensive stance of Icelandic cultural production – which he sees exemplified in the excessive focus of scholars and politicians on the Sagas and the precolonial period of the Commonwealth – he relates this to Iceland's political history. He writes:

> Anyone who has acquainted himself with documents on the psychology and cultural state of colonial nations can see how many of their features are comparable to the psychological and cultural attitude of Icelanders. The "defensive" cultural stance is widespread among many colonial and semi-colonial nations, and is typically more dominating the more precious the cultural heritage of the nation, and the grander the "golden age" they refer to.[488]

The "documents" he refers to – and which he quotes in the essay – are the writings of the Martiniquan revolutionary Frantz Fanon's *Les Damnés de la terre* (*The Wretched of the*

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[488] In the original: "Það getur ekki farið framhjá neinum þeim sem hefur kynnt sér heimildir um sálarlíf og menningarástand nýlenduþjóða hversu mörg einkenni þess eiga sér næsta nákvæmar hliðstæður í sálrænni og menningarlegri afstöðu Íslendinga. 'Varnarstaða' menningarinnar er mjög útbreitt fyrirbæri meðal ýmissa nýlendu- og hálf-nýlenduþjóða, og er að jafnaði því einráðari sem þær eiga sér dýrmætari menningararf, glæsilegri 'gullöld' að vísa til." Sigfús Daðason, "Veruleiki og yfirskin," (February – May 1963), in *Tímarit Máls og menningar,* June 1, 1963, 109, accessed Sep. 2017, http://timarit.is/view_page_init.jsp?issId=380863&pageId=6279003&lang=is&q=Veruleiki%20og%20yfirskin.

Earth, 1961) and French philosopher Francis Jeanson *La Révolution algérienne* (*The Algerian Revolution,* 1963).

Sigfús further associates the defensive stance of Icelandic culture to the demands of the capitalist market and the "export value" of the Sagas and Iceland's past. Icelandic culture has been made into a product for the consumption of tourists, he writes, and in the process completely severed from its roots. If the Sagas lent credence to Icelanders' claim of civilization and their demand for independence in the nineteenth century, Sigfús warns, such arguments have little effect in the battle against capitalist neocolonialism. Icelanders must come to the realization, he argues, that Icelandic society is not a "western" bourgeois society and that the strategies against mass culture that work in metropolitan centers cannot simply be transported to Iceland.[489] For Sigfús Daðason the solution to Iceland's cultural crisis lay not in the hands of the middle or upper classes, corrupted and sedated as they were by their newfound affluence, but rather among the labouring classes. It is thus in the "organically" derived "folk" culture of the lower classes that Sigfús sees the strongest weapon against American neocolonialism.

Significantly, the opposite outlooks of Alexander Jóhannesson and Jónas from Hriflu on the one hand, and Sigfús Daðason, on the other, on the avant-garde, is paralleled by their attitudes towards the cultural production of the lower classes, so-called "folk" culture or the art and poetry of the untrained. Thus, in an effort to highlight the mental confusion and imbalance which he associates with avant-garde poetry and art, Alexander compares Þórbergur Þórðarson's futurist poem to nonsensical rhymes by the seventeenth century Icelandic poet Þorbjörn Þórðarson, known as "Æri Tobbi" (Mad Tobbi). In comparison,

[489] Ibid, 99-112.

Sigfús Daðason would have understood Æri Tobbi's poetry in direct relation to the conscious use of such application of hybrid and contestatory language for critical purposes within modernist poetry.

Culture's Self-Alienation and the Icelandic Reception of the Avant-Garde

Both the conservative position of Jónas from Hriflu and the modernist position of Sigfús Daðason can be understood from within the context of Icelandic cultural nationalism, and thus as rooted in romantic critiques of the Enlightenment. Their differences can be comprehended, I believe, from within the framework of what Young describes as the fundamentally dissonant nature of modernity and its self-alienating drive, a process which – as Young demonstrates – is distinctly marked in the genealogy of the concept of culture. More specifically, the differences between Jónas from Hrifla and Sigfús Daðason can be understood in the context of a critical development in the understanding of the concept of culture, which Young sees taking place with the development of modernism in the twentieth century.

Tracing the historical development of the concept of culture, which has traditionally been understood in opposition to nature while also laying claim to the natural and the organic, Young notes that it is, moreover, deeply imbricated with the idea of race, as well as with notions of the differences between the economic classes. He concludes: "Culture has inscribed itself with the complex and often contradictory differences through which European society has defined itself. Culture has always marked cultural difference by producing the other; it has always been comparative, and racism has always been an integral part of it; the two are inextricably clustered together, feeding off and generating each

other."[490] Focusing more specifically on the emergence of a modern pluralist conception of culture, Young notes that this could only occur with the loss of currency of its twin-term civilization. Whereas civilization had once referred to the achievements of human progress in general, from the late nineteenth century on it came instead to figure the ideological project of imperialism. In the process "the hierarchy of higher and lower cultures within the scale of civilization around the world was transferred to European culture itself (with high culture paradoxically allying itself to non-European primitivism)."[491] Significantly, Young locates the initial emergence of this process of self-alienation which characterizes modernity – in which culture is understood both as civilization and the critique of civilization – in the romantic movement. Importantly, as well, he notes that this process is inaugurated by increasing evidence of the diversity of human societies through colonial conquest and exploration.

The narrative traced by Young familiar enough, and yet it also sheds important light on the complexity of the development of Icelandic national identity. I have already noted the transformation of Icelandic identity and self-identity which took place in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, in the wake of the rise of romanticism, wherein the perception of Icelanders as subhuman "savages" was replaced by an image of Icelandic culture as a carrier of the remains of an ancient "civilization." It is here that I would locate the conservative nationalism of Jónas from Hriflu and Alexander Jóhannesson. Theirs is an image of Icelandic national culture aligned with a view of culture as a universal progress towards the ever-greater development of human "reason." However, this is a teleological view of history with

[490] Young, *Colonial Desire,* 50.

[491] Ibid, 48.

a romantic twist, wherein each nation is understood to develop most naturally towards that universal goal through a deeply local process of cultivation within the context of its specific natural environment.

The opposite position of Sigfús Daðason and other proponents of modernism, can only be understood with reference to the process of self-alienation which, although it originates in the romantic movement, only develops clearly in the twentieth century. For it is through this inversion of values and the alignment of European "high" culture with the non-European "primitive," for the purpose of a critique of industrial capitalist modernity, that the unrefined poetry and art of the untrained and unschooled lower classes came to be re-defined not as a sign of mental confusion but rather in terms of a free, natural originality, as an antidote to the restrictions of modern rational "civilization."

This transformation can be discerned in Icelandic public discourse as early as 1931, in a review by the Icelandic painter Jóhannes S. Kjarval of an exhibition of works by the self-taught artist Gísli Jónsson frá Búrfellskoti (1878-1933). Kjarval writes of his first meeting with the artist in 1904: "He may be the first futurist that I saw – later, abroad, I met many others, of a different sort."[492] He goes on to write: "Gísli painted some of his pictures in bright colours and in a peculiar style, pictures somewhat along the lines of Sölvi Helgason's, but simpler and on a larger scale – the style all spirals and swoops and squiggles – but presented according to fashion – in rectangularity. Gísli Jónsson was on the scene pretty

[492] J.S.K. (Jóhannes Sveinsson Kjarval), "Málverkasýning Gísla Jónssonar," in *Vísir,* Dec. 13, 1931. Quoted from Guðnadóttir, "Jóhannes Kjarval's Appropriation of Progressive Attitudes in Painting Between 1917 and 1920," 492.

much as early as the earliest futurists."[493] Kjarval's understanding of futurism was, as art historian Kristín Guðnadóttir notes, "free-wheeling" and unorthodox, and he seems to understand the term as interchangeable with expressionism and cubism.[494] In this regard his understanding of the avant-garde seems to confer with Alexander Jóhanneson's, for whom futurism, cubism, dadaism and expressionism were all subsumed under the label "intuitive art" (Icel. "innsýnislist").[495] However, Kjarval's interpretation of the work of Gísli Jónsson as "futurist" *avant la lettre* also points to the myth of the modern artists as a visionary which,

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[493] J.K.S., "Málverkasýning Gísla Jónssonar." Kjarval's evocation of the work of Sölvi Helgason – also known by the name he gave himself, Sólon Íslandus – is significant for the tacit association it establishes between folk culture, the avant-garde and the least privileged members of Icelandic society. Sölvi Helgason was a nineteenth century Icelandic drifter, known for his writing and painting. Likely plagued by what modern medicine would call mental illness, Sölvi is part of a group of well-known Icelandic drifters and vagabonds who have gained a mythical position in Icelandic cultural memory but occupied a highly precarious position within Icelandic society, largely because of their economic background. See Ólafur J. Engilbertsson, "Eftirsóttir einfarar," in *Lesbók Morgunblaðsins,* June 15, 1996, 20, accessed Nov. 2017, http://timarit.is/view_page_init.jsp?issId=242733&pageId=3311652&lang=is&q=Eftirs%F3ttir%20einfarar. As historians have noted, a significant number of paupers in eighteenth and nineteenth century Iceland were children, with more than fifty per cent of all paupers reported under the age of twenty in 1703. Furthermore, the percentage of paupers rose sharply between 1850 and 1870 as a result of over-population and unemployment in the agricultural sector. The situation of young paupers was often dire, with many reports of maltreatment and abuse. This may have been exacerbated by the fact that governments auctioned out the maintenance of paupers to the lowest bidder. See e.g. Gísli Á. Gunnlaugsson, "'Everyone's Been Good to Me, Especially the Dogs': Foster-Children and Young Paupers in Nineteenth-Century Southern Iceland," in *Journal of Social History,* vol. 27, no. 2 (Winter, 1993), 341-358. Karlsson, *The History of Iceland,* 161-164; 228-233; 248-254.

[494] Ibid.

[495] Hjartarson, "The Early Avant-Garde in Iceland." 616-617.

as Benedikt Hjartarson has noted, was prevalent in the writing of Icelandic theologists in the early twentieth century.[496]

As I have highlighted in the previous chapters, the external perception of Icelandic art and culture was marked in the first and second half of the twentieth century by both negative and positive conceptions of the primitive. As the examples above indicate, for Icelandic artists and critics, the primitive continued to be understood as an integral part of Icelandic identity well into the twentieth century. For conservative traditionalists like Jónas from Hriflu, who ascribed to a vision of modernity as a progression towards ever greater human "reason," this was something to be overcome. For modernists like Sigfús Daðason or Kjarval, it was the lifeline of the nation.

Whose Reversals? The "Premodern" in Cultural Nationalism and the Avant-Garde

As Young's account of the self-alienating drive of capitalist modernity underlines, culture is a comparative concept which marks cultural difference by producing the other. In the nineteenth and early twentieth century, the others against which Icelanders measured their culture were the racialized "primitives" of the tricontinent. Thus, for instance, in 1905 Icelandic students in Copenhagen protested the inclusion of Icelandic people and cultural products in the Danish Colonial Exhibition (D. Dansk Koloniudstilling), held in the Tivoli Gardens of Copenhagen, on the grounds that Icelandic culture did not belong in the same category as the "savage tribes" (Icel. "siðlausum þjóðum") and "nature nations" of "Negroes

[496] See Benedikt Hjartarson, "Af úrkynjun, brautryðjendum, vanskapnaði, vitum og sjáendum. Um upphaf framúrstefnu á Íslandi," in *Ritið: Tímarit Hugvísindastofnunar,* vol. 6, no. 1 (2006), 101.

and Eskimoes," referring to the populations of other Danish colonies, particularly Greenland and the West Indies.[497]

While anxieties over Icelandic identity and image continued to mark public discourse about politics and culture, in the postwar period, the most serious threat perceived against Icelandic national identity and political independence was no longer the perception of Icelanders as "uncivilized," but rather the economic and cultural dominance of American capitalism. "Americanization" – through the infiltration of mass-produced consumer products and American "entertainment" – was, as I have discussed in the first chapter of this dissertation, understood by many, including the younger generation as SÚM's inaugural exhibition in 1965 demonstrates, to threaten the moral fibre of the nation. For both traditionalists and modernists, however the goal remained the same: to secure the inclusion of Icelanders among the cultured nations of the world, and to counter the image of Icelandic culture as backwards and stagnant. It was for this purpose, precisely, that Icelandic nationalists turned, in the postwar period, to the "archaic" traditions and beliefs of folk culture.

In an essay on the concept of the "avant-garde," art historian Ann Gibson notes the discrepancy of the terms in which the historical returns of "ethnic" minorities and urban European art have been understood.[498] Whereas the conscious applications of practices traditionally designated as "primitive" or "naïve" by the former group are typically labeled as "neoprimitivist" – a label which indicates a certain conservativism – the same tactics are understood as culturally radical, modern and critical when applied by European artists. Thus,

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[497] Loftsdóttir, "Colonialism at the margins," 602-606.

[498] See Ann Gibson, "Avant-Garde," in *Critical Terms for Art History,* ed. Nelson and Shiff, 156-163.

Gibson asks: "In the attempt to break away from the status quo, whose reversals are acceptable? Who benefits? Who decides?"[499] The same questions could be asked in relation to anti-colonial and nationalist cultural revival movements.

Countering the perception of anti-colonialism as aligned with a provincial nationalism, Young emphasizes its reliance on processes of transculturation and hybridization:

> … cultural activism, often deployed alongside the development of modes of resistance with which to meet force, was designed to counter the ideological assumptions, justifications and sense of inferiority that colonists propagated upon subject peoples. In ideological terms, these forms of political resistance can be divided into those that drew upon indigenous culture and those that identified with forms – colonial or western – of modernity. By the twentieth century, these had become heavily interrelated and most drew on a combination of the mixture of two. They remained significant ideological polarities however.[500]

Like cultural nationalism, then, anti-colonialism emerges out of transcultural contact. What the research of Young and Hutchinson indicates is, in fact, the direct indebtedness of anti-colonial – including nationalist – movements to internal critiques of European modernity, and the profoundly transcultural nature of both phenomena. The growing awareness of the radically different cultures of colonized peoples undoubtedly transformed the self-image of citizens of European colonial empires. It is equally true, however, that the romantic and modern critiques of European modernity provided anti-colonial resistance movements with an alternative self-image than that afforded by their subjugated status, an image which allowed them to place themselves in the vanguard, rather than the rear, of history. It is in this

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[499] Ibid, 163.

[500] Young, *Postcolonialism: An Historical Introduction*, 164.

context, and as part of their translation of avant-garde practices into the context of postwar Iceland, that SÚM artists turned in the early 1970s to the local and the "premodern."

SÚM's Politics, Nationalism and the Avant-Garde

In the first chapter I noted that, in the weeks prior to the establishment of SÚM in 1965, the work of SÚM founders Haukur Dór Sturluson, Hreinn Friðfinnsson, Jón Gunnar Árnason and Sigurjón Jóhannsson was exhibited at an exhibition of artwork presented as part of the Anti-War Movement's cultural week. In the two decades after its establishment, SÚM would continue to align itself with the Icelandic Anti-War Movement and more broadly with Leftist critiques of capitalist consumer culture, of the production and consumption of art as commodity, as well as with critiques of American neocolonialism. Alongside the artists' overt engagement with local and global politics, however, an increased interest in and alignment with Icelandic folk culture can be discerned in the artistic production and rhetoric of SÚM in the 1970s. This is explicitly tied to its association with Leftist nationalism and the rhetoric of the Anti-War Movement.

Folk culture's dual association with the avant-garde and with Leftist political resistance was made manifest in events presented at the "cultural week" in 1965, for instance in a new musical rendition by musician and poet Pétur Pálsson of the 1952 allegorical poem "Sóleyjarkvæði" (Sóley's poem) by Jóhannes úr Kötlum (b. Jóhannes Bjarni Jónasson).[501] Composed in the direct aftermath of Iceland's entry into NATO in 1949, "Sóleyjarkvæði"

[501] Jóhannes úr Kötlum published ten books of traditional and social-realist poetry in the 1920s and 1930s, before adopting a modernist style in the mid-1940s, publishing under the pseudonym Anonymus[*sic*], until finally "coming out" as a modernist poet with his book *Sjödægra* (Seven days' mountain) in 1955. See Þorvaldsson, "Icelandic Poetry Since 1940," 471-474.

weaves texts from old folk rhymes and poems together into a contemporary political message. Also presented were live readings by Jóhannes úr Kötlum, Þórbergur Þórðarson, and Guðbergur Bergsson; the latter a young writer who would soon join the ranks of SÚM, and whose 1966 novel *Tómas Jónsson, metsölubók* (*Tómas Jónsson, bestseller*) is understood to be a landmark of postmodernist Icelandic literature.[502]

I also argued in chapter one that the work and political activity of the SÚM artist Róska, in the late 1960s and 1970s, could be understood as a testament to the emergence of a new brand of Icelandic nationalism emerging among the younger generation in the postwar period; one that was critically intersected with an international Leftist, feminist, anti-imperialist, anti-war struggle. Róska was, as I have noted, a member of the Socialist Youth League; a more militant generation of socialists that emerged and split from the Icelandic Socialist Party around 1970.[503] As an example of their tactics, in May 1969, members of the Youth League attempted to bomb an army barrack used for socializing at the U.S. army base in Hvalfjörður.[504]

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[502] See Ástráður Eysteinsson and Úlfhildur Dagsdóttir, "Icelandic Prose Literature 1940-1980," in *A History of Icelandic Literature,* ed. Neijmann, 404-470.

[503] For instance, as I discuss in the second chapter of this dissertation, one of the hottest topics of public debate in Iceland in the late 1960s was the dissemination – since 1955 but greatly increased since 1961 – of American television to Icelandic homes through the U.S. military base in Keflavík. In 1969 the Socialist Youth League – Róska included – snuck into the broadcasting room at the U.S. army station in Keflavík, where they proceeded to spray paint political messages on the walls of the broadcasting room and into the lenses of recording equipment, while burning an American flag. See HEH, "Gerðu innrás á völlinn!," in *Alþýðublaðið,* Nov. 17, 1969, 1 and 11, accessed July 2017, http://timarit.is/view_page_init.jsp?issId=233575&pageId=3186313&lang=is&q=%E1%20Ger%F0u%20innr%E1s%20v%F6llinn; "Róska í Bæjarpistlinum," 16-17.

[504] See Jóhannesson, *Óvinir ríkisins,* 254-262.

On 15 November that same year, Róska and her fellow Youth League member Birna Þórðardóttir took to the stage at a public festival held at Háskólabíó, a Reykjavík cinema, in celebration of the fifty-year anniversary of the publication of Halldór K. Laxness' first novel, *Barn náttúrunnar: ástarsaga* (*The child of nature: a romance,* 1919).[505] While Róska held the communist North Vietnamese (the Democratic Republic of Vietnam, DRV) flag in the background, Birna proceeded to give a forceful speech on the U.S.'s military involvement in Vietnam, calling for direct action from artist, mirroring the message of the Art Workers' Coalition in New York in the same period:[506]

> Against the appalling indifference, apparent in the world's attitude towards this war, all sophisticated autonomous culture is transformed into its opposite. It takes on the same role as religion and sedatives, becoming a part of the false consciousness, one of the tools of the dominant classes, allowing it to perpetrate its acts of terror and mass murder. […] The calcified institutions of the socialist movement need to be destroyed, art must step down from its ivory tower. The time of global class conflict has arrived, revolution and counterrevolution battle it out. The time has come to fight and put everything on the line.[507]

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[505] Ibid, 263-264. That same month, members of the Youth League – including Róska – snuck into the broadcasting room at the Keflavík army station, as I discuss in the second chapter of this dissertation.

[506] See Julia Bryan-Wilson, *Art Workers: Radical Practices in the Vietnam War Era* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009).

[507] In the original: "Andspænis hryllilegu tilfinningaleysi, sem speglast í afstöðu heimsins til þessarar styrjaldar, hverfur allur fágaður hlutlaus kúltúr í andstæðu sína. Hann tekur að gegna sama hlutverki og trúarbrögðin og gleymskulyfin, verður hluti af hinni fölsku meðvitund, eitt af þjónustutækjum valdstéttarinnar, sem skapar henni næði til ástundunar hryðjuverka sinna og fjöldamorða. [...] Steinrunnar stofnanir sósíaliskrar hrefyingar verður að brjóta upp, listin verður að stíga ofan úr fílabeinsturni sínum. Tími heimssögulegra stéttaátaka er genginn í garð, bylting og gagnbylting takast á. Stundin er komin til að berjast og leggja allt að veði." Birna's speech was published, in its entirety,

Not all members of SÚM associated themselves or their work with the politics of the Socialist Youth League. Nevertheless, SÚM artists seem to have shared a critical attitude towards US neocolonialism, as well as an understanding of the complicity of conventional artforms in a capitalist mode of consumption, brought into direct relationship to military warfare and human rights violations by Birna Þórðardóttir in her speech in 1969.

Nationalism and Anti-Colonialism at SÚM Exhibitions

SÚM artists political commitment to local nationalist and international anti-colonial struggle is demonstrated by the work of many members as well as by exhibitions hosted by the collective. In 1973 and 1977, Gallery SÚM hosted exhibitions devoted to Cuban political propaganda and the Palestinian freedom movement respectively. On 29 May 1973, an exhibition of posters and documentary films from Cuba was held at Gallery SÚM. It was presented as part of a broader information campaign by the Icelandic-Cuban Fellowship (Icel. Vináttufélag Íslands og Kúbu; VÍK, est. 1971). Playing in the gallery during the exhibition were tape recordings of Cuban music. Also presented were three Cuban short films, on Che Guevara, Vietnam, and the U.S. civil rights movement. Finally, the ambassador for Cuba in Iceland, Oscar Alcalde, presented a public talk with a slide show.[508]

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in the Socialist daily newspaper *Þjóðviljinn* (The National Will), on 20 Nov. 1969, alongside a picture of Birna in the pulpit and Róska waving the North Vietnamese flag. "Klukkan glymur á ný," in *Þjóðviljinn,* Nov. 20, 1969, 4, accessed July 2017, http://timarit.is/view_page_init.jsp?issId=221518&pageId=2847912&lang=is&q=%E1%20%E1%20n%FD%20Klukkan.

[508] See ÞH, "Kúbuvika hefst á þriðjudaginn," in *Þjóðviljinn,* May 27, 1973, 11, accessed July 2017, http://timarit.is/view_page_init.jsp?issId=220768&pageId=2836256&lang=is&q=K%FAbuvika%20hefst%20%E1%20%FEri%F0judaginn.

Four years later, in February 1977, an exhibition of posters, photographs and postcards dedicated to the Palestinian struggle for freedom was held at Gallery SÚM. It was organized by the Palestine Committee of Iceland (Icel. Palestínunefndin á Íslandi).[509]

SÚM's commitment to Leftist nationalism is demonstrated by the presentation at Gallery SÚM, in 1973, of the exhibition *Ísland úr NATO – Herinn burt (Iceland out of NATO – Out with the Army*) [Figure 4.2], which was organized by Leftist students at the University of Iceland. Opening on the fifty-fifth anniversary of Iceland's sovereignty from Denmark, on 1 December 1973, the exhibition presented forty-three works by twenty-eight artists.[510] On the same occasion a public assembly was held at Háskólabíó where the speakers included a delegate from the National Liberation Front of South Vietnam (Fr. Front national de liberation du Sud Viêt Nam) – also known as the Viêt Cong – and a spokesperson of the Chilean student movement who had fled from Chile to Czechoslovakia after the military coup that fall.[511]

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[509] See ÞH, "Gallerí SÚM: Plaköt og myndir frá Palestínu," in *Þjóðviljinn,* 23 Feb. 1977, 3, accessed July 2017, http://timarit.is/view_page_init.jsp?issId=221872&pageId=2854156&lang=is&q=S%DAM%20Plak%F6t%20og%20fr%E1%20Palest%EDnu.

[510] See SB, "Pólitísk myndlistarsýning í Gallerí SÚM – í tilefni fullveldisdagsins." *Tíminn,* 1 Dec. 1973, 6, accessed July 2017, http://timarit.is/view_page_init.jsp?issId=264992&pageId=3742782&lang=is&q=P%F3lit%EDsk%20%ED%20Galler%ED%20%ED; SÚM, *Ísland úr Nató – Herinn burt: 1. Des. 1973,* Exhibition catalogue. The Living Art Museum Archives, Reykjavík.

[511] At the public assembly in Háskólabíó on 1 December 1973, poems by Pablo Neruda were also read, and the last speech by president Salvador Allende to be broadcast publicly, on the eve of the military coup on 11 September 1973, was played by tape. Carrero spoke to Icelandic reporters at a public meeting about the situation in Chile, held in the Nordic House in Reykjavík, shortly thereafter, and later in the month Le Le Van Ky spoke with members of Icelandic political parties, the vice-

Among the works presented at the Anti-NATO exhibition at Gallery SÚM in 1973 were Magnús Tómasson's *Flugnaherinn* – also known as *Herinn sigursæli* (*The Victorious Army,* 1969) [Figure 4.3] – an installation of twelve large life-like models of houseflies arranged like a military echelon, with the "leader" carrying a black flag. Previously exhibited at the group-exhibitions *SÚM III* and *SÚM IV,* the work was intended, as Magnús noted in an interview with the daily newspaper *Vísir* in 1975, as a critique of the practices of war and of the herd mentality by which they were supported.[512] Magnús's fellow SÚM member, Jón Gunnar Árnason presented his sinister *Leikur fyrir tvo stjórnmálamenn, annan rétthentan, hinn örvhentan* (*Game for two politicians, one right-handed, the other left-handed,* 1972) [Figure 4.4]. It was composed of two black welding gloves to which the artist had attached two knives and two sets of iron devices in the shape of two pairs of feet, each facing the

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chairman of Iceland's Foreign Affairs Committee (Icel. Utanríkismálanefnd), as well as visiting the exhibition at Gallery SÚM. See ÞH, "1. Des. Ísland úr Nató – Herinn burt. Baráttusamkoma í dag," in *Þjóðviljinn,* Dec. 1, 1973, 1, accessed July 2017, http://timarit.is/view_page_init.jsp?issId=220928&pageId=2838762&lang=is&q=1%20des%20%EDsland%20%FAr%20Herinn%20burt%20NAT%D3; SB, "Pólitísk myndlistarsýning í Gallerí SÚM – í tilefni fullveldisdagsins," 6; Kr, "Le Le Van Ky lýsir ástandinu í Víetnam: Yfir ein millj. Manna í einangrunarbúðum – tvö hundruð þúsund pólitískir fangar," in *Tíminn,* Dec. 22, 1973, 6, accessed July 2017, http://timarit.is/view_page_init.jsp?issId=265011&pageId=3743302&lang=is&q=Le%20Le%20Van%20Ky%20l%FDsir%20%E1standinu.

[512] See Aðalsteinn Ingólfsson, "Ekki á klafa hjá neinum," in *Vísir,* August 9, 1975, 7, accessed May 2016, http://timarit.is/view_page_init.jsp?issId=239170&pageId=3263968&lang=is&q=Ekki%20%E1%20klafa%20hj%E1%20neinum.

other. Stepping into the devices, visitors were invited to put on the gloves which hung from the ceiling above, and quite literally battle out their political differences.[513]

Other works at the Anti-NATO exhibition pointed more specifically to local politics, for instance, Gylfi Gíslason's *Brúðkaup aldarinnar 30. mars '49* (*Wedding of the Century March 30 '49,* 1972-3) [Figure 4.5]. It consisted of a ripped envelope with an enlarged postage stamp and an "express" sticker; the image on the stamp showed the Icelandic Lady of the Mountain – a visual embodiment of the Icelandic nation – dressed as a bride and, standing beside her, the personification of the U.S. government, Uncle Sam, the bridegroom.[514] The envelope was further rubber stamped with "30.3.1949;" the date of Iceland's largest political protest to date, when thousands rioted in front of the Parliament building in Reykjavík in protest of the government's decision to join NATO.[515]

Finally, Hildur Hákonardóttir's texile work, *Desember 1972* (*December 1972,* 1972) [Figure 4.6] combined traditional "feminine" craft with an international anti-colonial political message. Previously exhibited at the Anti-War Movement's conference held in Reykjavík in January 1973 – on the occasion of which it was photographed, printed as a poster and sold to fund the Anti-War Movement's activities – the wall hanging carried the woven inscription "Viet Minh – Tupamaros – Black Panthers – FNL – Al Fatah – Pathet Lao – IRA – Frelimo – MPLA," referencing a host of political liberation movements around the globe. And below, in Icelandic "Þeim mönnum sem hann hefur velþóknun á," or "Among

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[513] See Halldór B. Runólfsson, "Fráhvarf frá vélsmíði og hreyfiverkum," in *Íslensk listasaga frá síðari hluta 19. aldar til upphafs 21. aldar,* vol. IV, ed. Kvaran, 213.

[514] ÞH, "Síðasti dagur í SÚM," in *Þjóðviljinn,* Dec. 11, 1973, 16, accessed Sep. 2017, http://timarit.is/view_page_init.jsp?issId=221203&pageId=2842982&lang=is&q=DAGUR%20%ED.

[515] See e.g. Ingimundarson, "Buttressing the West in the North."

those with whom he is pleased," a quote from the New Testament Christmas story from the Gospel of Luke; thus, bringing the Christian message of peace into question by contrasting it with global struggles for independence from the colonial, capitalist and military rule of western, largely Christian, powers.

As the work presented at the Anti-NATO exhibition at Gallery SÚM in 1973, and SÚM's presentation of the Cuban and Palestinian exhibitions demonstrates, SÚM artists understood the nationalist struggle against the rise of American political and cultural influence in Iceland to be connected with a broader global campaign against the economic hegemony of former colonial powers worldwide. Alongside this explicitly political work and activity of SÚM, a growing engagement with Icelandic folk culture is noticeable within the artist collective. In what follows I argue that SÚM's promotion and mobilization of Icelandic folk art and culture was understood in the same terms as their more overtly political work and activity, as a tool in the fight against political and cultural subjugation.

The complementary nature of SÚM's anti-capitalist, anti-colonial critique and the mobilization of Icelandic folk art, culture and beliefs, for the creation of a native "high" art, is exemplified in the artist collective's contributions to a public protest organized by the Anti-War Movement, the Icelandic Vietnam Committee (Icel. Vietnamnefndin, est. 1967) and the Icelandic Youth Coalition (Icel. Æskulýðssamband Íslands, ÆSÍ, est. 1958), on the occasion of the meeting of U.S. President Richard Nixon and French Prime Minister Georges Pompidou in Reykjavík on 31 May 1973. SÚM members donated their efforts by designing signs for the march.[516] Some of these bore slogans such as "Iceland out of NATO" (Icel.

[516] "Svona er dagskráin," in *Þjóðviljinn,* May 31, 1973, 3, accessed Sep. 2017, http://timarit.is/view_page_init.jsp?issId=220746&pageId=2835905&lang=is&q=NIXON%20ER.

"Ísland úr NATÓ"), while others included iconic telephones, an obvious reference to the installation of listening devices in telephones at the Democratic National Committee headquarters uncovered in the Watergate scandal and the attempted coverup by President Nixon which would eventually lead to his resignation on 9 August 1974. However, as a photograph accompanying an article on the protest published in the socialist newspaper *Þjóðviljinn* on 2 June 1973 reveals,[517] SÚM's designs also included a magic rune (Icel. galdrarún), referred to in the article as a Seal of Solomon (Icel. Salomonsinnisgli) and described as a providing its bearer with protection against evil spirits.[518]

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[517] "Sóknarhugur og baráttuskap," in *Þjóðviljinn,* June 2, 1973, 10-11, accessed Sep. 2017, http://timarit.is/view_page_init.jsp?issId=220772&pageId=2836319&lang=is&q=og%20S%F3knarhugur%20og%20bar%E1ttuskap.

[518] The notion of "premodern" pagan Icelandic beliefs as a tool in anti-colonial activism was similarly invoked by the Ásatrú Fellowship later that same year, when, on the occasion of the 1 December protest organized by Leftist students against the ongoing U.S. military presence in Iceland, the fellowship raised a traditional nithing pole (Icel. níðstöng) facing the military base in Keflavík. See Ráa, "Ísland úr NATO – Herinn burt: FRÁBÆR BARÁTTUSAMKOMA 1. DES," in *Stúdentablaðið,* Dec. 20, 1973, 1 and 8, accessed Sep. 2017, http://timarit.is/view_page_init.jsp?issId=293684&pageId=4345244&lang=is&q=Bar%E1ttusamkoma%20%CDSLAND%20%DAR%20NATO. Nithing poles are traditionally made of a long wooden pole into which a curse is carved in runes, and on the end of which the head of an animal is attached. The pole is then raised into the ground and the head of the animal directed towards the intended receiver. Examples of nithing poles appear in the Icelandic *Egil's Saga* (Icel. *Egils saga*) and *Vatnsdæla saga* from the thirteenth century, but there are also more contemporary examples of their use. For instance, in 1990 the Alliance of University Educated State Employees (Icel. Bandalag háskólamenntaðra ríkisstarfsmanna) raised a nithing pole against the Icelandic government in disputes over the salary of university graduates, and in 2006 an Icelandic farmer raised a nithing pole against his neighbor over the alleged killing of his dog. See "Reistu níðstöng og sendu ríkisstjórninni bölbænir," in *Tíminn,* Sept. 4, 1990, 16, accessed Sep. 2017, http://timarit.is/view_page_init.jsp?issId=280931&pageId=4059924&lang=is&q=b%F6lb%E6nir%2

Folk Culture and Art at SÚM Exhibitions

In the 1970s SÚM presented a number of exhibitions of Icelandic "folk" art, both at Gallery SÚM in Reykjavík and abroad. The first of these was an exhibition of works by the folk painter Stefán V. Jónsson from Möðrudal, also known as Stórval, presented at Gallery SÚM in September 1972.[519] Born in 1908, Stefán was a well-known eccentric and legendary figure in Reykjavík, following his impromptu outdoor public exhibitions of painting in the 1950s and sixties.[520] He is acknowledged as one of Iceland's foremost "naïve" painters and

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0reistu; V. Grettisson, "Kærður fyrir níðstöng," in *blaðið,* Dec. 21, 2006, 8, accessed Sep. 2017, http://timarit.is/view_page_init.jsp?issId=358730&pageId=5745723&lang=is&q=K%E6r%F0ur%20fyrir%20n%ED%F0st%F6ng.

[519] See Exhibition of paintings by Stefán V. Jónsson, 1972 (Icel. Málverkasýning Stefáns V. Jónssonar. 1972). 1972. Gallerie SÚM Papers, Unfiled [Icel. óskráð]. The Archive of Artist-Run Initiatives. The Living Art Museum, Reykjavík, Iceland; "Sýnir í SÚM," in *Alþýðublaðið,* Sept. 14, 1972, 4, accessed Sep. 2017, http://timarit.is/view_page_init.jsp?issId=234619&pageId=3203100&lang=is&q=S%DDNIR%20%ED%20S%DAM%20Stef%E1n%20M%F6%F0rudal.

[520] See "Málverkasýning á Lækjartorgi," in *Alþýðublaðið,* March 13, 1959, 1, accessed Oct. 2017, http://timarit.is/view_page_init.jsp?issId=235387&pageId=3212038&lang=is&q=%E1%20L%E6kjartorgi%20%E1%20L%E6kjartorgi%20%E1; "Lögreglumenn keyptu tvær myndir Stefáns," in *Tíminn,* March 14, 1959, 12, accessed Oct. 2017, http://timarit.is/view_page_init.jsp?issId=60991&pageId=1036168&lang=is&q=L%F6greglumenn%20keyptu%20myndir; "Æðsta snilld að vera góður í hraunum," in *Tíminn,* March 6, 1962, 4 and 13, accessed Oct. 2017, http://timarit.is/view_page_init.jsp?issId=61894&pageId=1049366&lang=is&q=g%F3%F0ur%20%ED%20hraunum%20a%F0%20vera%20g%F3%F0ur%20%ED%20hraunum%20a%F0; "Sýning undir berum himni." *Dagur,* 10 March 1962, 8, accessed Oct. 2017, http://timarit.is/view_page_init.jsp?issId=209466&pageId=2707827&lang=is&q=undir%20berum%20himni.

celebrated for his child-like paintings of horses and landscape, several of which he exhibited at Gallery SÚM in 1972.

Two years later, the SÚM collective planned and hosted an exhibition of Icelandic folk art for the 1974 Reykavík Art Festival.[521] The exhibition was organized by novelist Guðbergur Bergsson. Four years later, in 1978 Guðbergur would declare, in an interview published in *Þjóðviljinn* on Christmas Eve 1978: "The Icelandic bourgeoisie has never had a high culture. It has never created anything other than pretentiousness and sentimentality… The only art that has ever existed in Iceland is folk art. It has been our high culture."[522] Echoing the sentiments of Sigfús Daðason's essay from 1960, Guðbergur declares modern, avant-garde "high" art – as opposed to the "bourgeois" arts of landscape painting or abstract art – as aligned with folk art.

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[521] See Reykjavík Art Festival 1974 presents folk art (Icel. Listahátíð 1974 sýnir alþýðulist). 1974. Document listing contributors to the exhibition of Icelandic folk art at Gallery SÚM 1974. Gallerie SÚM Papers, Unfiled [Icel. óskráð]. The Archive of Artist-Run Initiatives. The Living Art Museum, Reykjavík, Iceland; "Sýning á alþýðulist á Íslandi 1974," in *Tíminn,* March 14, 1974, 15, accessed Sep. 2017, http://timarit.is/view_page_init.jsp?issId=265091&pageId=3745448&lang=is&q=Al%FE%FD%F0ulist%20%E1%20%EDslandi%201974; ÞH, "SÚM sýnir Alþýðulist á Listahátíð." *Þjóðviljinn,* 16 May 1974, 7, accessed Sep. 2017, http://timarit.is/view_page_init.jsp?issId=221059&pageId=2840974&lang=is&q=al%FE%FD%F0ulist; "Listahátíð 1974: Könnun á íslenskri alþýðulist hjá SÚM," in *Morgunblaðið,* 8 June 1974, 16, accessed Sep. 2017, http://timarit.is/view_page_init.jsp?issId=115876&pageId=1453074&lang=is&q=listah%E1t%ED%F0%201974.

[522] Ingólfur Margeirsson, "Menningin er flokkunarvél," [Interview with Guðbergur Bergsson] in *Þjóðviljinn,* Dec. 24, 1978, 8-9, accessed July 2016, http://timarit.is/view_page_init.jsp?issId=222446&pageId=2864505&lang=is&q=flokkunarv%E9l%20er.

Also in 1974, and just weeks prior to the opening of the folk art exhibition in Gallery SÚM, SÚM organized a travelling exhibition of Icelandic art, presented under the title *H_2O*, where this association of the avant-garde with folk art was clearly manifested. Opening in Copenhagen's abandoned St. Nicholas Church (D. Nikolaj kirke) – run by the Danish Visual Artists Union since 1972 – on 29 March 1974,[523] *H_2O* presented a mixture of works in various media by SÚM members alongside photographs by painter Hörður Ágústsson of Icelandic turf houses, and paintings by folk artists, including Stefán Jónsson from Möðrudal, Óskar Magnússon, Blómey Stefánsdóttir, Sigurlaug Jónasdóttir and Ísleifur Konráðsson.[524]

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[523] The scene of several 1960s avant-garde manifestations, including some of the first Fluxus concerts in Europe, the abandoned church had hosted Danish artist Knud Pedersen's art library since 1957. It is known, since 2011, under the name Copenhagen Contemporary Art Center. See "The history of Copenhagen Contemporary Art Center," Nikolaj Kunsthall, accessed September 2018, http://www.nikolajkunsthal.dk/en/info/history-copenhagen-contemporary-art-center.

[524] See Ólafsson, "Íslensk list H_20," *Þjóðviljinn*, May 28, 1974, 8-9, accessed May July 2015. http://timarit.is/view_page_init.jsp?issId=221038&pageId=2840609&lang=is&q=%F3lafsson%20%EDslensk%20list; Hildur Hákonardóttir, document describing the group exhibition *H_2O* held at Nikolajkirke in Copenhagen March 20 – Dec. 1, 1974, signed in Reykjavík on 29 January 1974, Gallerie SÚM Papers, Box 3/5, Folder J, The Archive of Artist-Run Initiatives, The Living Art Museum, Reykjavík, Iceland; H_2O Icelandic travelling exhibition organized by SÚM (D. H_2O Islandsk vandreudstilling organiseret af SÚM). 1974. Document listing works exhibited at the group exhibition *H_2O* held at Nikolajkirke in Copenhagen March 20 – Dec. 1, 1974. Gallerie SÚM Papers, Box 3/5, Folder J. The Archive of Artist-Run Initiatives. The Living Art Museum, Reykjavík, Iceland. The exhibition later travelled to Trelleborgs Museum in Sweden. See H_2O Icelandic contemporary art (Sw. H_2O Isländsk nutidskonst). 1974. Document listing works exhibited at the group exhibition *H_2O* held at Trelleborgs Museum, Sweden, Nov. 30, 1974 – Jan. 12, 1975. Gallerie SÚM Papers, Box 3/5, Folder J. The Archive of Artist-Run Initiatives. The Living Art Museum, Reykjavík, Iceland.

The work of Ísleifur Konráðsson had been publicly defended by Dieter Roth in 1967, following a negative review of the artist's work by abstract painter and art critic Valtýr Pétursson.[525] As I argued in the second chapter of this dissertation, the dramatic transformation of Roth's practice around 1960 was, in part, the result of his confrontation with the raw urban environment of Iceland and the broader implications of Icelandic culture's "tastelessnes." Roth's defense of the "naïve" painting of Ísleifur Konráðsson should be understood as premised on Roth's turn away from modern art and aesthetics around 1960 and his rejection of the traditional distinctions of culture from nature integral to both.

Similarly, SÚM artists' promotion of folk art should be understood, firstly in the context of their broad rejection of modern notion of "high" art as a vehicle for universal values or truths, induced, in part, by their association with Dieter Roth. Secondly, in the associated context of their critique of the National Gallery of Iceland's neglect of all forms of artistic practice that did not conform to the modern formalist paradigm. As previously discussed, it was this critique and the widespread frustration among artists with the continued neglect of both experimental and folk art that led to the founding of the Living Art Museum (Icel. Nýlistasafnið) in 1978. Thirdly, and finally, SÚM's promotion of folk art in the 1970s can be understood in the context of their support for Leftist, nationalist and anti-colonial politics of the Anti-War Movement.

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[525] See Diter Rot [Dieter Roth], "Bréf til Valtýs Péturssonar," in *Morgunblaðið,* May 20, 1967, 12, accessed Sep. 2017, http://timarit.is/view_page_init.jsp?issId=117107&pageId=1498640&lang=is&q=br%E9f%20til.

The Local and the Global: The Unification of Nationalism, Anti-Colonialism and the Avant-Garde Within SÚM

The inclusion of Hörður Ágústsson's photographs of Icelandic turf houses at *H_2O* in 1974 echoes SÚM's framing of their contribution to the Reykjavík Art Festival two years prior. As I noted in my introduction to this dissertation, SÚM's choice of images of a traditional turf house for the front and back cover of the exhibition catalogue seems at first glance to contradict the decidedly "international" tone and ambition of SÚM's exhibition, which presented work by several well-known European and American artists associated with Fluxus and conceptual art. This choice becomes intelligible, however, in the context both of SÚM artists' absorption of experimental avant-garde artistic practices, and their engagement with Icelandic politics, each of which supported the other.

In the local context of Icelandic postwar cultural politics, the turf house had a distinct resonance. While the number of turf-houses was more than double the number of wooden houses in Reykjavík in 1850, by the mid-1950s they had been almost completely eradicated from the capital. This destruction of traditional vernacular architecture happened after an announcement made by King Frederik VI in 1839 of the establishment of a public building committee for Reykjavík, whose responsibility it would be to organize the town's layout, and the subsequent decree by the authorities that no turf-houses should be allowed to be erected within Reykjavík and that whenever standing houses required maintenance they should be demolished.[526] It is important to note that the majority of these houses were inhabited by the

[526] "Torfbæir bannaðir í Reykjavík," in *Morgunblaðið C,* Sept. 24, 2002, 44, accessed Nov. 2017, http://timarit.is/view_page_init.jsp?issId=250901&pageId=3453661&lang=is&q=torfb%E6ir%20Torfb%E6ir%20banna%F0ir%20%ED%20Reykjav%EDk%20%ED%20Reykjav%EDk; Rúnarsdóttir, "Á tímum torfbæja."

lower classes, by people who did not own land but were employed in precarious work such as fishing. The last remaining turf house within Reykjavík however, was not demolished until 1980. Tellingly, it was inhabited by Eðvarð Sigurðsson, a member of parliament for the socialist People's Alliance between 1971 and 1979, who – because of his political alliances – was the subject of espionage in the postwar period.[527]

It is in this distinct postwar context of the turf house's association with Leftist politics and the Turf Association's struggle against Reykjavík's modernization – and more broadly the continued struggle against Iceland's "Americanization" – that SÚM's mobilization of the image of this native architectural form on the covers of the 1972 catalogue and in the 1974 exhibition should be understood [Figures 0.1-0.2]. Furthermore, the turf house also had a distinct resonance with postwar avant-garde artistic practices. Composed of stone sandwiched between turf bricks sometimes with a wooden framework for extra support, turf houses rely on, and sustain, a continuous, sensorial and performative engagement with the natural environment, as the houses must be maintained and effectively recreated on a regular basis from elements of the environment, as the turf rots and the sod dries out. Their formal autonomy is undermined by their material arrangement. In this, there is a definite affinity with the ephemeral and performative character of Fluxus work and Roth's biodegradable

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[527] See Jóhannesson, *Óvinir ríkisins;* S.dór, "Mitt Grímsstaðaholt er ekki til lengur," in *Þjóðviljinn,* Aukablað, May 1, 1981, 8-10, accessed Nov. 2017, http://timarit.is/view_page_init.jsp?issId=223119&pageId=2876829&lang=is&q=E%F0var%F0%20Sigur%F0sson; JH, "Litla-Brekka á Grímsstaðaholt rifin: 'Maður á margar góðar minningar úr þessu húsi – sagði Eðvarð Sigurðssyn, fyrrv. alþingismaður sem vildi flytja húsið og gera það að hjónagarði,'" in *Dagblaðið,* Feb. 4, 1981, 4, accessed Nov. 2017, http://timarit.is/view_page_init.jsp?issId=228600&pageId=3099880&lang=is&q=E%F0var%F0%20Sigur%F0sson.

works. The turf house was, in other words, likely understood by SÚM artists as decidedly subversive, both in the local context of Icelandic nationalism and the international context of global anti-colonial critique, as well as in the context of the avant-garde postformalist practices of the postwar period.

Folk Belief and SÚM's Rematerialization of Art

In the previous chapter I argued that the "romantic" or "poetic" conceptualism of SÚM artists Sigurður Guðmundsson, Kristján Guðmundsson and Hreinn Friðfinnsson can be more accurately understood in terms of a critical rematerialization of the artwork, a conception which I characterized in terms of these artists' critical disavowal of the notion of "intellectual" artistic practices as necessarily tied to a negation of the artwork's material existence and its relation to sensual perception. Furthermore, as I noted, this argument relies on a reconceptualization of matter not as inert and mute, but dynamic, performative, active and agentive.[528] Finally, as I have shown, such a conception of matter can be drawn from the legacy of romantic thought, specifically from Johann Gottfried Herder's philosophy of language. And significantly, it is not irreconcilable with the fundamental insight of (post-)structuralist theory, that conceptual, ideological, cultural and institutional structures shape our perceptions of material reality.

The notion of matter as agentive is moreover implicitly aligned with animist folk beliefs. As folklorist Terry Gunnell points out, a crucial component of various Icelandic folk

[528] As I noted in the previous chapter my description of matter as agentive follows American feminist theorist and theoretical physicist Karen Barad's definition of agency, not as a property of a pre-existing subject but a material-discursive practice of the drawing and reworking of boundaries. See Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway,* 214.

beliefs – in elves (Icel. *álfar*), hidden people (Icel. *huldufólk*), nature spirits (Icel. *náttúruvættir*), trolls (Icel. *tröll*), ghosts (Icel. *draugar*), magic, the predictive power of dreams, and more – is belief in liminal beings; beings that occupy the spaces in between life and death, between the wild and the cultivated, the material and the spiritual, the visible and invisible, between male and female, and the human and the nonhuman.[529] Such legends also "clothed" the Icelandic landscape in experience and tradition, as Gunnell notes, turning "a space into a place, and a place into a living space," as well as mapping the geographical, mental, historical and spiritual surroundings of Icelanders.[530]

Gunnell's argument is echoed by Danish ethnographer Kirsten Hastrup's description of the contemporary Icelandic landscape as deeply historicized, marked by cultural meaning, and a vital part of local memory. "It is not simply a surface, or a stage upon which people play their social roles; it is part of the social space. It infiltrates practices and makes history. There is, as it were, agency on both sides; the opposition between wilderness and culture dissolves."[531] This conception of landscape as social and historicized directly contradicts, of

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[529] As folklorist Terry Gunnell has noted, in the past people occupying a temporal or spatial periphery of the community were commonly believed to be especially knowledgeable about, and vulnerable to, the supernatural world. Life was viewed as "a passage through various stages and varying social communities which you entered and left by way of a variety of initiatory rites of passage. At such times, just before christening, marriage and death, you were seen as standing in a state of … 'liminality.' You were between communities, lacked true belonging, and momentarily became a peripheral being at risk from outside forces." Terry Gunnell, "Legends and Landscape in the Nordic Countries," in *Cultural & Social History,* vol. 6, no. 3 (2009), 314-15.

[530] Ibid, 308.

[531] Kirsten Hastrup, "Icelandic Topography and the Sense of Identity," in *Nordic Landscapes: Region and Belonging on the Northern Edge of Europe*, ed. Michael Jones and Kenneth Olwig (Minneapolis; London: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), 53.

course, the modern notion of landscape as a visual scenery, a neutral background for the activity of human beings, a conception which is – as I have noted in the first chapter of this dissertation – intricately linked to the practices of colonialism and the rise and spread of capitalism globally since the sixteenth century.

In interrupting the clear boundaries of the conceptual categories of culture and nature Icelandic folk legends and tales can also be understood as challenging the autonomy and solidity of the human subject – premised as the notion of the human subject has traditionally been on the distinction of the human being from the animal and from its own nature – thus calling into question the epistemological foundations of modernity. It is, arguably, precisely for these reasons that folk belief and folk tales became the focus of Enlightenment figures in the eighteenth and nineteenth century, in Iceland as elsewhere. The reconfiguration of Icelanders as "modern" and "civilized" in that period relied not only on a denial of the external perception of the Icelandic population's "savage" customs, but equally importantly on a process of internal reconceptualization, in which the repression of popular beliefs in paranormal and supernatural phenomena and the occult, idolatry and paganism was considered crucial.[532]

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[532] Historian Ingi Sigurðsson notes for instance, that "some of the main figures of the Icelandic Enlightenment wrote in extremely negative terms about such folk tales and about popular beliefs in general, which they regarded as characterized by superstition." See Ingi Sigurðsson, "The Icelandic Enlightenment as an Extended Phenomenon," in *Scandinavian Journal of History,* vol. 35, no. 4 (2010), 379. An article by folklorist Jón Jónsson, published in the history journal *Sagnir: tímarit um söguleg efni* in 1996 recounts several examples of attacks on folk beliefs and tales in the writing of leaders of the Icelandic Enlightenment in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, as well as examples that show the continued popularity of tales of elves, hidden people, magic, ghosts and other paranormal entities. See Jón Jónsson, "Draugur í skjalasafni biskups: Upplýsing og þjóðtrú í upphafi 19. aldar," in *Sagnir,* vol. 17, no. 1 (June 1996), 6-11, accessed Nov. 2017,

From the perspective of the anti-colonial and nationalist rhetoric of the Anti-War Movement, exemplified by the writing of Sigfús Daðason, this process of cultural repression could be understood in terms of the complicity of an Icelandic elite in the subjugation of the native masses for economic gain. Although the Icelandic population is ethnically homogeneous, crucially, a clearly-defined, often Danish educated, elite did exist in the island at least from the eighteenth century,[533] and it was from this elite that the leaders of the Icelandic Enlightenment and the Icelandic nationalist movement – who often occupied top public official positions – were drawn in the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries.[534] Not surprisingly, then, as historian Ingi Sigurðsson notes, "the Icelandic Enlightenment was by no means radical. While the champions of the Enlightenment wanted ordinary people to become more 'enlightened,' they did not wish to see any major change in the structure of

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http://timarit.is/view_page_init.jsp?issId=367027&pageId=5954502&lang=is&q=Draugur%20%ED%20skjalasafni%20biskups%20%ED.

[533] Throughout the eighteenth century the governor of Iceland was, with only two exceptions, a Danish or Norwegian nobleman. However, the district-governors (Icel. *amtmenn*), who resided on the island, were commoners. While Crown officials were traditionally Danish, in the late eighteenth century it became more common for members of the native upper class to be recruited into office. To occupy such positions the Icelanders had to have a law degree from the University of Copenhagen. Thus, "a relatively homogeneous Icelandic elite," was formed "whose members were landowners, farmers of crown estates, or royal officials – or all these combines." See Anna Agnarsdóttir, "Iceland in the Eighteenth Century: An Island Outpost of Europe?," in *Sjuttonhundratal,* vol. 10 (2013), 12.

[534] Historian Ingi Sigurðsson has noted the important role played by top officials in Icelandic society, both religious and secular, in the Enlightenment movement. See Sigurðsson, "The Icelandic Enlightenment as an Extended Phenomenon," 371-390.

Icelandic society,"[535] a structure in which a small fraction of the population dominated the overwhelming majority of poor tenant subsistence farmers.[536]

It was thus in this context of class-struggle, as well, that the romantic movement for the preservation of folk culture and belief in the nineteenth century should be understood. And, it is in the same context of social dissonance and political struggle that its' revival in the postwar period can be comprehended. However, crucially, the disruption of the boundaries of culture and nature in folk tales and legends also supports SÚM artists' project of the rematerialization of the art object. Ultimately, SÚM artists' evocation of folk belief within the formal frames of experimental postformalist practices might be understood as an answer to Sigfús Daðason's call for the creation of an independent, "organic," but modern Icelandic art and culture.

Jón Gunnar Árnason: Cosmic Environments and Pagan Myth

A critical exploration of the continued cultural effects of Iceland's political subjugation under the Danish Empire is brought together with an engagement with autochthonous "pagan" Icelandic beliefs in the work of SÚM artist Jón Gunnar Árnason from the 1970s. Two works by Jón Gunnar from the mid-1970s include a rare overt and highly ironic

[535] Ibid, 375. Like the European nobility, members of Iceland's small landowning elite – which made up 5% of the population in the eighteenth century – payed no taxes. They protected their interest through labor bondage (Icel. *vistarband*) which stipulated that all members of the public who did not own or rent land had to be registered and employed on a farm as servants, thus preventing the possible drain from agriculture to fisheries and the emergence of settlements on Iceland's coast. The law also prevented landless people from marrying. See Agnarsdóttir, "Iceland in the Eighteenth Century," 11-13.

[536] Karlsson, *The History of Iceland*, 161-168; 228-235; 248-254.

reference to Icelanders' relationship to their former colonial masters. *GOD Dag – Atferlisverk fyrir Akureyringa* (*Good Day – A Performance for Akureyri),* from 1974, is a performance work dedicated to the population of Akureyri, a town in northern Iceland which developed in the late nineteenth century around the former settlements of Danish merchants. The town was, in the twentieth century, sometimes referred to as Iceland's "Danish town" (Icel. "danski bærinn") and it was popular belief that its population spoke Danish on Sundays, a legacy from the local Danish elite.[537] In reference to this, Jón Gunnar's work stipulates that each time two townspersons wearing hats should meet in Akureyri, they should remove their hats and greet each other in Danish: "God Dag!"[538] That same year Jón Gunnar travelled to Denmark, where he scaled and planted an Icelandic flag on one of Denmark's highest natural points, Himmelbjerget (The Sky Mountain, or the Mountain of Heaven) [Figure 4.7]. Performed with much theatrics and documented by Jóhannes S. Kjarval's son, architect Sveinn Kjarval, Jón Gunnar's highly ironic performance evokes and mobilizes romantic notions of the majesty and purity of Iceland's highlands which are implicitly contradicted by the low-lying Danish landscape. In this indirect comparison, the Danish landscape can only appear unimpressive at best, thus adding further insult to Jón Gunnar's act.

Around the same time that these contemplations on Iceland's relationship with Denmark emerge in Jón Gunnar's work, the artist turned his attention to Icelandic "pagan" beliefs. In 1973 Jón Gunnar erected a wooden idol to the pagan Norse god Freyr –

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[537] See "Bolsíur og danska á sunnudögum," in *Dagur,* May 4, 1991, 6, accessed Nov. 2017, http://timarit.is/view_page_init.jsp?issId=208664&pageId=2694956&lang=is&q=Bols%EDur%20og%20danska%20%E1%20sunnud%F6gum.

[538] See Ingólfsson, "Æviatriði – Biography," 90.

worshipped in the old Ásatrú for fertility and good fortune – on Flatey, an island west of the mainland of Iceland [Figure 4.8].[539] Jón Gunnar's fellow SÚM member, Guðbergur Bergsson, who was also staying in Flatey at the time, made a poetic offering to Jón Gunnar's idol, later published in a book of poems titled *Flateyjar-Freyr. Ljóðfórnir. OrðFórn TónFórn Færð Flateyjar Frey* in 1978.[540] Flatey became a place of retreat for Jón Gunnar in the early 1970s, and he stayed on the island regularly in the next few years, along with a small group of artists and other friends. As one of them, Guðmundur Páll Ólafsson, described it in 1994, they were full of ideals and dreamt of restoring the small and rapidly disappearing society in the island and of creating a self-sustaining community in Flatey; "Land should be used moderately and in harmony with nature. This position of ours resonated with our worldview and was in accordance with our opposition to the presence of a foreign military, to atomic threat and warmongering around the world."[541] Thus it was, in the still largely "untouched" environment of Flatey and in the context of the global 1970s anti-war movement and of the local nationalist struggle against neocolonialism that Jón Gunnar took up a theme that would occupy his art until his untimely death in 1989 – that of the sun.

On summer solstice in 1974 Jón Gunnar created what he would later refer to as an adoration of the sun; the environmental work *Að gera sólina bjartari* (*Making the sun*

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[539] Ibid, 89; Ómar Valdimarsson, "Pílagrímsför í þjóðgarð Guðs almáttugs: Nokkrar svipmyndir frá helgardvöl í Flatey á Breiðafirði," in *Tíminn,* July 22,1972, 8-10, accessed Nov. 2017, http://timarit.is/view_page_init.jsp?issId=264300&pageId=3719786&lang=is&q=Gu%F0s%20alm%E1ttugs%20%ED%20%ED.

[540] Margeirsson, "Menningin er flokkunarvél," 8-9; Ólafur Gíslason, "Ferðin að hliði sólarinnar: Leið Jóns Gunnars Árnasonar frá óreiðu Díónýsosar til kosmískrar reglu Apollós," in *Hugarorka og sólstafir,* 23.

[541] Guðmundur P. Ólafsson, "Um sólstöður," in *Hugarorka og sólstafir,* 66.

brighter, 1974) [Figures 4.9-4.12].[542] On that brightest day of the year, when the sun never sets in Iceland, Jón Gunnar placed four mirrors out in Flatey, each one facing one cardinal direction, in an attempt to both harvest and increase the cosmic energy of the sun.[543] Jón Gunnar's *Making the sun brighter* goes beyond the expansion of the parameters of the artwork into the earth's ecosystem in Sigurður Guðmundsson's *Untitled (Ice-Philosophy,* 1971) [Figure 3.1] – discussed in the previous chapter – to include within its boundaries the entire solar system. As Jón Gunnar later explained: "In this work, which is also a kind of adoration of the sun, I am trying to move out of the atmosphere to dissolve the sculpture as such, to make a work of unknown dimension where both space and man are part of the work."[544] Jón Gunnar's expansion of the artwork into space can be constructively compared to the critical role of space in the work of artists associated with the Düsseldorf-based artist network ZERO, exhibitions of which Jón Gunnar had contributed work to in the early 1960s.[545]

Much ZERO art demonstrates the artists' utopian and futuristic aspirations towards the "dematerialization" of art through the incorporation of movement and light, and the use of airy, reflective and light, modern industrial materials such as aluminum, steel, glass and plexiglass. A key objective of ZERO was to break the autonomy of the art object and the privileging of vision, central to both Concrete art and Abstract Expressionism. Critical to this expansion of the art object was the artist's conviction that technological progress demanded

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[542] Ólg, "Sól, hnífar, skip," 7-9.

[543] Ólafsson, "Um sólstöður," 67.

[544] Ólg, "Sól, hnífar, skip," 9

[545] See Einar Guðmundsson, "Blómið og rætur þess," in *Hugarorka og sólstafir,* 55-61.

corresponding advances in art.[546] Otto Piene described the significance of the term ZERO in 1964, by distinguishing it from the anti-modernism of dada: "But from the beginning we looked upon the term not as an expression of nihilism or a dada-like gag but as a word indicating a zone of silence and of pure possibilities for a new beginning like the count-down when rockets are started – zero is the incommensurable zone in which the old state turns into the new."[547] In comparison, no such ideal of technological progress can be discerned in Jón Gunnar's work. In fact, several comments made by Jón Gunnar, and much of the artist's early work testify to his decisive technophobia and his critical attitude towards industrialization, technology, and capitalism.[548]

In 1969, for instance, Jón Gunnar exhibited a number of mechanized and electrified works with a decidedly dystopian air at Gallery SÚM. Among them, *Da Nang* (1967), a work

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[546] In addition to extending the art object into space through movement, ZERO artists experimented with materials that stimulated the viewer's sense of touch – such as fire, cotton, nails and feathers – and freed art from the confines of the museum or the gallery, through the use of media such as television and through public performance. See Petersen, "Space and the Space Age in Postwar European Art: Lucio Fontana, Yves Klein, and their Contemporaries;" Eleanor J. Atwood Gibson, "The Media of Memory: History, Technology and Collectivity in the Work of the German Zero Group 1957-1966" (PhD Diss., Yale University, 2008), ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global; *ZERO: Countdown to Tomorrow, 1950s – 60s,* Edited by Valerie L. Hillings and Margaret Schavemaker (New York: Guggenheim Museum Publications, 2014), Exhibition catalogue.

[547] Otto Piene, "The Development of Group Zero," in *Times Literary Supplement,* no. 3262 (September 3, 1964), 812. Quoted from Petersen, "Space and the Space Age in Postwar European Art," 196.

[548] See: Kristín M. Baldursdóttir, "Galdrastafir Jóns Gunnars," in *Morgunblaðið* C - Sunnudagur, Dec. 4, 1988, C6-C7, accessed Nov. 2017, http://timarit.is/view_page_init.jsp?issId=333804&pageId=5250730&lang=is&q=J%F3ns%20Gunnars; Ólg, "Sól, hnífar, skip," 7-9.

which reflected on U.S. army's use of automatic rifles in the Vietnam War. Also, *Hjartað* (*The Heart*, 1968) [Figure 4.13] – an enlarged electrified replica of a human heart, made from various spare car parts, iron and steel which "beats," vibrating and shaking with great clamor when turned on – inspired by the world's first human heart transplant, performed by Christiaan Barnard in South Africa on 3 December 1967. As Jón Gunnar later explained, the work originated in his feeling of disgust at the "distortion" and manipulation of the human body that this entailed.[549] In this critical attitude towards technology, Jón Gunnar's early work is closer to Jean Tinguely's ironic parody of technological progress and efficiency than the work of ZERO artists. Jón Gunnar's idea, from 1962, for the creation of a mechanized "art critic," a robot that would waive its arms, say "bla bla bla," and spew out a paper strip with the same inscription, for instance, has a definite affinity with Tinguely's *Meta-matic* drawing machines from 1959.[550]

At the heart of Jón Gunnar's work is the romantic notion of man's alienation from nature as a result of capitalism and industrialization as well as a concern for the ecological effects of technology and industry.[551] This concern is brought forth in the artist's comments from 1970:

> If we use technology wisely, it won't be long until we can stop all labour, and don't have to do anything except think and play or whatever we want. […] But then we are so tremendously stupid that we are ruining this little ball that we live

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[549] Ólg, "Sól, hnífar, skip," 7-9.

[550] Ingólfsson, "Æviatriði – Biography," 85.

[551] For a discussion of the romantic concept of alienation, its ecological implications and how it differs from the post-Kantian conception of Hegel and Marx, see Alison Stone, "Alienation from Nature and Early German Romanticism," in *Ethical Theory and Moral Practice,* vol. 17 (February 2014), 41-54.

> on. […] We are ruining our earth with technology. In comparison war and unrest, as despicable as it is, is a minor problem.[552]

Crucially, it is at this time and in the context of this critique of modern technology and the "spirit of capitalism,"[553] that an increased focus on nature and ecology – and his obsession with the figure of the sun more particularly – emerges in Jón Gunnar's work.

The spiritual dimensions of this focus are highlighted by Jón Gunnar's comment in an interview published in 1988, shortly before the artist's premature death: "I love the sun. It is god, the conception and life giver of all that is."[554] That Jón Gunnar's expansion of the artwork into space should focus on the sun in particular is demonstrative of its distinction from ZERO's idealization of space exploration. For, in comparison to the moon, the sun is clearly hostile to human colonization, and yet – as Jón Gunnar reminds us – the source of all life as we know it. As such, the figure of the sun can be understood to undermine the fantasy of man's total domination of space. Jón Gunnar's focus on the cosmic energy of the sun is

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[552] In the original: "Ef við notum tæknina skynsamlega, líður ekki á löngu áður en við getum hætt öllu púli, þurfum þá ekkert að gera nema að hugsa og leika okkur eða hvað annað sem við viljum. [...] En svo erum við svona æðislega heimsk og vitlaus að við erum að eyðileggja þessa litlu kúlu, sem við búum á. [...] Við erum bókastaflega að eyðileggja jörðina okkar með tæknivæðingu. Í samanburði við þetta eru styrjaldir og svoleiðis brölt, jafn andstyggilegt og það er, ósköp smávægileg vandamál." Þorleifsson, "Afskiptaleysi er glæpur," 43.

[553] In *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (G. *Die protestantische Ethik und der Geist des Kapitalismus,* publ. 1905)*,* German sociologist Max Weber defines what he calls "the spirit of capitalism" in terms of rationalized organisation of labour, calculating administration and an accompanying disenchantment of the world. See Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (London; New York: Routledge, 1992).

[554] In the original: "Ég elska sólina. Hún er guð, hugsunin og lífgjafi allra og alls." Baldursdóttir, "Galdrastafir Jóns Gunnars," C6.

further related to the artist's conviction of the energetic force of all matter and the concrete material effects of invisible energy.[555]

Jón Gunnar's *Sólvagninn* (*Sun Chariot*) [Figure 4.14], from 1978, is composed of steel bars molded into the frame of a wheeled wagon. Through its form and its title, this work references the myth of the pagan sun and moon deities, the twins Sól (Sun, also known as Elfdisk) and Máni (Moon), documented in the *Poetic Edda,*[556] and in Snorri Sturluson's *Prose Edda* (Icel. *Snorra-Edda*).[557] According to the myth, Sól and Máni "must fly in the sky each day to tally time for all mankind."[558] Their chariot is drawn by two horses named Árvakr (Arvak) and Alsviðr (Alsvid),[559] and is hounded by the wolves Hati (Hate) and Sköll (Skoll) who are destined to catch up with them and devour them at Ragnarök, the Fate of the Gods. After this apocalyptic battle between the gods or Æsir and various monsters such as the fire giant Surtr, the legends tell that a new sun, the daughter of Sól, will continue her mother's journey.[560] Jón Gunnar's *Sun Chariot* can thus be interpreted as a reminder, through

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[555] Þorleifsson, "Afskiptaleysi er glæpur," 26-27; 41; 43-44; Ólg, "Sól, hnífar, skip," 7-9.

[556] The *Poetic Edda* is a collection of "primary sources on Nordic Mythology and heroic legend preserved in two main manuscripts written by Christian scribes in Iceland in the late thirteenth/early fourteenth century, although most of them appear to have much earlier roots." Terry Gunnell, "Foreword," in *The Poetic Edda*, trans. Jeramy Dodds (Toronto: Coach House Press, 2014), 9.

[557] *Prose Edda* is a "handbook and guide to the old mythology for poets and scholars," written by Snorri Sturluson in about 1220. David Leeming, "Prose Edda," in *The Oxford Companion to World Mythology* (Oxford University Press, 2006), accessed October 2018, http://www.oxfordreference.com.ezproxy.library.ubc.ca/view/10.1093/acref/9780195156690.001.0001/acref-9780195156690-e-1304.

[558] "Vafthrudnir's Sayings" (Icel. Vafþrúðnismál), in *The Poetic Edda*, 62.

[559] Ibid, 74.

[560] Ibid, 74

the ancient legends of Ásatrú, both of the potential apocalyptic consequences of modern threats to the environment and of the immense power of the sun as a life-giving force.

Hreinn Friðfinnsson: Patterns of the Virtual and the Concrete

In 1972, SÚM artists Sigurður Guðmundsson, Kristján Guðmundsson and Hreinn Friðfinnsson established and opened the artist-run In-Out Center in Amsterdam, alongside Latin-American artists Raúl Marroquín, Michel Cardena and Ulises Carrión, and Dutch artists Hetty Huisman, Pieter Laurens Mol and Gerrit Jan de Rook. Among the works presented at the inaugural exhibition on 24 November 1972 was Hreinn Friðfinnsson's *Álagablettir* (*Sacred and Enchanted Places,* 1972), discussed in the introduction to this chapter. That same year, Hreinn placed an advert in Raúl Marroquín's magazine/newspaper *Fandangos,* pleading for the public to send him their personal secrets. As I have argued in the previous chapter, Hreinn's ad can be understood in the context of his artistic exploration of the virtual, as an integral but immaterial aspect of human relations to concrete reality. One year later, Hreinn contributed another text-based work to the same publication, now renamed *Vandangos. Dream* (1973) [Figure 4.15] documents a strange vision the artist had in a dream. It reads:

> I dreamt that I was on the farm where I was born and raised up. I and my father (who is dead) were working in the homefield, collecting some hay. We had there a horse and a wagon by which we were going to transport the hay to the stable. It was rather dark outside but quite warm. When we had loaded the wagon my father disappeared but his shadow was left there with me and I knew that I was to rub it on the wheels of the wagon to make it run smoother. Then I was to connect

> the wagon to the horse with strings made of light which had gone down through the sea. Then I woke up.[561]

Hreinn's vision is certainly surreal. Nevertheless, it would be a mistake to interpret Hreinn's *Dream* from a psychoanalytic position of dreams as repositories of subconscious repressed thought.

Belief in the predictive power of dreams is historically strong in Iceland. Premonitions through *draumspá* (dream visions) are afforded great importance in the Icelandic Sagas and are as such, an integral part of Icelandic cultural identity.[562] The continued strength of such beliefs in the 1970s is confirmed, by the results of a 1974 study of Icelandic folk beliefs and attitudes.[563] Commenting on this tradition in 1958, Gabriel Turville-Petre, Professor of Ancient Icelandic Literature and Antiquities at the University of Oxford, noted that it was premised on a belief that the future "is not something unformed, but it is a state which exists already."[564] For Turville-Petre, the Icelandic belief in dream-symbolism implied a belief in fate, the notion that future developments are entirely out of a person's control and predetermined by a supernatural power, whether pagan or Christian.

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[561] See *Hreinn Friðfinnsson*.

[562] See e.g. G. Turville-Petre, "Dreams in Icelandic Tradition," in *Folklore*, vol. 69, no. 2 (June 1958), 93-111; Ralph O'Connor, "Astronomy and Dream Visions in Late Medieval Iceland: Stjörnu-Odda draumr and the Emergence of Norse Legendary Fiction," in *JEGP, Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, vol. 111, no. 4 (Oct. 2012), 474-512; Christopher Crocker, "To Dream is to Bury: Dreaming of Death in Brennu-Njáls saga," in *JEGP, Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, vol. 111, no. 2 (April 2015), 261-291.

[563] As folklorist Terry Gunnell notes, while it did not draw as much attention abroad as the Icelanders' hesitance to deny the existence of nature spirits, Erlendur's study showed a much more striking "high level of belief in dreams, in accompanying spirits, and the possibility of continuing contact with the dead." Gunnell, *Modern Legends in Iceland,* 337.

[564] G. Turville-Petre, "Dreams in Icelandic Tradition," 95.

Considering Hreinn Friðfinnsson's *Dream* in the context of his larger oeuvre, however, I propose that the artist's interest in, and evocation of, the tradition of *draumspá* is better understood not as an indication of his adherence to a belief in predestiny, but rather as premised on the notion of time and space as performative constructs, and of the virtual as an immanent part of material – if incorporeal – reality. Furthermore, on the artist's related critical interruption of the traditional distinction of cognition, sensation and emotion.

The potential of dreams to disrupt the traditional boundaries of cognition, sensation and emotion is underlined by another dream, placed front and center at Hreinn's solo-exhibition at London's Serpentine Gallery in 2007. Running across the wall facing the entrance to the exhibition was the sentence: "Thorsteinn Surtr dreamed he was awake but everyone else was asleep; then he dreamed he fell asleep and everyone else woke up." Understood by one critic as a vague invitation "to treat Friðfinnsson's show as a sort of daydream, and his work as a kind of fiction,"[565] the sentence is, in fact, adopted from *Íslendingabók* (*The Book of Icelanders, Libellus Islandorum*) – an account of the history of Iceland written by Ari fróði (Ari the Learned) in the period 1122-1133 and preserved in manuscripts form the seventeenth century – where it is part of a description of events that led to the solution of a very practical problem encountered by early Icelanders; that of reckoning the number of days constituting the solar year. Realizing that their old calendar was falling out of sync, with summer gradually beginning earlier and earlier, around 955 AD Þorsteinn "Surtur" (the Black) Hallsteinsson – probably by way of observation of movements of the

[565] Searle, "Sweet Dreams."

location of the sunset – proposed that an extra week, called *sumarauki* (summer's extra week), be added at mid-summer every seventh year.[566]

While Ari fróði's account in *Íslendingabók* does not necessarily suggest that the solution to this problem was revealed to Þorsteinn in his dream, it does propose that Þorsteinn's dream – and its interpretation by Ósífur Helgason – played an integral and effective part in solving the issue and re-establishing order to the public proceedings of the ancient Icelandic parliament *Alþingi* (Althing, est. 930 AD).[567] Hreinn Friðfinnson interest in dreams is, I argue, rooted not in a notion of dreams as an expression of the repressed thoughts of an alienated human subject, but rather, in their subversive potential for the interruption of the boundaries of the past, the present and the future, and in their relation – as a form of nonconscious conceptualization – to sensual perception of material reality. As such, Hreinn's dreams directly challenge the traditional distinction and isolation of the

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[566] For more on the mathematics of Þorsteinn "Surtur"'s amendment, see Kristín Bjarnadóttir, "Ethnomathematics at the Margin of Europe – A Pagan Calendar," in *International Congress on Mathematical Education (ICME) 11,* Conference Proceedings (2008), 189-207, accessed Nov. 2017, https://www.mathunion.org/fileadmin/ICMI/files/About_ICMI/Publications_about_ICMI/ICME_11/Bjarnadottir.pdf.

[567] In *Íslendingabók* (The Book of Icelanders), Ari fróði (Ari the Learned) writes, of this event: "But there was a man called Þorsteinn surtr, … He dreamed that he seemed to be at the law rock, where there was a big crowd, and he was awake, but he thought all of the others slept. But then he thought he fell asleep, but he thought then that all of the others awoke. Ósýfr Helgason… interpreted this dream such that everyone would become silent when he spoke at the law rock, but when he would become silent then they would all approve of that which he had said. And then when people came to the assembly, then he gave this advice at the law rock, that every seventh summer should be increased by a week as an attempt, to see how it goes. And just as Ósýfr had interpreted the dream, this idea awoke well with everyone, and it was then taken as law on the advice of Þorkell máni [Þorkell moon] and other wise men." See Crocker, "To Dream is to Bury," 262-263.

subject from the object in western philosophy, in a manner similar to his 1973 textual work *Substances,* discussed in the previous chapter.

Several works by Hreinn also explicitly invert the traditional distinction of culture from nature through an evocation of folk belief. I have already noted this in regard to *Álagablettir* (*Sacred and Enchanted Places*, 1972). In 1977, an exhibition of conceptualist work by Hreinn opened at Gallery Suðurgata 7 in Reykjavík, a gallery run by young artists, many of whom were students of SÚM artist Magnús Pálsson at the Reykjavík College of Arts and Crafts, which would soon replace Gallery SÚM as the leading venue for experimental art in Reykjavík. There, Hreinn presented four works, among them *Munstur* (*Patterns,* 1977), which the artist described as a performance (Icel. performans).[568] On a small wooden table in the gallery lay a pile of small rocks and beside it a piece of paper [Figure 4.16]. As the artist explained in an interview published in *Þjóðviljinn* on the occasion of the exhibition opening, *Munstur* consisted of an invisible image,[569] an undocumented pattern of the historical interweaving of man and nature:

> In this work a pattern emerges, which is based on the fact that the stones have a long history and it has taken them ages to achieve their current form. No two stones are the same either and their history is slightly unique, both their geological history and the history of their movement. In this way, they are a bit

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[568] See Guðbjörg Kristjánsdóttir, "'Það er algengt að fólk tíni steina og gefi hver öðrum,"" in *Þjóðviljinn,* August 14, 1977, 8, accessed Sep. 2017, http://timarit.is/view_page_init.jsp?issId=222006&pageId=2856577&lang=is&q=og%20%FEa%F0%20og%20%DEa%F0%20er%20a%F0%20og%20%FEa%F0%20er%20algengt%20a%F0%20f%F3lk.

[569] As Hreinn stated: "The appearance of the work in the gallery is very insignificant but it exists in an invisible image." In the original: "Verkið lítur mjög lítilfjörlega út á sýningunni en það er fólgið í ósýnilegri mynd." Ibid.

> like people. This development is very slow but steady. And then you can just invade this long history by picking them up here and there and gathering them in a pile. Then people, aware that I or someone is having an exhibition, might come to the place where the stones are and take one of them. The pattern that I scribbled there on that little picture, is interwoven as man and stone leave together. I am interested in this kind of invisible pattern and I find it beautiful together, man and stone.[570]

In his description of *Munstur,* Hreinn draws attention to the performativity and the historicity of matter. The stone is not an autonomous and stable "thing" but rather the result of a long process of multiple historical material interactions within phenomena. These interactions – and the "life" of the stone – are independent of the human being; the stone has a history of its own as Hreinn reminds us, thus decentering the human being. This conception of the stone places *Munstur* (*Pattern*) in direct relation to Hreinn's *Álagablettir* (*Sacred and Enchanted Places*) and its evocation of the Icelandic folk belief in elves and nature spirits. Furthermore, Hreinn's explicit analogy between the human and the nonhuman – of the life of man and stone – and his exposition of their interwoven history further implicitly destabilizes the traditional concept of the human as uniquely autonomous from nature.

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[570] In the original: "Í því verki skapast leiðamunstur, sem byggist á því, að steinarnir eiga sér langa sögu og það hefur tekið þá óratíma að verða svona í laginu. Það eru heldur aldrei neinir tveir eins og saga þeirra er dálítið mismunandi, bæði jarðfræðisaga og hvernig þeir hafa borist til. Að þessu leyti minna þeir dálítið á folk. Þesis þróun hefur mjög hægan gang en öruggan. Svo getur maður ráðist inn í þessa löngu sögu með því bara að tína þá upp svona hingað og þangað og sett þá saman í hrúgu. Síðan kemur folk, sem veit að ég eða einhver er að halda sýningu, á staðinn, þar sem steinarnir eru, og getur tekið einn þeirra. Mynstrið, sem ég krotaði þarna á litlu myndina, fléttast saman, þegar maður og stein fara út saman. Ég hef áhuga á einhverju svona ósýnilegu munstri og mér finnst það fallegt saman, maður og steinn." Ibid.

Although *Munstur* (*Pattern*) is presented in the unaffective style of 1970s conceptualism, and centers on patterns of human and nonhuman behavior, Hreinn is not interested in documenting the actual movements of the stones and people. It is, as he stresses, rather the invisible "image" or pattern – the immaterial and yet concrete and performative relationship between man and stone, as well as the virtual possibility of their future interaction – that interests him. This refusal to represent is central, in fact, to Hreinn's work, and rooted, in the artist's absorption of Fluxus's critique of representation in the years prior.

Similarly, both Sigurður Guðmundsson's *Untitled (Ice-Philosophy)* (1971) and Hreinn Friðfinnson's *Álagablettir* (*Sacred and Enchanted Places,* 1972) share the typical "documentary" aesthetic of 1970s conceptualism. And yet, the content of each work also challenges the (post-)structuralist framework through which Anglo-American conceptual art has often been read – what Eve Meltzer has called the "dream of the information world:" the dream (or nightmare) of the world as a total sign system, in which the real appears as nothing more than the effect of the signifier.[571] In the previous chapter, I argued that, in direct contradiction to this cultural imaginary often associated with certain dominant forms of conceptual art, Sigurður Guðmundsson's *Untitled (Ice-Philosophy)* rests on the implicit notion of matter as performative and agentive, and thus, that it can be understood to entail a critical rematerialization of the artwork. The same can be said about Hreinn Friðfinnsson's *Álagablettir* (*Sacred and Enchanted Places,* 1972), a work which figures matter as agentive and explores this through the Icelandic tradition of belief in nature spirits, elves and hidden people.

[571] See Meltzer, *Systems We Have Loved,* 29-69.

The focus of SÚM artists on the relation of the human being to nature, the emotional or intuitive basis suggested by the artists for their practice, and their evocations of "archaic" cultural practices and beliefs have been discussed, both by the artists themselves and by critics and historians, as reflective of a fundamental if vague alterity of Icelandic art and culture. Often characterized in terms of a "poetic" or "romantic" attitude, as I have noted this has been justified in terms of the relative lack of industrial development in Iceland and the Icelandic people's allegedly direct relationship to or engagement with the wilderness. On the contrary, I have argued that these characteristics of the work of SÚM artists can be understood as the maturation of a historical process of Iceland's transcultural relation to European modernity, and thus as an outcome of the fundamental antinomy of modernity. Furthermore, I have argued that the work of SÚM artists explicitly and consciously challenges hegemonic processes of globalization, by making visible and insisting on the contemporaneity of perspectives and positionalities that displace modern "enlightened" perspectives on the boundaries and relations of the human and the nonhuman, of culture and nature.

Conclusion

SÚM artists' mobilization of Icelandic folk culture and art must be understood in the context, firstly, of the wider re-evaluation of folk culture and folk beliefs within the framework of Icelandic nationalism in the postwar period, and secondly, in relation to SÚM's translation of avant-garde and experimental practices into Iceland. Both have their roots in critiques of modernity that emerge through processes of transculturation related to the expansion of the capitalist economy and European domination through colonial practices.

By figuring animist, "pagan" beliefs and "archaic" cultural traditions and practices in the "ultra-modern" stylistic terms of conceptual and postformalist art, SÚM artists challenged the linear periodization that frames the concept of modernity. It is through processes of transculturation – in the context of their contact with transnational networks of experimental artists and their introduction into the "globalized" artworld of the 1970s – that Icelandic artists, poets and scholars came, in the postwar period, to mobilize the notion of their own culture's primitivity to problematize the concept of a universal process of historical progression.

As I have argued, SÚM's translation of avant-garde and experimental artistic practices into Iceland came to be uniquely focused on a critical, creative and often highly humorous reconfiguration of the boundaries of culture and nature, and of the human and the nonhuman. It is significant, in this context, that the evocations of a local, Icelandic cultural identity in SÚM work should come to focus not on the Icelandic Sagas – as cultural representations of the high status of Icelandic "civilization" – but on the undervalued and repressed aspects of Icelandic folk culture and beliefs that challenge the established boundaries of nature and culture, central to the tradition of European modern philosophy and aesthetics.

Finally, SÚM artists' negation of the notion of the "modern" is part of the artists' wider confrontation with the strict conceptual distinction of culture from nature, and of the human from the nonhuman, as well as the correlated distinction of the conceptual from the material and the cognitive from the sensual. This should be understood, I have argued, as informed by the longer historical process of the formation of Icelandic national identity since the Early Modern period, and by the artists' implicit recognition of the complicity of these

terms with the authoritarian circumscription of behavior and the hierarchical ordering of peoples and cultures that was central to the project of modernity.

Conclusion

In his recent work, art historian Terry Smith has argued that the profound geopolitical shifts following from processes of decolonization and globalization in the aftermath of WWII inaugurated the emergence of an increased sensitivity and awareness of the contemporaneous presence of multiple historical trajectories and relations to modernity throughout the globe, making the modern "divisions of the world into those who live in modern times and those who, while physically present, were regarded as noncontemporaneous beings" increasingly indefensible.[572] Art historian Reiko Tomii has illustrated the significance of the concept of contemporaneity to discussions of postwar Japanese artistic practice. As she notes, its value lies in its implicit challenge to notions of similarity and "imitation," and the idea that "influence" flows unproblematically from global cultural "centers" to the "peripheries" of the art world. Confronting this tendency, Tomii stresses the importance of a nuanced analysis of similarities and differences, and of considering local contexts in tandem with global developments.[573] These are the concerns that have shaped my examination of the history of SÚM, and it is on these grounds that I position the development of artistic practice within SÚM in the 1960s and seventies in terms of the emergence of contemporary art in Iceland.

The foundations of contemporary artistic practice were laid, in Iceland, by SÚM in the 1960s and seventies, and the work of SÚM artists, their practice and their critiques of modern art and its paradigms – of the distinction of high and low forms of artistic production, of the separation of cognition and sensation, and of the traditional boundaries of

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[572] Terry Smith, "Contemporary Art and Contemporaneity," in *Critical Inquiry,* vol. 32, no. 4 (Summer 2006), 701.

[573] See Reiko Tomii, "'International Contemporaneity' in the 1960s," 123-147.

nature and culture, and of the human and the nonhuman – still resonates in the practice of Icelandic artists to this day. The confrontation with Icelandic national identity and critiques of U.S. influence in Iceland in the postwar period, initiated by SÚM, was expanded by artists of the subsequent generation. For instance, in artist Rúrí (b. Þuríður Fannberg) provocative 1974 performance, *A Proposition to Change the Icelandic National Costume to Meet with Modern Icelandic Society*, in which the artist wore an "updated" version of the Icelandic national costume – made of an American flag – at a public celebration of Iceland's sovereignty [Figure 4.17]. SÚM's critical engagement with the discourse of art in Iceland – in particular the romantic ideal of Icelanders' closeness to nature and its twin concept of the primitive character of Icelandic culture and art – has been taken up by artist Ragnar Kjartansson, an artist whose practice spans a wide range of mediums and whose, often highly ironic but never sarcastic, work – including *Scandinavian Pain* (2006) [Figure 4.18] and *The End – Rocky Mountains* (2009) [Figure 4.19] – has explored the clichés of Icelandic national identity and of the romantic image of the North in a potent mix of performative theatrics and emotional sincerity.[574] A continuation of SÚM artists' engagement with folk art and folk

[574] For more on Ragnar Kjartansson's work see e.g. Lilly Wei, "Ragnar Kjartansson: The Beginning of 'The End,'" in *Art in America,* vol. 97, no. 6 (June 2009), 122-124, accessed Nov. 2018, http://ezproxy.library.ubc.ca/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=aph&AN=42427535&site=ehost-live&scope=site; Marcus Miller, "Ragnar Kjartansson," in *Border Crossings,* vol. 29, no. 3 (Sep.-Nov. 2010), 134-135, accessed Nov. 2018, http://ezproxy.library.ubc.ca/login?url=https://search-proquest-com.ezproxy.library.ubc.ca/docview/840372758?accountid=14656; Tatiana Mellama, "Ragnar Kjartansson: Rocky Mountain Rag," in *Canadian Art,* vol. 27, no. 1 (Spring 2010), 54-56, accessed Nov. 2018, https://search-proquest-com.ezproxy.library.ubc.ca/docview/216888687?accountid=1465; Laura Cumming, "Ragnar Kjartansson review – one of the greatest artists at work today," in *The*

belief and their critical mixing of autochthonous Icelandic cultural traditions with avant-garde artistic practices and artforms marks the work of Steingrímur Eyfjörð,[575] whose contribution, as Iceland's representative, to the 52nd Venice Biennale in 2007, included a "hidden" (elf) yearling sheep "procured" through a medium and displayed in *The Sheep Pen,* the central work of Steingrímur's exhibition [Figure 4.20].[576] Finally, the diverse practice of the Danish-born, Icelandic artist Ólafur Elíasson shares with the work of SÚM artists' a fundamental concern and engagement with the relationship of human beings to nature and with human experiences of nature that is profoundly shaped by romantic critiques of modernity [Figure 4.21].

While these contemporary artists work in a globalized sphere of art and their practices share much in common with those of artists situated in diverse corners of the globe, it is also uniquely configured by the historical and geopolitical context of Iceland, and by the genealogy of artistic practice and cultural discourse that I have traced in the history of SÚM.

Observer, July 17, 2016, accessed Nov. 2018, https://global-factiva-com.ezproxy.library.ubc.ca/ga/default.aspx.

[575] For more on Steingrímur Eyfjörð's work see e.g. "Steingrímur Eyfjörð," Icelandic Art Center, accessed Dec. 2018, https://icelandicartcenter.is/people/artists/steingrimur-eyfjord/; "Steingrimur Eyfjord – at the Palazzo Bianchi Michiel." Press Release, March 23, 2007. Center for Icelandic Art. Accessed Dec. 2018. http://cia.icelandicartcenter.is/info/pdf/Icelandic%20Pavilion%202007%20press.pdf; Elena Filipovic, "Steingrimur Eyfjord" (Review), Frieze, Feb. 3, 2005, accessed Nov. 2018, https://frieze.com/article/steingrimur-eyfjord.

[576] For further details on Steingrímur Eyfjörð's exhibition at the Venice Biennale in 2007, see *Steingrímur Eyfjörð – Lóan er komin, La Biennale di Venezia,* Edited by Steingrímur Eyfjörð and Hanna Styrmisdóttir (Reykjavík: Lóan er komin ehf.; Center for Icelandic Art; Listasafn Reykjavíkur, 2007), Exhibition catalogue, accessed Dec. 2018, http://listasafnreykjavikur.is/syningar/steingrimur-eyfjord-loan-er-komin.

To understand the continued specificity of contemporary art in Iceland within the global art world one must reckon with the complex dynamics of connectedness and opposition, of transcultural translation and the continued legacy of the antinomies that have distinguished modernity and its afterlife.

Images

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Figure 0. 1 Front cover of *SÚM 1972,* 1972, exhibition catalogue, 27 x 20.5 x 1.2 cm.

Publisher: Gallery SÚM, Reykjavík. The Living Art Museum (N-3172), Reykjavík, Iceland.

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Figure 0. 2 Back cover of *SÚM 1972,* 1972, exhibition catalogue, 27 x 20.5 x 1.2 cm.

Publisher: Gallery SÚM, Reykjavík. The Living Art Museum (N-3172), Reykjavík, Iceland.

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Figure 1. 1 Vilhjálmur Bergsson (front) and Hringur Jóhannesson (back) pictured with Magnús Pálsson's "landscape hats" at SÚM's exhibition of "miniature objects" in Gallery SÚM, December 1971. Photograph published in Vísir, Dec. 3, 1971, http://timarit.is/view_page_init.jsp?issId=237869&pageId=3240952&lang=is&q=S%DAM.

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Figure 1. 2 Þórarinn B. Þorláksson, *Þingvellir,* 1900, oil on canvas, 52 x 81 cm. Private collection. In *Íslensk listasaga frá síðari hluta 19. aldar til upphafs 21. aldar,* vol. I, ed. Ólafur Kvaran, 83.

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Figure 1. 3 Þórarinn B. Þorláksson, *Stjórisjór* (Langisjór), 1906, oil on canvas, 32 x 60 cm. Private collection. In *Íslensk listasaga frá síðari hluta 19. aldar til upphafs 21. aldar,* vol. I, ed. Ólafur Kvaran, 101.

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Figure 1. 4 Ásgrímur Jónsson, *Í Möðrudal* (*In Möðrudalur*), 1907, oil on cardboard, 55.5 x 88.5 cm. Ríkissjóður Íslands, Reykjavík, Iceland. In *Íslensk listasaga frá síðari hluta 19. aldar til upphafs 21. aldar,* vol. I, ed. Ólafur Kvaran, 103.

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Figure 1. 5 Jóhannes S. Kjarval, *Íslandslag (Hvassárgljúfur)* (*Iceland's Melody (Hvassárgljúfur)*), 1949-1959, oil on canvas, 115 x 156 cm. The National Gallery of Iceland, Reykjavík, Iceland. In *Íslensk listasaga frá síðari hluta 19. aldar til upphafs 21. aldar,* vol. II, ed. Ólafur Kvaran, 81.

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Figure 1. 6 Svavar Guðnason, *Jónsmessudraumur* (*Midsummer's Dream*), 1941, oil on canvas, 98 x 130 cm. Photograph by Esben H. Thorning. KUNSTEN Museum of Modern Art, Aalborg, Denmark. In *Íslensk listasaga frá síðari hluta 19. aldar til upphafs 21. aldar,* vol. III, ed. Ólafur Kvaran, 9.

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Figure 1. 7 Finnur Jónsson, *Óður til mánans* (*Ode to the Moon*), 1925, oil and gold on canvas, 78 x 68 cm. The National Gallery of Iceland, Reykjavík, Iceland. In *Íslensk listasaga frá síðari hluta 19. aldar til upphafs 21. aldar,* vol. II, ed. Ólafur Kvaran, 39.

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Figure 1. 8 Hreinn Friðfinnsson, *Komið við hjá Jóni Gunnari* (*Dropping by Jón Gunnar's*), 1965, reproduced in 1989, broken door and pain, 200 x 72.5 cm. The National Gallery of Iceland, Reykjavík, Iceland. In *Íslensk listasaga frá síðari hluta 19. aldar til upphafs 21. aldar,* vol. IV, ed. Ólafur Kvaran, 58.

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Figure 1. 9 Sigurjón Jóhannsson, *Glorious,* 1965, triptych, oil, collage, wood and metal on particle board, 120 x 210 cm. Private collection. In *Íslensk listasaga frá síðari hluta 19. aldar til upphafs 21. aldar,* vol. IV, ed. Ólafur Kvaran, 57.

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Figure 1. 10 Jón Gunnar Árnason, *Svo er margt sinnið sem skinnið* (*To each his own*), 1964-65, aluminum and steel, 90 x 330 x 30 cm. Tilraunastöð Háskóla Íslands í meinafræði að Keldum, Iceland. In *Íslensk listasaga frá síðari hluta 19. aldar til upphafs 21. aldar,* vol. IV, ed. Ólafur Kvaran, 46.

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Figure 1. 11 Jón Gunnar Árnason, *Herra Guðmundur* (*Mr. Jones*), 1965, plaster, steel, aluminum and electricity, mannequin head, tie, shirt collar, pewter cookie tin and plastic car, 162 x 24 x 18 cm. Private collection. In *Íslensk listasaga frá síðari hluta 19. aldar til upphafs 21. aldar,* vol. IV, ed. Ólafur Kvaran, 56.

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Figure 1. 12 Jón Gunnar Árnason, *Radar,* 1967, steel and rock. Photograph by Ragnar Kjartansson. In *Útisýningarnar á Skólavörðuholti 1967-1972,* ed. Inga S. Ragnarsdóttir and Kristín G. Guðnadóttir, 68.

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Figure 1. 13 Þórður Ben Sveinsson, *Ræktunarsvæði nr. 3* (*Cultivation Area no. 3*), 1967, grass, seeds, sign. Photographh by Ari Kárason. Reykjavík Museum of Photography, Reykjavík, Iceland. In *Útisýningarnar á Skólavörðuholti 1967-1972,* ed. Inga S. Ragnarsdóttir and Kristín G. Guðnadóttir, 66.

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Figure 1. 14 Róska (Ragnhildur Óskarsdóttir), *Tilvonandi húsmóðir* (*Súper-þvottavél*) (*Future housewife* (*Super-washing-machine*)), 1967, steel (washing machine), paint. Photograph by Ragnar Kjartansson. In *Útisýningarnar á Skólavörðuholti 1967-1972,* ed. Inga S. Ragnarsdóttir and Kristín G. Guðnadóttir, 63.

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Figure 1. 15 Sigurður Guðmundsson, *Landslag* (*Landscape*), 1969, gouache and pencil on paper, 62 x 71 cm. Private collection of the artists. In *Íslensk listasaga frá síðari hluta 19. aldar til upphafs 21. aldar,* vol. IV, ed. Ólafur Kvaran, 71.

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Figure 1. 16 Kristján Guðmundsson, *Landslag* (*Landscape*), 1969, ironing board, cloth, chicken feces, neon light tube. Photograph from *SÚM III,* 1969. Reykjavík: Gallery SÚM, Exhibition catalogue.

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Figure 1. 17 Sigurður Guðmundsson, *Drengur* (*Boy*), 1969, wood, light bulb socket, light bulb, cloth, concrete and newspaper, 20 x 45 x 200 cm. The National Gallery of Iceland, Reykjavík, Iceland. In *Íslensk listasaga frá síðari hluta 19. aldar til upphafs 21. aldar,* vol. IV, ed. Ólafur Kvaran, 82.

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Figure 1. 18 Magnús Pálsson, *Erðanú borð!* (*What-a-table!*), 1962, wood, metal, paper and plaster, 80.5 x 40 x 43.5 cm. The National Gallery of Iceland, Reykjavík, Iceland. In *Íslensk listasaga frá síðari hluta 19. aldar til upphafs 21. aldar,* vol. IV, ed. Ólafur Kvaran, 37.

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Figure 1. 19 Gylfi Gislason, *Fjallasúrmjólk* (*Mountain Sourmilk*), 1971, pen and watercolor on paper, 72.5 x 96.5 cm. The National Gallery of Iceland, Reykjavík, Iceland. In *Íslensk listasaga frá síðari hluta 19. aldar til upphafs 21. aldar,* vol. IV, ed. Ólafur Kvaran, 147.

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Figure 1. 20 Jóhannes S. Kjarval, *Fjallamjólk* (*Mountain Milk*), 1941, oil on canvas, 106 x 150 cm. Listasafn ASÍ, Reykjavík, Iceland. In *Íslensk listasaga frá síðari hluta 19. aldar til upphafs 21. aldar,* vol. II, ed. Ólafur Kvaran, 63.

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Figure 2. 1 Dieter Roth, *Banana Print,* 1966, banana and tape on linen, 101 x 77 x 33 cm. Dadi Wirz. In *ROTH TIME,* ed. Theodora Vischer and Bernadette Walter, 98.

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Figure 2. 2 Dieter Roth, *Insel* (*Island*), 1968, foodstuffs, pigment, plaster, nails and wire on pressboard, 38.5 x 34 x 12 cm. Private collection, Cologne. In *ROTH TIME,* ed. Theodora Vischer and Bernadette Walter, 501.

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Figure 2. 3 Dieter Roth, *P.O.TH.A.A.VFB.* (*Portrait of the artist as Vogelfutterbüste* [birdseed bust]), 1970, chocolate, 23.5 x 15 x 10 cm. Private collection. In *ROTH TIME,* ed. Theodora Vischer and Bernadette Walter, 115.

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Figure 2. 4 Dieter Roth, *Löwenturm* (*Lion tower*), 1969-89, chocolate, sugar, glass. Museum für Gegenwartskunst and the Emanuel Hoffman-Stiftung, Basel. In *ROTH TIME,* ed. Theodora Vischer and Bernadette Walter, 259.

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Figure 2. 5 Installation views of the exhibition *Staple Cheese (A Race),* Eugenia Butler Gallery, Los Angeles, 1970. In *ROTH TIME,* ed. Theodora Vischer and Bernadette Walter, 131.

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Figure 2. 6 Dieter Roth and Björn Roth, *Gartenskulptur* (*Garden sculpture*), 1968-96, wood, wire, rope, metal, construction materials and objects, furnishings, plants, video equipment, monitors, painting utensils, liquids in glasses, foodstuffs, toys, clothing, pigments, photographs, drawings, multiples, and collages, variable dimensions. Flick collection, New York. Photograph by Dominik Labhardt. In *ROTH TIME,* ed. Theodora Vischer and Bernadette Walter, 246.

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Figure 2. 7 Dieter Roth, catalogue for the exhibition *SÚM I,* 1965. Photographer unknown.

The Living Art Museum (N-1315), Reykjavík, Iceland.

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Figure 2. 8 Dieter Roth, *Kinderbuch* (*Children's Book*), 1957, artist book, 32 x 32.3 cm. The Living Art Museum (N-1121), Reykjavík, Iceland.

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Figure 2. 9 Dieter Roth, *Literaturwurst (Martin Walser:* Halbzeit*)* (*Literature sausage (Martin Walser:* Halftime*)*), 1961, chopped book pressed into sausage shape and framed, 52.5 x 42.5 x 12 cm. Edition 7/50. Dieter Roth Foundation, Hamburg, Germany. In *ROTH TIME,* ed. Theodora Vischer and Bernadette Walter, 75.

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Figure 2. 10 Dieter Roth, *Gummibandbild* (*Rubber-band picture*), 1961, pigment, nails, and rubber bands on plywood, 100 x 100 cm. Kaiser Wilhelm Museum Krefeld (inv. No. 15/1963), Germany. In *ROTH TIME,* ed. Theodora Vischer and Bernadette Walter, 69.

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Figure 2. 11 Dieter Roth, *Collected Works,* volume 7: *bók 3b* and *bók 3d* (reconstructions of the books published by forlag ed Reykjavík, 1961), 1974, artist's book of cut die comic book and coloring book pages, 22.8 x 16.8 cm. Publisher: Edition Hansjörg Mayer, London, Stuttgart and Reykjavík. Printer: Staib and Mayer, Stuttgart. Edition: 1,000. Photograph by Jonathan Muzikar. The Museum of Modern Art Library, New York, https://www.moma.org/interactives/exhibitions/2013/dieter_roth/works/collected-works-volume-7-bok-3b-and-bok-3d-reconstruction-of-the-books-published-by-forlag-ed-reykjavik-1961-gesammelte-werke-band-7-bok-3b-und-bok-3d-rekonstruction-der-im-verlag-forlag-ed-re/index.html.

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Figure 2. 12 Dieter Roth, *Lochplakat (*Perforated poster), 1961, screenprint with die-cut holes, 100.5 x 70.5 cm. Staatsgalerie Stuttgart / Sohm Archives (inv. No. 1938/69), Stuttgart, Germany. In *ROTH TIME,* ed. Theodora Vischer and Bernadette Walter, 70.

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Figure 2. 13 *Kalenderrolle 1,* 1961, artist book, 121 x 11.5 cm. Publisher: Verlag Kalender/Ebeling und Dietrich, Wuppertal, Germany. The Living Art Museum (N-1254), Reykjavík, Iceland.

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Figure 2. 14 *An Anthology of Chance Operations,* 1963, artist book, 19.7 x 22.5 cm. Publisher: La Monte Young and Jackson Mac Low. The Living Art Museum (N-480), Reykjavík, Iceland.

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Figure 2. 15 Dieter Roth, *Kúluspil* (G. *Kugelspiel,* E. *Bied Game*), 1961, kinetic sculpture, 100 x 100 cm. The Living Art Museum (N-17), Reykjavík, Iceland.

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Figure 2. 16 Dieter Roth's *Vindharpa* (*Windharp*) mounted, 1961. Photographer: Gestur Einarsson. Photograph published in *Tíminn,* September 16, 1961, http://timarit.is/view_page_init.jsp?issId=61745&pageId=1047015&lang=is&q=Vindharpa.

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Figure 2. 17 George Brecht and the "Fluxus Editorial Council," *cc V TRE,* February 1964 (Fluxus newspaper no. 2), detail of back page featuring Dieter Roth's *Poem Machine,* offset on paper, 57.2 x 44.5 cm). Jean Brown papers, 1916-95 (bulk 1958-85), Getty Research Institute, Research Library, no. 890164. In Natilee Harren, "Fluxus and the Transitional Commodity," *Art Journal,* vol. 75, no. 1 (2016), 58.

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Figure 2. 18 Dieter Roth, *P.O.TH.A.A.VFB.* (*Portrait of the artist as Vogelfutterbüste* [birdseed bust]), 1970, photocollage, 24 x 18 cm. Staatsgalerie Stuttgart/Sohm Archives (inv. no. 1999/1095), Stuttgart, Germany. In *ROTH TIME,* ed. Theodora Vischer and Bernadette Walter, 115.

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Figure 2. 19 Nam June Paik and Charlotte Moorman perform at Lindarbær, Reykjavík, 1965. Photographer: Gestur Einarsson. Photograph published in *Fálkinn,* June 8, 1965, http://timarit.is/view_page_init.jsp?issId=295680&pageId=4384770&lang=is&q=Nam%20June%20Paik.

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Figure 2. 20 Nam June Paik and Charlotte Moorman perform at Lindarbær, Reykjavík, 1965. Photographer: Gestur Einarsson. Photograph published in *Fálkinn,* June 8, 1965, http://timarit.is/view_page_init.jsp?issId=295680&pageId=4384770&lang=is&q=Nam%20June%20Paik.

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Figure 2. 21 Nam June Paik and Charlotte Moorman perform at Lindarbær, Reykjavík, 1965. Photographer: Gestur Einarsson. Photograph published in *Fálkinn,* June 8, 1965, http://timarit.is/view_page_init.jsp?issId=295680&pageId=4384770&lang=is&q=Nam%20June%20Paik.

Figure removed due to copyright restrictions

Figure 2. 22 Nam June Paik and Charlotte Moorman perform at Lindarbær, Reykjavík, 1965. Photographer: Gestur Einarsson. Photograph published in *Fálkinn,* June 8, 1965, http://timarit.is/view_page_init.jsp?issId=295680&pageId=4384770&lang=is&q=Nam%20June%20Paik.

Figure removed due to copyright restrictions

Figure 2. 23 Nam June Paik and Charlotte Moorman perform at Lindarbær, Reykjavík, 1965. Photographer: Gestur Einarsson. Photograph published in *Fálkinn,* June 8, 1965, http://timarit.is/view_page_init.jsp?issId=295680&pageId=4384770&lang=is&q=Nam%20June%20Paik.

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Figure 2. 24 Nam June Paik and Charlotte Moorman perform at Lindarbær, Reykjavík, 1965. Photographer: Gestur Einarsson. Photograph published in *Fálkinn,* June 8, 1965, http://timarit.is/view_page_init.jsp?issId=295680&pageId=4384770&lang=is&q=Nam%20June%20Paik.

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Figure 2. 25 Nam June Paik and Charlotte Moorman perform at Lindarbær, Reykjavík, 1965. Photographer: Gestur Einarsson. Photograph published in *Fálkinn,* June 8, 1965, http://timarit.is/view_page_init.jsp?issId=295680&pageId=4384770&lang=is&q=Nam%20June%20Paik.

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Figure 2. 26 Dieter Roth, *Box for Picture Cultivation,* 1968, box, envelopes, chocolate, paper, and more. Photograph by Ragnar Kjartansson. In *Útisýningarnar á Skólavörðuholti 1967-1972,* ed. Inga S. Ragnarsdóttir and Kristín G. Guðnadóttir, 92.

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Figure 2. 27 Magnús Pálsson, *Kjóll* (*Dress*), 1968, cloth, plaster, paint. Photograph by Ragnar Kjartansson. In *Útisýningarnar á Skólavörðuholti 1967-1972,* ed. Inga S. Ragnarsdóttir and Kristín G. Guðnadóttir, 97.

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Figure 2. 28 Magnús Pálsson, *Bestu stykkin* (*The Best Pieces*), 1965, clothing, plaster, paint and glue, height: 145 cm. The Living Art Museum, Reykjavík, Iceland. In *Íslensk listasaga frá síðari hluta 19. aldar til upphafs 21. aldar,* vol. IV, ed. Ólafur Kvaran, 40.

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Figure 2. 29 Magnús Pálsson, *Pappírsást I* (*Paper Love I*), 1966, artist book, 29 x 55 cm. The National Gallery of Iceland, Reykjavík, Iceland. In *Íslensk listasaga frá síðari hluta 19. aldar til upphafs 21. aldar,* vol. IV, ed. Ólafur Kvaran, 39.

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Figure 2. 30 Magnús Pálsson, *Ferð* (*Journey*), 1966, wallpaper, ammonium print, various sizes. The Living Art Museum, Reykjavík, Iceland. In *Íslensk listasaga frá síðari hluta 19. aldar til upphafs 21. aldar,* vol. IV, ed. Ólafur Kvaran, 41.

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Figure 2. 31 Dieter Roth, *Lyktarorgel* (*Smell Organ*), 1965. Photographer unknown. The Living Art Museum, Reykjavík, Iceland.

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Figure 2. 32 Sigurður Guðmundsson, *Galti 69,* 1969, reproduced 1989, hay and sign, 140 x 150 cm. Private collection of the artist. In *Íslensk listasaga frá síðari hluta 19. aldar til upphafs 21. aldar,* vol. IV, ed. Ólafur Kvaran, 81.

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Figure 2. 33 Kristján Guðmundsson, *Vörðubrot* (*Ruined Cairn*), 1970, whole-wheat bread. From the outdoor sculpture exhibition at Skólavörðuholt at the Reykjavík Art Festival in July 1970. Photograph by Egill Sigurðsson. In *Íslensk listasaga frá síðari hluta 19. aldar til upphafs 21. aldar,* vol. IV, ed. Ólafur Kvaran, 64.

Figure removed due to copyright restrictions

Figure 2. 34 Þórður Ben Sveinsson, *Gúmmífrelsi* (*Rubber Freedom*), 1969, performance at Gallery SÚM. The National Gallery of Iceland, Reykjavík, Iceland. Photographer unknown. In *Íslensk listasaga frá síðari hluta 19. aldar til upphafs 21. aldar,* vol. IV, ed. Ólafur Kvaran, 73.

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Figure 2. 35 Kristján Guðmundsson, *Performables & Other Pieces,* 1970, artist book, multiple, 15.3 x 11.5 cm. Edition 4/30. The Living Art Museum (N-240), Reykjavík, Iceland.

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Figure 2. 36 Kristján Guðmundsson, *Performables & Other Pieces,* 1970, artist book, multiple, 15.3 x 11.5 cm. Edition 4/30. The Living Art Museum (N-240), Reykjavík, Iceland.

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Figure 2. 37 Kristján Guðmundsson, *Performables & Other Pieces,* 1970, artist book, multiple, 15.3 x 11.5 cm. Edition 4/30. The Living Art Museum (N-240), Reykjavík, Iceland.

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Figure 2. 38 Kristján Guðmundsson, *Performables & Other Pieces,* 1970, artist book, multiple, 15.3 x 11.5 cm. Edition 4/30. The Living Art Museum (N-240), Reykjavík, Iceland.

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Figure 2. 39 Kristján Guðmundsson, *Performables & Other Pieces,* 1970, artist book, multiple, 15.3 x 11.5 cm. Edition 4/30. The Living Art Museum (N-240), Reykjavík, Iceland.

Figure removed due to copyright restrictions

Figure 2. 40 Kristján Guðmundsson, *Performables & Other Pieces,* 1970, artist book, multiple, 15.3 x 11.5 cm. Edition 4/30. The Living Art Museum (N-240), Reykjavík, Iceland.

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Figure 2. 41 Kristján Guðmundsson, *Performables & Other Pieces,* 1970, artist book, multiple, 15.3 x 11.5 cm. Edition 4/30. The Living Art Museum (N-240), Reykjavík, Iceland.

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Figure 2. 42 Kristján Guðmundsson, *Performables & Other Pieces,* 1970, artist book, multiple, 15.3 x 11.5 cm. Edition 4/30. The Living Art Museum (N-240), Reykjavík, Iceland.

Figure removed due to copyright restrictions

Figure 2. 43 Kristján Guðmundsson, *Performables & Other Pieces,* 1970, artist book, multiple, 15.3 x 11.5 cm. Edition 4/30. The Living Art Museum (N-240), Reykjavík, Iceland.

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Figure 2. 44 Kristján Guðmundsson, *Performables & Other Pieces,* 1970, artist book, multiple, 15.3 x 11.5 cm. Edition 4/30. The Living Art Museum (N-240), Reykjavík, Iceland.

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Figure 2. 45 Kristján Guðmundsson, *Performables & Other Pieces,* 1970, artist book, multiple, 15.3 x 11.5 cm. Edition 4/30. The Living Art Museum (N-240), Reykjavík, Iceland.

Figure removed due to copyright restrictions

Figure 2. 46 Kristján Guðmundsson, *Performables & Other Pieces,* 1970, artist book, multiple, 15.3 x 11.5 cm. Edition 4/30. The Living Art Museum (N-240), Reykjavík, Iceland.

Figure removed due to copyright restrictions

Figure 2. 47 *SÚM III,* 1969, exhibition poster, 61 x 48 cm. The Living Art Museum (N-1448), Reykjavík, Iceland.

Figure removed due to copyright restrictions

Figure 2. 48 Jón Gunnar Árnason, *Cellophony,* 1972, multiple, performance, 10 x 4 cm.

The Living Art Museum (N-296), Reykjavík, Iceland.

Figure removed due to copyright restrictions

Figure 3. 1 Sigurður Guðmundsson, *Untitled (Ice-Philosophy*), 1971, six gelatin silver prints on fiber-based paper, carton, text, 62 x 34 cm (framed). Cultural Heritage Agency of the Netherlands, Amsterdam. On a long-term loan at the Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam, the Netherlands. In *Dancing Horizon,* ed. Kristín D. Jóhannesdóttir, 63.

Figure removed due to copyright restrictions

Figure 3. 2 *SÚM IV,* 1971, exhibition catalogue, 27.5 x 20.7 x 0.4 cm. Publisher: Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam. The Living Art Museum (N-3173), Reykjavík, Iceland.

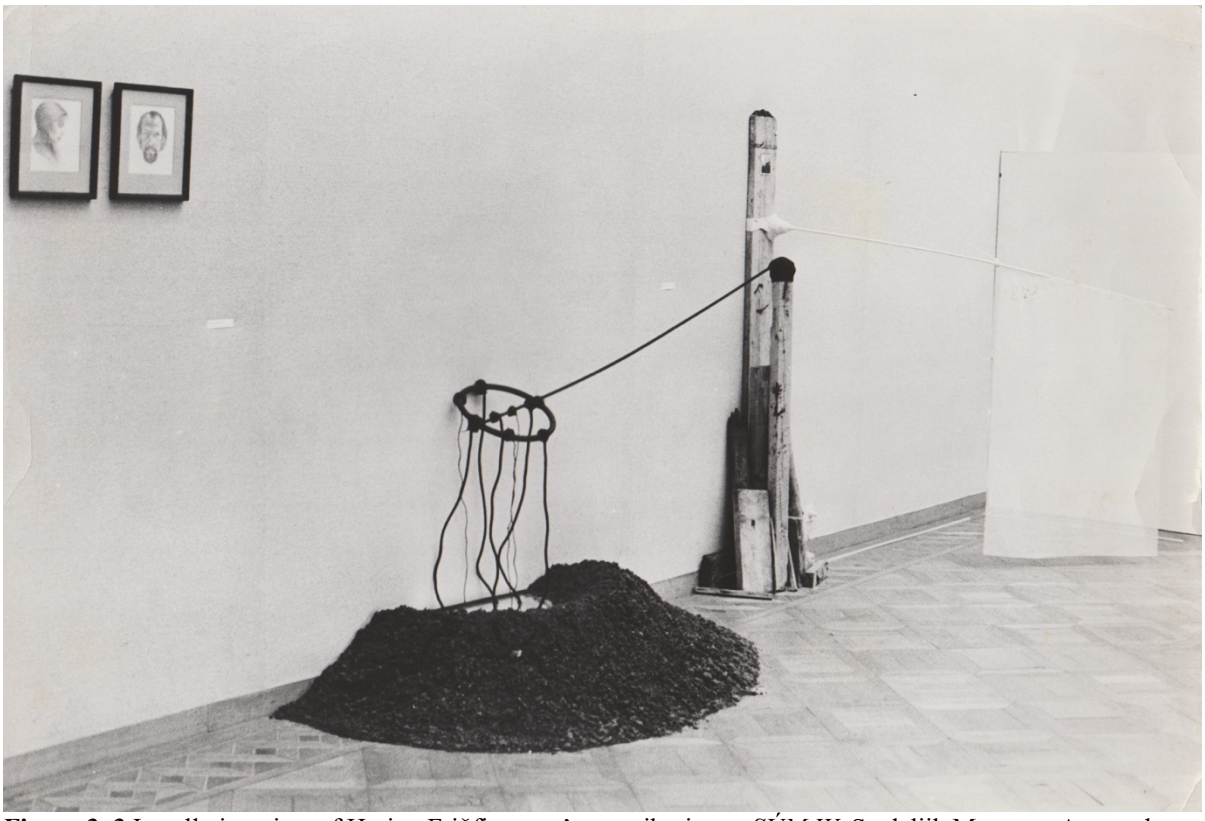

Figure 3. 3 Installation view of Hreinn Friðfinnsson's contribution at *SÚM IV,* Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam, 1971. Possibly shows Hreinn Friðfinnsson's *Landscape piece,* 1970-71. Photograph courtesy of the artist.

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Figure 3. 4 Sigurður Guðmundsson, *Realisatie* (*Realisation*), 1970-71, gelatin silver print on fiber-based paper, 128 x 90 cm. Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam, the Netherlands. In *Dancing Horizon,* ed. Kristín D. Jóhannesdóttir, 29.

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Figure 3. 5 Sigurður Guðmundsson, *Bækur-lækur* (*Books-brooks*), 1972, books, plywood, photograph, glass, 30.5 x 45 cm. The Living Art Museum, Reykjavík, Iceland.

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Figure 3. 6 Sigurður Guðmundsson, *Ljóð (Að elta folk og drekka mjólk*) (*Poem (Poem (Following people and drinking milk),* 1972, six gelatin silver prints on fiber-based paper, text, 32 x 24 cm (framed). Private collection. In *Dancing Horizon,* ed. Kristín D. Jóhannesdóttir, 69.

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Figure 3. 7 Sigurður Guðmundsson, *Pavement, street,* 1973, gelatin silver print on fiber-based paper, text, 52 x 60 cm (framed), 29 x 40 cm (image). Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam, the Netherlands. In *Dancing Horizon,* ed. Kristín D. Jóhannesdóttir, 77.

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Figure 3. 8 Sigurður Guðmundsson, *Earth, water,* 1974, gelatin silver print on fiber-based paper, text, 46 x 55 cm (framed), 25.5 x 37.5 cm (image). Edition of 5 (+1 AP). Various collections. In *Dancing Horizon,* ed. Kristín D. Jóhannesdóttir, 79.

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Figure 3. 9 Kristján Guðmundsson, *Punktar/Periods,* 1972, artist book, 18 x 14.9 x 0.15 cm. Publisher: Silver Press, Reykjavík/Amsterdam. The Living Art Museum (N-3079), Reykjavík, Iceland.

Figure removed due to copyright restrictions

Figure 3. 10 Kristján Guðmundsson, *Punktar/Periods,* 1972, artist book, 18 x 14.9 x 0.15 cm. Publisher: Silver Press, Reykjavík/Amsterdam. The Living Art Museum (N-3079), Reykjavík, Iceland.

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Figure 3. 11 Sigurður Guðmundsson, *Concentratie* (*Concentration*), 1971, gelatin silver print on fiber-based paper, 40 x 60 cm (framed), 23.4 x 35.5 cm (image). Edition of 3 (+2 AP). Various collections. In *Dancing Horizon,* ed. Kristín D. Jóhannesdóttir, 51.

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Figure 3. 12 Kristján Guðmundsson, *Circles,* 1974, arist book, 20.7 x 20.7 x 0.3 cm. Publisher: Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam. The Living Art Museum (N-3081), Reykjavík, Iceland.

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Figure 3. 13 Kristján Guðmundsson, *Málverk af eðlisþunga plánetunnar Jörð* (*Painting of the Earth's Specific Gravity*), 1972-73, acrylic paint on metal, 23.5 x 24.5 cm. Private collection. In-Out Center Archives, https://inoutcenterarchives.nl/artist/kristjan-gudmundsson/images/149

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Figure 3. 14 Kristján Guðmundsson, *6 x 7 Jafntíma línur* (*6 x 7 Equal-Time Lines*), 1974, ink on blotting paper, three units, 40 x 40 cm each. Reykjavík Art Museum, Reykjavík, Iceland. In *Íslensk listasaga frá síðari hluta 19. aldar til upphafs 21. aldar,* vol. IV, ed. Ólafur Kvaran, 175.

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Figure 3. 15 Hreinn Friðfinnsson, *A Place – Staður,* 1975, two photographs and text, 36 x 30 cm each. Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam, the Netherlands. In *Íslensk listasaga frá síðari hluta 19. aldar til upphafs 21. aldar,* vol. IV, ed. Ólafur Kvaran, 189.

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Figure 3. 16 Hreinn Friðfinnsson, *Síðar – After a While,* 1976, photograph and text, 29.5 x 30.6 cm each. Private collection. In *Íslensk listasaga frá síðari hluta 19. aldar til upphafs 21. aldar,* vol. IV, ed. Ólafur Kvaran, 189.

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Figure 3. 17 Hreinn Friðfinnsson, *Substances,* 1973, text, glass, 40 x 60 cm. In *Hreinn Friðfinnsson,* ed. Melissa Larner. London: Serpentine Gallery, 2007, 15, Exhibition catalogue.

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Figure 3. 18 Sigurður Guðmundsson, *A Project for the Wind, Drawing,* 1971, text on paper, 28 x 22 cm. Edition 1/2. Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam, the Netherlands. In *Dancing Horizon,* ed. Kristín D. Jóhannesdóttir, 35.

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Figure 3. 19 Sigurður Guðmundsson, *A Project for the Wind, Drawing,* 1971, gelatin silver print on fiber-based paper, 28 x 22 cm. Edition 1/2. Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam, the Netherlands. In *Dancing Horizon,* ed. Kristín D. Jóhannesdóttir, 35.

Figure removed due to copyright restrictions

Figure 3. 20 Sigurður Guðmundsson, *A Project for the Wind, Drawing,* 1971, gelatin silver print on fiber-based paper, 28 x 22 cm. Edition 1/2. Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam, the Netherlands. In *Dancing Horizon,* ed. Kristín D. Jóhannesdóttir, 35.

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Figure 3. 21 Sigurður Guðmundsson, *A Project for the Wind, Drawing,* 1971, gelatin silver print on fiber-based paper, 28 x 22 cm. Edition 1/2. Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam, the Netherlands. In *Dancing Horizon,* ed. Kristín D. Jóhannesdóttir, 35.

Figure removed due to copyright restrictions

Figure 3. 22 Sigurður Guðmundsson, *A Project for the Wind, Drawing,* 1971, gelatin silver print on fiber-based paper, 28 x 22 cm. Edition 1/2. Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam, the Netherlands. In *Dancing Horizon,* ed. Kristín D. Jóhannesdóttir, 35.

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Figure 3. 23 Sigurður Guðmundsson, *A Project for the Wind, Drawing,* 1971, gelatin silver print on fiber-based paper, 28 x 22 cm. Edition 1/2. Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam, the Netherlands. In *Dancing Horizon,* ed. Kristín D. Jóhannesdóttir, 35.

Figure removed due to copyright restrictions

Figure 3. 24 Sigurður Guðmundsson, *A Project for the Wind, Sculpture,* 1971, text on paper, 28 x 22 cm (framed). Edition 1/2. Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam, the Netherlands. In *Dancing Horizon,* ed. Kristín D. Jóhannesdóttir, 43.

Figure removed due to copyright restrictions

Figure 3. 25 Sigurður Guðmundsson, *A Project for the Wind, Sculpture,* 1971, gelatin print on fiber-based paper, 28 x 22 cm (framed). Edition 1/2. Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam, the Netherlands. In *Dancing Horizon,* ed. Kristín D. Jóhannesdóttir, 43.

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Figure 3. 26 Sigurður Guðmundsson, *A Project for the Wind, Sculpture,* 1971, gelatin print on fiber-based paper, 28 x 22 cm (framed). Edition 1/2. Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam, the Netherlands. In *Dancing Horizon,* ed. Kristín D. Jóhannesdóttir, 43.

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Figure 3. 27 Sigurður Guðmundsson, *A Project for the Wind, Sculpture,* 1971, gelatin print on fiber-based paper, 28 x 22 cm (framed). Edition 1/2. Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam, the Netherlands. In *Dancing Horizon,* ed. Kristín D. Jóhannesdóttir, 43.

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Figure 3. 28 Sigurður Guðmundsson, *A Project for the Wind, Sculpture,* 1971, gelatin print on fiber-based paper, 28 x 22 cm (framed). Edition 1/2. Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam, the Netherlands. In *Dancing Horizon,* ed. Kristín D. Jóhannesdóttir, 43

Figure removed due to copyright restrictions

Figure 3. 29 Sigurður Guðmundsson, *A Project for the Wind, Sculpture,* 1971, gelatin print on fiber-based paper, 28 x 22 cm (framed). Edition 1/2. Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam, the Netherlands. In *Dancing Horizon,* ed. Kristín D. Jóhannesdóttir, 43.

Figure removed due to copyright restrictions

Figure 3. 30 Hreinn Friðfinnsson, *Five Gates for the South Wind,* 1971-72, fourteen photographs and text, six photographs: 15.5 x 20.5 cm, eight photographs: 20.5 x 15.5 cm, one photograph: 20.5 x 20.5 cm. Centre Georges Pompidou, Musée National d'Art Moderne, Paris, France. In *Íslensk listasaga frá síðari hluta 19. aldar til upphafs 21. aldar,* vol. IV, ed. Ólafur Kvaran, 183.

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Figure 3. 31 Sigurður Guðmundsson, *Landscape,* 1977, gelatin silver print on fiber-based paper, 77 x 100 cm (framed). Cultural Heritage Agency of the Netherlands, Amsterdam, the Netherlands. In *Dancing Horizon,* ed. Kristín D. Jóhannesdóttir, 137.

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Figure 3. 32 Sigurður Guðmundsson, *Dancing Horizon,* 1977, chromogenic print, 65 x 80 cm (framed). Private collection. In *Dancing Horizon,* ed. Kristín D. Jóhannesdóttir, 131.

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Figure 4. 1 Hreinn Friðfinnsson, *Sacred and Enchanted Places,* 1972, photograph, text on paper, 52 x 72 cm. Claes Nordenhake. In *Hreinn Friðfinnsson,* ed. Melissa Larner, 57.

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Figure 4. 2 *Ísland úr NATO – Herinn burt* (*Iceland out of NATO – Out with the army*), 1973, exhibition poster, 16 x 42 cm. The Living Art Museum (N-1467), Reykjavík, Iceland.

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Figure 4. 3 Magnús Tómasson sitting by his work *Herinn sigursæli* (*The Victorious Army*), 1969, in an exhibition celebration Gallery SÚM's third birthday, in Gallery SÚM, February 1972. Photographer: rl. Photograph published in *Þjóðviljinn,* Feb. 19, 1972, http://timarit.is/view_page_init.jsp?issId=220393&pageId=2830630&lang=is&q=Magn%FAs.

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Figure 4. 4 Jón Gunnar Árnason, *Leikur fyrir tvo stjórnmálamenn, annan örvhentan, hinn rétthentan* (*Game for two politicians, one right-handed, the other left-handed*), 1972, steel, aluminum and rubber, 60 x 60 cm. Reykjavík Art Museum, Reykjavík, Iceland. In *Íslensk listasaga frá síðari hluta 19. aldar til upphafs 21. aldar,* vol. IV, ed. Ólafur Kvaran, 212.

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Figure 4. 5 Gylfi Gíslason, *Brúðkaup aldarinnar 30. Mars '49* (*Wedding of the Century March 30 '49*), 1972. Photographer unknown. Photograph published in *Þjóðviljinn,* Dec. 11, 1973, http://timarit.is/view_page_init.jsp?issId=221293&pageId=2844454&lang=is&q=Gylfi%20G%EDslason.

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Figure 4. 6 Hildur Hákonardóttir, *Desember 1972* (*December* 1972), 1972, textile, 112 x 87 cm. The Living Art Museum (N-586), Reykjavík, Iceland.

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Figure 4. 7 Jón Gunnar Árnason climbing Himmelbjerget (The Sky Mountain) in Denmark.

Photographs by Sveinn Kjarval. In *Hugarorka og sólstafir,* ed. Aðalsteinn Ingólfsson, 90.

Figure removed due to copyright restrictions

Figure 4. 8 Jón Gunnar Árnason, *Flateyjar-Freyr* (*Flatey Freyr*), 1973, wood and iron on stone, height: 177 cm. Photograph by Guðmundur P. Ólafsson. Private collection. In *Íslensk listasaga frá síðari hluta 19. aldar til upphafs 21. aldar,* vol. IV, ed. Ólafur Kvaran, 213.

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Figure 4. 9 Jón Gunnar Árnason, *Sól I: Að gera sólina bjartari* (*Sun I: Making the sun brighter*), 1974, text, photographs and maps on paper, 70 x 100 cm. The Living Art Museum, Reykjavík, Iceland.

Figure removed due to copyright restrictions

Figure 4. 10 Jón Gunnar Árnason, *Sól I: Að gera sólina bjartari* (*Sun I: Making the sun brighter*), 1974, text, photographs and maps on paper, 70 x 100 cm. The Living Art Museum, Reykjavík, Iceland.

Figure removed due to copyright restrictions

Figure 4. 11 Jón Gunnar Árnason, *Sól I: Að gera sólina bjartari* (*Sun I: Making the sun brighter*), 1974, text, photographs and maps on paper, 70 x 100 cm. The Living Art Museum, Reykjavík, Iceland.

Figure removed due to copyright restrictions

Figure 4. 12 Jón Gunnar Árnason, *Sól I: Að gera sólina bjartari* (*Sun I: Making the sun brighter*), 1974, text, photographs and maps on paper, 70 x 100 cm. The Living Art Museum, Reykjavík, Iceland.

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Figure 4. 13 Jón Gunnar Árnason, *Hjartað* (*The Heart*), 1968, iron, steel and electricity, 240 x 120 x 100 cm. The National Gallery of Iceland, Reykjavík, Iceland. In *Íslensk listasaga frá síðari hluta 19. aldar til upphafs 21. aldar,* vol. IV, ed. Ólafur Kvaran, 49.

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Figure 4. 14 Jón Gunnar Árnason, *Sólvagn* (*Sun Chariot*), 1978, chrome steel, 300 x 250 x 110 cm. The National Gallery of Iceland, Reykjavík, Iceland. In *Íslensk listasaga frá síðari hluta 19. aldar til upphafs 21. aldar,* vol. IV, ed. Ólafur Kvaran, 217.

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Figure 4. 15 Hreinn Friðfinnsson, *Dream,* 1973, framed text on paper, 20 x 20 cm. In *Hreinn Friðfinnsson,* ed. Melissa Larner, 14.

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Figure 4. 16 Installation view, showing Hreinn Friðfinnsson's *Munstur* (*Pattern*), exhibited at Gallery Suðurgata 7, 1977. Photographer unknown. Photograph published in *Þjóðviljinn,* August 14, 1977, http://timarit.is/view_page_init.jsp?issId=222006&pageId=2856577&lang=is&q=Hreinn%20Fri%F0finnsson%20Hreinn%20Fri%F0finnsson.

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Figure 4. 17 Rúrí (b. Þuríður Fannberg), *A Proposition to Change the Icelandic Costume to Meet with Modern Icelandic Society,* 1974, performance, Háskólabíó (University Cinema), Reykjavík, Iceland. Rúrí, http://ruri.is/2011/10/01/performances/.

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Figure 4. 18 Ragnar Kjartansson, *Scandinavian Pain,* 2006, performance, Momentum 4th Nordic Festival of Contemporary Art, Moss, Norway. August Luhring Gallery, Brooklyn, New York, https://www.luhringaugustine.com/artists/ragnar-kjartansson/artworks/performances2?view=slider#32.

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Figure 4. 19 Ragnar Kjartansson, still from *The End – Rocky Mountains,* 2009, five channel video, duration: 30 min. 30 sec. August Luhring Gallery, Brooklyn, New York, https://www.luhringaugustine.com/artists/ragnar-kjartansson/artworks/videos2?view=slider#23.

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Figure 4. 20 Steingrímur Eyfjörð, *Lóan er komin* (*The Golden Plover Has Arrived*), 2003, The Icelandic Pavillion, Palazzo Michiel dal Brusa', La Biennale de Venezia, Venice, Italy. Installation view of Steingrímur Eyfjörð's *The Sheep Pen,* 2007, mixed media, dimensions variable. Photographer: Spessi. The Center for Icelandic Art (Icel. Kynningarmiðstöð íslenskrar myndlistar), http://cia.icelandicartcenter.is/venice/images/Icelandic%20Pavilion%20view3.jpg.

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Figure 4. 21 Ólafur Elíasson, *The Weather Project,* 2003, monofrequency lights, projection foil, haze machines, mirror foil, aluminum, and scaffolding, 26.7 x 22.3 x 155.4 m. Installation in Turbine Hall, Tate Modern, London. Photograp by Studio Olafur Eliasson. Tate Modern, London, https://www.tate.org.uk/whats-on/tate-modern/exhibition/unilever-series/unilever-series-olafur-eliasson-weather-project-0.

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