stabilisation, through which cognitive systems represent and intervene in nature and themselves within it.

A coordinated assessment of the legacy of the French school of historical epistemology of science and its incarnation within current philosophical materialisms in relation to contemporary Anglo-Saxon structural realisms in the philosophy of science and mind would thus begin by interrogating how the operation of mathematical formalisation leads to divergent concepts of 'structure', through which ontological and epistemological theorisation construes the relation between subject and world. Seen in this broader context of philosophical questions and tasks, *Rationalist Empiricism* comprises an essential contribution to a living philosophical tradition, but is also an intervention that opens a path for unprecedented encounters between schools of thought that have for too long been kept isolated from each other as a result of obsolete disciplinary boundaries.

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Art's social forms

Louis Menand, *The Free World: Art and Thought in the Cold War* (Farrar, Straus and Giroux: New York, 2021). 857pp., £30.00 hb., 978 0 37415 845 3

During the past decade there has been an intensified debate in mainstream art criticism about the tension between art's freedom and free speech. In this debate art's freedom has been accused of being under severe threat by, on the one hand, cultural Marxists concerned with identity politics and social justice, and, on the other, by alt-right fascists' promoting a nationalistic art and culture. Both, it has been argued, threaten art's freedom. But what is meant by this concept here? Although art's freedom together with free speech is a given in liberal western democracies, how can this concept be understood? More specifically, is the freedom of art as pure and cleansed of all connections to a societal ground as its liberal defenders try to argue?

From the standpoint of western philosophy, art's freedom – or rather its autonomy – can be traced back, for example, to Friedrich Schiller's *Kallias Letters* (1793), written to his friend Gottfried Körner a few years after the French revolution. Here Schiller constructs an analogy between beauty – represented in art – and the autonomy of the free will as formulated in Immanuel Kant's moral writings, making beauty into 'freedom in appearance'. This idea that art gains autonomy through its form, which then becomes an image of freedom, continues throughout modernity in writers, thinkers and intellectual movements as different as *l'art pour l'art* and the Frankfurt School, Oscar Wilde and Theodor Adorno, including influential American art critics in the Cold War period like Clement Greenberg and Harold Rosenberg.

Another way of interrogating the idea of art's freedom is to focus on the country that has been more than any other historically connected to the idea of freedom, and on a period in its history when this was particularly the case: the USA in the time of the 'free world'. The latter is a term mainly associated with 'The Truman Doctrine', derived from a speech by the then president, Harry Truman, in the spring of 1947, which is often regarded as announced the beginning of the Cold War. The speech is partly reprinted in Louis Menand's latest book, *The Free World: Art and Thought in the Cold War*. Truman famously characterises liberal democracy as a way of life distinguished by 'free institutions, representative government, free elections, guarantees of individual liberty, freedom of speech and religion, and freedom from political repression', in contrast to the way of life of the totalitarian state that 'relies upon terror and oppression, a controlled press and radio, fixed elections, and the suppression of personal freedoms'. The task that Menand sets himself is to investigate the art, culture and thought that was produced in this geopolitically tense historical moment. It's a huge object of study so it is no surprise that the book spans 800 pages. But it has a sharply defined timeframe and geographical location: from the introduction of Truman's doctrine to the end of the Soviet Union in 1991, all viewed from the standpoint of the USA. Despite this scale, most examples in the book cover the 1950s to

the 1970s, which is also reflected in that it opens with a chapter on the end of the Second World War and ends with a chapter on the final days of the Vietnam War.

Written in 18 poetically titled chapters – 'Object of Power', 'The Free Play of the Mind', 'Northern Songs' and so on – the book digs into art practices, intellectual movements and cultural phenomena such as Action Painting, New Criticism, the Civil Rights Movement and underground paperback publishing. Although North American phenomena – and this is one of Menand's main points about art and thought in the free world – these ideas and thoughts are transatlantic in nature, mostly because of the way the Second World War ended, and therefore must include France, England and their colonies and former colonies. The title of each chapter effectively functions as an aphorism that Menand unfolds or argues for through a method explained in the preface as containing three parts: firstly, 'the underlying social forces – economic, geopolitical, demographic, technological' of a period, secondly, 'what was happening "on the street", how X ran into Y', and thirdly, 'what was going on in people's heads'. The result of this rather classically chosen method is that most chapters begin with well-chosen statistics on, for example, the number of students enrolled at a university within a certain decade, the number of technological apparatuses a middleclass family owned in the USA in 1955, how many countries were colonies and how many were liberating themselves, and then moves on to specific individuals (primarily men), such as John Cage, James Baldwin, Jean-Paul Sartre, Andy Warhol and George Orwell to name only a handful of those whose lives are unfolded in minute detail in the book.

The chapters are not structured chronologically or thematically. Rather each says something specific – sometimes contradictory to other chapters – about art and thought in this period. Menand, a staff writer at the *New Yorker*, lets the Chekhovian and creative writing class slogan, 'show, don't tell', lead him. The consequence is an almost novelistic book in which the reader sees Baldwin walking the streets of his childhood in Harlem and, later in life, hears him speak as a renowned writer to fellow writer as well as woman abuser Norman Mailer in a café in Paris in the mid 1950s. Menand makes the reader feel the smell of Jackson Pollock's paint, follow the thoughts of Claude Lévi-Strauss on the boat to New York and experience the fraught love affair between Isaiah Berlin and the Soviet censored poet Anna Akhmatova as if standing in the doorway.

Menand's method is standard in the journalistic reportage and mainstream biographical story telling. It ascribes to a logic that the parts make up a whole. As such it stands in contrast to the method propagated by Karl Marx in his critique of political economy, or to Walter Benjamin's thesis on art criticism in romanticism, as well as to Max Horkheimer's idea of critical theory, in which the entry point of a study is the concept, or as Marx famously puts it, a method in which one goes from the 'abstract' to the 'concrete', where the concrete is not the given but the determination of the abstract. Menand is not a Marxist or a critical theorist, so it is not surprising that he does the opposite, at least at the level of each chapter, where biographical details, colour of clothes and other minute details are pushed to the forefront to tell something. But at the level of the composition of the entire book, Menand structures the chapters in a way which creates something similar to the procedure of going from the abstract to the concrete. This makes the book more worth reading. 'Empty Sky', 'Northern Songs' and 'Vers La Libération' are, on the one hand, intimate stories about

George Kennan, the diplomat behind The Truman Doctrine, the Beatles' arty and cheeky interviews and the articles by Betty Friedan that led up to the second wave feminist movement in the USA in the mid 1950s; on the other hand, these chapters are also titles or aphorisms that together make out a more abstract and often conflicted idea of the concept of art's and thought's freedom in the Cold War. Since people, rather than themes, move in and out of different chapters, and in that way connect them – Jasper Johns, for example, appears in one chapter in relation to Cage and Cunningham, and turns up in another on Warhol and pop art simply because he attended the latter's well-known parties – the book also constructs a coherent and meaningful narrative between individuals and events that would not necessarily have been thought together before. Menand also says he wrote the book to understand his childhood and early adulthood. Not dissimilar to how an analysand creates a narrative of their childhood in the psychoanalytic session, here it is the historian of ideas, Louis Menand himself, who lies on the couch and reconstructs the years of his early life. The question is: are the reconstructions true?

Apart from the essayistic composition of the chapters, the strength of Menand's method of showing rather than telling, as well as his bricolage composition of chapters, is the surprising but illuminating way in which he often brings together two ideas or lines of thought. For example, in the chapter 'The Human Science', he places Lévi-Strauss' concept of culture as structure – and in effect Structuralism as a new discipline in the USA concerned with how things get their meaning and function in a system of signification – next to the major internationally touring exhibition *The Family of Man*, curated by MOMA's director Edward Steichen in 1955. *The Family of Man* was curated like a photo-essay with all kinds of photos and techniques placed non-hierarchically next to one another, not dissimilar to how signification in Lévi-Strauss' structure takes place via function and place. '*The Family of Man* was sometimes edited according to the venue. […] But the overall design required balance, and the fact that, apart from country and photographer, there was no identifying information about the pictures depoliticized most of the images. Every image was generic – which, of course, was the point.' In other chapters Menand simply juxtaposes two persons or phenomena next to one another to make a point. Some of these have been brought together before. In 'Emancipating Dissonance' Menand, like uncountable art historians before him, situates John Cage, Merce Cunningham and Robert Rauschenberg next to one another to say something about a specific atonal method in composition, painting and choreography making. In 'Commonism' he puts the analytical philosopher of art Arthur C. Danto next to Andy Warhol. Other combinations are more unusual, like when he opens one chapter with John F. Kennedy's speech on freedom after the Berlin Wall had fallen and continues without much comment to Isaiah Berlin's two concepts of liberty, before then tying these ideas of freedom together with new printing technologies, such as the soft back book and its utilisation by underground publishers of erotic books. Each phenomenon in Menand's book has been written about on its own before, but by simply situating them next to one another, without much comment or explanation, Menand manages to say something new about how he understands the idea of freedom in this period.

But what is this concept of art's, culture's and thought's freedom? Whereas speeches by politicians like Truman or Kennedy are in the book, as well accounts of the main philosophical concepts in the liberal tradition on freedom, such as Berlin's *Two Concepts of Liberty* from 1958 alongside Sartre's and other post-war conceptions of freedom, Menand's concept of art and culture's freedom is to be found elsewhere. Firstly and primarily, the idea of freedom Menand writes about appears in the many artistic and philosophical methods or procedures shown in the book. In chapter after chapter Menand unfolds, in a clear prose, artistic and philosophical thoughts and procedures of the artists and thinkers he writes about. From Franz Fanon's distinct ideas of freedom's relationship to culture and domination in his 1956 article, 'Racism and Culture' – 'As long as one group is subaltern, no genuine culture can be produced.' – to Cage's transformation of Stockhausen's 'serial composition' and Rauschenberg's and Johns' 'figural art that was anti-illusionistic'. From the scattered and fast-forward pace of Beat literature to the elitist yet universal addressee of the writings of Susan Sontag. Or George Orwell's socialist concrete style of writing as a critique of managerial capitalism: 'Orwell made jargon, formula, elision, obfuscation, and cliché the enemies of liberty and democracy and the symptoms of creeping totalitarianism.' Seen from this angle, freedom

for Menand is to be found in the making of new forms, compositions, procedures, methods and choreographies. In other words, his is an understanding of freedom as closely related to *form* as that encountered in both Schiller's and Adorno's writings on art.

Secondly, Menand's understanding of freedom is to be found in the infrastructures or ecological systems of art and culture: the material and institutional conditions needed for paintings to be shown, novels to be read and philosophers to be published. Menand draws a picture in which the university (from its meritocratic system in the 1950s to its managerial transformation from the 1970s onwards), independent journals and publishers, specific visas and exchange programmes for emigrants in the post-war years, as well as a flourishing art market and cheap housing, were conditions for the emergence and development of the artistic, cultural and philosophical methods accounted for in the book. As such Menand's concept of freedom is relative, far from *l'art pour l'art*.

The main way in which Menand's study differs from others of this period, apart from its non-academic way of presenting research, is that it invites contradictions and tensions in the people, movements and thoughts that are scrutinised. New Criticism's method of close reading, with proponents like Cleanth Brooks and T.S. Eliot, was not separated from society as they liked to think, but conditioned by a racist and non-democratic southern American ideology: 'In short, American New Criticism was founded by writers associated with a reactionary political and religious program, and under the aegis of a poet and critic, Eliot, who believed that modern society was, in his words, "worm-eaten with Liberalism".' Following Benjamin Piekut and other art historians, Menand also shows how Cage, whose musical scores were open for interpretation by anyone according to his anarchist ideals, nevertheless despised the versions of them by Charlotte Moorman and Nam June Paik.

Despite his attention to such tensions and contradictions, Menand tends to idealise the culture of this youth, which is understandable considering the post-liberal times in the USA in which it was written. Menand writes about the differences between, for example, Aime Césaire's idea of freedom and Baldwin's or Arendt's or Orwell's understanding of totalitarianism, but writing about less canonised artists and thinkers would have brought the antagonisms more to the surface. How can, for example, Angela Davis' and the Black Panther's critique of prisons, Herbert Marcuse's understanding of freedom and sexual liberty, and Yvonne Rainer's transformation of Cage's score be excluded from a book on art, culture and thought in the Cold War? Although Menand brings up how the USA publishing system censored books due to explicit sexual content, he downplays this in favour of the big formalist experiments of the time. This emphasis on the 'good' stuff makes the book melancholic, romantic and untruthful at times. I think that this also has to do with the form and method that Menand employs. His juxtapositions or montages want to please or reconcile, unlike Benjamin who also deployed montage as a way of radically showing rather than telling.

The main problem with the book is, however, the almost completely neglected aspect of capitalism's transformation during this period, how this change is related to the decolonisation and liberation movements taking place in parallel, and how they conditioned the understandings of freedom that can be found, for example, in Friedrich von Hayek's Darwinist writings. As Quinn Slobodian among others have demonstrated, the Cold War years cannot be understood without seeing the emergence of supranational and partly undemocratic institutions like the IMF and the World Bank in parallel to the process of decolonialisation. By not taking these into account, it as if Menand, from his divan, doesn't go deep enough into his childhood, into the darker conditions of the 'free world' that also paved the way for the emergence of a neo-liberal undemocratic world order. To understand the state of art's autonomy and freedom after 1991, the rise of fascism as well as the social justice movements of the past decades, these larger transformations of capitalism's structure and institutions need to be taken into account.

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