

## Chapter 2

# Revolutions—Forms That Turn

**Abstract** This chapter focuses on the sixteenth Biennale of Sydney titled *Revolutions – Forms that Turn* as a unique biennale that incorporated modern and contemporary kinetic artworks in order to reflect on time, revolution and movement in modern, postmodern and contemporary art. Consequently the biennale is useful for considering the changing conceptualisations of movement, temporality and contemporaneity. I argue that the curation of the biennale is emblematic of the peculiar relationship to time in contemporary art; a present that unfolds in time, while also accumulating and preserving the past within it, to which the role of actual movement in *Revolutions – Forms that Turn* were critical in forming.

Today biennales are the centre stage for contemporary art in the Artworld. Not only do they showcase and discuss the nature of our contemporaneity, but they also differ from the modern world fairs and biennales, because they explicitly project multiple fractured histories and identities. The desire to overturn previous political and theoretical structures is central to the discussions around contemporary biennales. For instance, when asked ‘what makes a biennial?’ world-renowned curator Rosa Martinez answered that ‘The idea biennial is a profoundly political and spiritual event. It contemplates the present with the desire to transform it’, and is indicative of a larger social, political and economic flows within contemporary society (Stallabrass 2003, p. 34). We might even say that biennales are perceived as trendsetters, or predictors of intercultural flows that focus on the political nature of art in a global setting.

Considering this perception, the sixteenth Biennale of Sydney *Revolutions—Forms that Turn* was an unusual biennale at the time. Rather than focusing solely on contemporary artists the biennale presented modern, postmodern and contemporary artists alongside one another in order to reflect on the themes: time, revolution, and formal and political movement in art in the past century. It is no surprise then that the biennale was criticised by some for reflecting more on art history, than contemporary art (Desmond 2008, p. 5).

Despite this criticism, another unique aspect to the biennale was the incorporation of kinetic sculpture throughout the exhibition spaces. Viewers were

confronted with mechanical sculptures that stuttered in loops, rotating spikes, swaying mobiles, and swung fans across a ceiling. The biennale also coincided with a number of exhibitions in the last few years that focused on actual movement in art in western art history elsewhere in the world. Many of these exhibitions celebrated the presence and influence of kinetic sculpture in art history and contemporary society. For example, *Moving Parts: Forms of the Kinetic* (2004) at the Graz Kunsthaus focused on mechanical movement in art that has ‘come to appear as an everyday normality to us’ (Magnaguagno 2005, p. 9); at the New Museum in New York *Ghosts in the Machine* presented kinetic sculpture as a ‘prehistory to the digital age’; *Force Fields, Phases of the Kinetic* (2000) at the Hayward Gallery was ‘an investigation of movement in art’ to remind audiences of the presence of mechanical movement in sculpture prior to the digital age (Nash 2000, p. 313).

As mentioned in the introduction of this book, kinetic sculpture is often remembered as an antiquated exploration of movement in sculpture, and conjures associations of being a ‘cabinet of curiosities’ dug up from a forgotten age. Therefore Christov-Bakargiev’s decision to highlight the importance of kineticism in western art history during the Sydney biennale invites questions around how and why kinetic sculpture says something about contemporary art and society, and might be re-remembered by audiences. In the biennale kinetic sculpture was not regarded as an obsolete, mechanical and unrequited practice, as others have (Weibel 2007, pp. 21–41), but instead was considered as integral to our regard for form, movement, and time in the mechanical and digital ages.

What might be one of the reasons for Christov-Bakargiev’s curatorial decision? Rather than solely focusing on new and emerging artists Christov-Bakargiev presented audiences with reflections of the past in order to better understand the present. In effect *Revolutions—Forms that Turn* sensationalised elements of modern avant-garde art within a contemporary context and reimagined kinetic sculpture as a signifier for reflecting on time, movement, form and revolution. Consequently the biennale now helps us to think about how kinetic sculpture has been framed by art history in the past, and how these analyses have changes over time.

*Revolutions—Forms that Turn* indicates some of the changing roles, functions and effects of exhibiting modern kinetic art in contemporary exhibitions. That is, rather than an obscure and obsolete avant-garde tendency, the curation of this biennale is useful for considering contemporary and historical kinetic art as a resource for contemplating the changing conceptualisation of movement, temporality and contemporaneity. The biennale is also valuable for tackling the assumption that kinetic sculpture is a key precursor to contemporary digital art. This idea is most prominently suggested by Frank Popper on multiple occasions including most strongly in *From Technological to Virtual Art* and *Origins and Developments in Kinetic Art*.

*Revolutions—Forms that Turn* is one of many large-scale international exhibitions that have drawn from avant-garde kinetic art in order to reflect on contemporary art theory and history in relation to perceptions of movement and temporality. Reflecting on the relevance of avant-garde kinetic sculpture in contemporary society, this chapter uses the biennale as an example for considering

various facets of kinetic art history from a contemporary perspective that conflict with past interpretations of the artistic practice. If, as I argue in this book, kinetic art helps us to think about the changing conceptions of temporality, over time, *Revolutions—Forms that Turn* is also valuable for opening new questions concerned with the role and effects of historical and contemporary movement art.

## 2.1 Revolving, Rotating, Mirroring

The title of the biennale, *Revolutions—Forms that Turn* resonates with what Marshall Berman has described in *All That is Solid Melts into Air: The Experience of Modernity* that there is a natural affinity between modernity and revolution, because modernity depends on technological and political progress conquering its ancestors. Berman reminds us that the term ‘modern’ depends on conquering the old, and associates all change with human advancement. In Berman’s words: ‘what is modern is newer than what it succeeds: what is revolutionary is more advanced than what it overthrows—“tradition” in one case, “reaction” in the other’ [47].

*Revolutions—Forms that Turn* echoed a similar regard for tradition, reaction, and revolution in modernity. The exhibition drew from historical canons of art in order to engage with the elements of contemporary art and society in a self-reflexive manner. Avant-garde artists were presented alongside contemporary counterparts to identify that change, revolution, innovation, and progression have been long standing central themes in society since modernity. The artistic director, Christov-Bakargiev presented both historical and contemporary works as part of a continued social impulse of revolt. As Christov-Bakargiev explained:

**What is the theme of the Biennale?** The impulse to revolt. Revolving, rotating, mirroring, repeating, reversing, turning upside down or inside out, changing perspectives. Such literal and formal devices are charted for their broader aesthetic, psychological, radical and political perspectives. This project explores the relationship and distance between ‘revolutionary art’ and ‘art for the revolution’, the space between form, on the one hand, and the role of art in society on the other (2008, p. 30).

Christov-Bakargiev showed a clear intention for the biennale to be an event for reflection, critique, and new interpretation of the contemporary world. The theme and statement nurture reflections and inquisitions into how the meaning and expression of political revolution has been a key characteristic in art in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Consequently *Revolutions—Forms that Turn* also focused on broad themes that have often been associated with modernism such as temporality, newness, mechanical reproduction, revolution and the avant-garde.

While a number of art historians, critics, and scholars have argued that contemporary art and society has moved beyond modern and postmodern approaches, others such as art historian Terry Smith have taken a less linear approach. In *What is Contemporary Art?* Smith identified that contemporary art has a number of coalescing trends, one of which focused on continuing issues and debates that have

persisted since modernity. For Smith this is a tendency that tries to ‘cleave new art to the old modernist impulses and imperatives, and renovate them’ (2009, p. 7). Direct examples of these trends at play includes art institutions such as the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA), which explicitly focuses on presenting modern art to contemporary audiences as a way to informing audiences on the heritage of contemporary art and society.

Similarly *Revolutions—Forms that Turn* emphasised the importance of the works by modern artists into a contemporary exhibition space to remind audiences of an art historical lineage that moves from modern to contemporary art. In effect, one might argue, as Christov-Bakargiev did, that the exhibition was simultaneously modern and contemporary. Such a curatorial decision might not seem so groundbreaking or surprising, considering other institutions like MoMA, Dia Art Foundation, the Tate Gallery also function in a similar way. However, unlike museums and major art institutions, biennales are not traditionally known for educating audiences about art history. Rather, as mentioned earlier, biennales today are geared towards to examining and debating issues laden in present art and society today.

Therefore the focus on the past transforming the present is what sets *Revolutions—Forms that Turn* apart from other biennales in recent years. The number of modern avant-garde artworks that were featured dominated over the presence of contemporary artists. Among the modern avant-garde works there was a concentration on early modern Constructivist, Dadaist, and Futurist artists, which included key art historical works from the early twentieth century that represented the machine aesthetic within modern art and modern mechanical movement. These included the ‘Futurist Manifesto’ by Filippo Tommaso, Marcel Duchamp’s *Bicycle Wheel* (1920); his collaboration with Man Ray, *Rotary Glass Plates, Precision Optics* (1920), mobiles by Russian Constructivist Alexander Rodchenko such as *Hanging Spatial Construction* Nos. 9–13 (1921–21), and Alexander Calder’s hanging kinetic mobiles *Hanging Spider* (1940) and *Roxbury Flurry* (1946). Already recognised as experimenters of social and political change through their art, these artists were presented in the biennale as reminders of the ancestral lines of avant-garde works that constitute contemporary art history (Engberg).

Also at the biennale were many artworks that were created in the decades shortly after WWII and responded to the technological and social issues at the time. These earlier artists were joined with central avant-garde figures from the 1960s to the 1980s, and were projected by the biennale as works through which to consider the previous approached to revolution, change, repetition and re-enactment in relation to the other artists (Christov-Bakargiev 2008, pp. 30–31). This includes John Cage’s durational work *4’33”* (1952/2004), Guy Debord’s film *Le Société du Spectacle* (1973), documentary material of Chris Burden’s performance *Shoot* (1971), Carolee Schneeman’s *Meat Joy* (1964), Valie Export’s *Touch Cinema* (1968), and Gordon Matta-Clark’s film, *Program Eight: Office Baroque* (1977/2005). These works contributed to a landscape of late-modern art during a period when the role of the avant-garde becoming an artistic tradition of its own, while also attempting to challenge traditional modes of representation in art.

Within the exhibition historical and contemporary kinetic sculpture played an integral role in implementing discussions about the modes and methods of how art history is framed, changing perceptions of time and technological aesthetics. Many reviews of the show also specifically commented on the presence of kinetic sculpture throughout the event (Clement). This is another reason why there was a stronger presence of historical works than those by contemporary artists in the biennale.

In *Revolutions—Forms that Turn* historical and contemporary kinetic sculpture played an integral role in implementing discussions about the modes and methods of art history, changing perceptions of time and technological aesthetics. This curatorial decision reinserts kinetic sculpture into a larger framework of Western art history and disassociates the practice as an unrequited and forgotten phase of modern art. Consequently the exhibition itself stands as a reconstruction of art history, within which kinesis is used as a tool for social and political revolution, as well as the revolution of aesthetic form, and this has continued in art throughout capitalist society.

## 2.2 Cum-Tempore (with Time)

The incorporation of kinetic sculpture in the biennale helped to convey the central curatorial themes that Christov-Bakargiev wanted to communicate and use to spark discussion: movement, revolution and repetition. Many of the sculptures were formal expressions of these themes, but laden in them were also tones of expression around political movement, revolution and the idea that history repeats itself. These themes encouraged questions such as ‘what does revolution look like today?’, ‘what has changed in society over time?’ and ‘will we make the same mistakes as our ancestors?’. Reflecting on history, political revolution and movement in the machine age meant that time, reflection, memory and temporality were central to the biennale, and audiences were encouraged to think about the changing attitudes of time, over time.

Each culture internalises its own peculiar concept and approach to time, and it has been suggested that western society has done so according to each technological age. For instance, modernity has often been characterised by the movement of mechanical acceleration, and time that moves in a linear fashion with the future moving through the present and into the past; While postmodernity enabled people to explore the instantaneity of digital technologies, and multi-linear time codes.

Similar trends in western art history have also prevailed, especially when considering artists who use mechanical and digital machines in their practices. When thinking about contemporary conceptualisations of time in art, Terry Smith provides a useful perspective that deals with the multiplicity of technologies and cultural flows that prevail today. In *What is Contemporary Art?* Smith describes the current approach to time as:

characterised more by the insistent presentness of multiple, often incompatible temporalities accompanied by the failure of all candidates that seek to provide *the* overriding temporal framework – be it modern, historical, spiritual, evolutionary, geological, scientific, globalizing, planetary...Everything about time these days – and therefore about place, subjectivity, and sociality – is at once intensely *here*, is slipping, or has become artifactual (p. 196).

Smith paints a complex relationship to time which is elusive, ‘slipping’ away, and containing a multiplicity of time codes (p. 196), which is indicative of the contemporary information age where we are privy to many kinds of competing and conflicting knowledge systems and notions of time.

Smith also gives opportunity to thinking about a multiplicity of time codes that reside in the present. It is precisely this multiplicity that characterises our relation to being in time in contemporary society. Similarly, rather than thinking about time in a linear fashion where the future draws into the present and become the past, the biennale encouraged audiences to consider the present temporality as a reserve of multiple time codes within it. As such contemporary art is not necessarily associated with newness, progression, being present, or up to date. Christov-Bakargiev is interested in the present being more than a singular ‘now’, but which gathers folds of the past within it. As Christov-Bakargiev explains: ‘everything that exists in the world is of my time, whether it is an old 1950s Bakelite telephone, or an artwork made two years ago or today’ (p. 33): we gather memories of the past into the present in order to inform, reflect and understand identity in contemporary society. Consequently this idea lends us to think that contemporary society is defined by what it remembers, because the past is continually reframed in time by contemporary perceptions and interpretations: the present unfolds in time, and does so by drawing on the past within it.

Christov-Bakargiev’s interest in how we might fold the past within the present resonates with Michel Serres’ approach to contemporaneity. Serres uses the example of a late-model car as an accumulation of inventions from the past as an analogy for defining ‘contemporary’ (p. 45). The wheel, motor and every other component were all separately invented in different eras, and these have come together with the invention of the car. In effect, the car is an accumulation of past milestones. While the contemporary contains the past, the only true indication that the car has been made in contemporary time is the assemblage of any additional inventions, its design, advertising, consumption and ideology.

Unlike Smith and Christov-Bakargiev, Serres does not privilege the contemporary but rather eradicates distinctions between the historical and the contemporary. He projects an absolute ‘indifferen[ce] to temporal distances’, where everything is at once contemporary *and* historical (Serres 1995, p. 45). While Christov-Bakargiev might not reach as far as Serres’ collapse of temporal distinctions, both regard the present as a force that folds the historical within it. The difference between Serres with Smith and Christov-Bakargiev is that the latter still

focus on present relationships with time, and therefore privilege the contemporary. This implies that constructions of art history today, according to Christov-Bakargiev, are constituted as contemporary, but not necessarily vice versa.

### 2.3 Avant-Garde Kinetic Artworks at the Biennale

Key players in the history of kinetic art were a key feature in executing the ideas of the biennale. Many of these artists were concerned with the movement of mechanical sculpture in order to think about the futility of industrial labour, and explore the performative possibilities of sculpture. These included Jean Tinguely's *Bascule no. 1: Sisyphus* (1965) and *Méta Malevich* (1954) and remnants of *Homage to New York* (1960), the latter of which were salvaged after a performance where Tinguely assembled scrap metal and goods including a piano, bicycle wheel, canisters of paint installed in the sculpture garden of MoMA before it played out its destruction: an explosion of waste to critique excess, consumption and commodification in capitalist societies. While *Homage to New York* might be regarded as a kinetic performance rather than a kinetic sculpture, the artwork resonates with Tinguely's *Bascule no. 1: Sisyphus*, and *Méta Malevich*—both mechanical sculptures doing what machines should not do in a utilitarian society: move without producing.

Len Lye's *Storm King* (1964) and *Ribbon Snake* (1965/2008 a reconstruction was created specifically for the biennale), continued discussions around mechanical reproduction. Both kinetic sculptures repeatedly move in rotations at regular intervals but also create irregular shapes, and sounds. Like Tinguely, Lye's machines were nonsensical, unproductive (in the utilitarian sense) and repetitive forces of movement. Lye used kineticism to explore the effects of movement as an organic force, even which mechanical materials could obtain.

David Medalla's *Cloud Canyons* (1967/1985) include a jet of soapy foam building up through a series of cylinders and projecting outwards through each tube. Despite being a mechanical sculpture the form of the foam is repetitive, yet unpredictable; constantly changing and yet unrepeatable in order to rupture the utilitarian association with mechanical works.

These artists have frequently been commended for their experimental techniques with mechanical form as well as social and political ideology. The decision to disperse contemporary artworks among a predominantly historical exhibition alludes to contemporary art as a continuation of modernism, or what Terry Smith would term as 'remodernism'. *Revolutions—Forms that Turn* reifies that the contemporary artworks signify a cyclical return to artistic experimentation, political antagonism, and dissolving traditional modes of representation. Additionally, this curatorial composition infers that form and aesthetic move in cycles; that post-modernity is historically read as a part of the greater cycles of art, and modernity as an ideology that is ongoing, even endless.

Among the contemporary artists that featured in the biennale, mechanical movement was also a regular feature. This included Olafur Eliasson's *Light Ventilator Mobile* (2002) and Rebecca Horn's *Cutting Through the Past*, both of which I will focus on in the following section; Michael Snow's *De La* (1969–1972), a rotating sculpture fitted with surveillance cameras, monitors, and controls that stalk viewers and project their movements on a screen without delay. Also exhibited was a reconstruction of Vladimir Tatlin's *Monument to Third International* (1919) entitled, *White Man Got No Dreaming* (2008) by Michael Rakowitz constructed with scrap material from what was the Pemulwuy Aboriginal Housing redevelopment plan for Redfern in Sydney. The works aptly echoed the biennale's themes around revolution, rupturing tradition, and resistance.

Exhibited alongside Calder's black-and-white hanging mobiles was Eliasson's *Light Ventilator Mobile*: a hanging, rotating mobile that balances the weight of a domestic fan on one end of a rod, and hanging down with its electrical chord on the other end is a spotlight shining onto the walls of the space. The motorised mobile rotates rapidly, while the dangling fan swings unpredictably at eye level, and the shine of the circling light attached at the opposite end of the mobile catches and briefly blinds the viewers. This work is dizzying, and tests the threshold between chaos and predictable circular action. Rather than conjuring political engagement like Snow and Rakowitz, *Light Ventilator Mobile* provides a more formal exploration of movement, chaos and predictability. There is a sense of displaced movement between the erratic motion of the fan and the comparatively smooth yet unpredictable glide of the light beam because a single horizontal rod connects them. Additionally, the movement of the viewer is restricted by the performance of the mobile. The rotation of the mobile casts a territorial circumference within the exhibition space, which viewers are not usually inclined to enter because of the peril of the swinging fan. The speed of the light beam extends the space occupied by the sculpture, casting outwards, rather than inwards, encouraging viewers to further step further back, and watch the light tracking the walls around it.

Eliasson is well known as a contemporary artist concerned with the phenomenological relations between the viewer and object and the act of perceiving as an uneven and, at times, waning and swelling subjective experience where one is 'seeing yourself seeing' (Lee 2007, 'Your Light and Space', pp. 33–35). When considering temporality Eliasson describes history as 'not external and objectified in a situation but... inside the spectator' (Eliasson in Morgan 16), as a constant reconstruction that is borne by each viewer and their experience. After the biennale, Eliasson also produced a number of works that expressed his curiosity with orchestrating temporality through kinetic lumina, sculpture, and installation, and exhibited them in the Museum of Contemporary Art in Sydney, a main venue for the Sydney Biennale. His exhibition *Take Your Time* focused on the subjective perceptions of and within the present temporality. He suggested that '[t]he sense of time that I work with is the idea of a "now".... There is only a "now".... our belief in time is just a construct' (quoted in Alle 2000, p. 30). Like many artists who have used actual movement to express time before him, Eliasson expresses sensitivity towards the effect of the temporal present kinetic movement on his audiences. He



aims for his works to let viewers ‘see themselves seeing’ this ‘now’ (Lee 2007, ‘Your Light and Space, p. 35), similarly to early avant-garde artists who used movement to draw attention to perceptions of the present.

Rebecca Horn’s installation in the biennale was as perilous as Eliasson’s swinging fan. Her *Cutting Through the Past* (1993–1994) is constructed with five doors standing in a circle on a platform with the edges of their frames pointing inwards towards a horizontal spike that rotates in the centre. At each rotation the spike scratches into the edge of each doorway as it passes, with what has been described as an ‘incisive and cruel gesture, rich with erotic implications’ (Engberg). Horn’s motion produces conflicting effects because each rotation is performed in its predictable manner, and yet as the spike approaches each doorway, a moment of piercing tension is orchestrated. *Cutting Through the Past* functions similarly to Eliasson’s *Light Ventilator Mobile* as both artists manipulate intensity and the accumulation of tension and intensity even when mechanical movement is constructed to move in a repetitious manner.

These contemporary gestures play to Christov-Bakargiev’s cyclical approach to time, which is in constant progression, and the effects of the modern machine aesthetic continue to be effective media for expressing time rhythms. Horn and Eliasson perform mechanised activities that range from the carefully measured, to entropic and unpredictable, and explore tensions laden within the present—time moves in obvious circles, and yet moments of tension, energy and suspense can arise within it. The curatorial decision to exhibit these works in the same biennale alongside the avant-garde works by Lye, Alexander Calder, Tinguely, and Medalla presents an assumption that Eliasson and Horn continue this artistic investigation. Although to varying degrees the reliance on the movement of form to build tension continues a desire to explore the actual and virtual effects of kinesis that was established by modern artists. These earlier artists from the 1960s (and in Calder’s case, the 1930s), each explore the capacity for unpredictable movement and unforeseen forms through repetitive mechanical actions.

As an art historical exhibition, Juliana Engberg claims that the biennale constructed political revolution as a recurring and yet weakening element of present society. As she summarises, ‘[a]t the beginning of the twentieth century, represented by Rodchenko, art is launching into space, daring us to embrace the dawn of speed and velocity. By the end of the century, represented by Cattelan’s forlorn hoisted horse, all the puff has gone out of the revolutionary enterprise’ (Engberg). Consequently the biennale drew together an art historical construction that reaffirmed the spirit of revolution with the modern avant-garde, and undermined contemporary art as a site for political engagement (Desmond 2008, p. 5). Therefore, to move forward in time requires a reconstruction of modern art that resensualises it within contemporary contexts.

This interpretation also positions *Revolutions—Forms that Turn* as a critical inquiry into the dialects between modernity and postmodernity, and an attempt to collapse the distinctions between these canons. Consequently, kinetic sculpture and installation are significant players in the reconstruction of contemporary art historical interpretation. For instance, Horn and Eliasson’s work are situated as

extensions of the modern machine aesthetic presented by early European avant-garde artists. Furthermore, as Christov-Bakargiev has argued, these early modern works of art are contemporary precisely because they are perpetuated by artists, institutions, and exhibitions as forerunners of the present sense of contemporaneity.

In this respect *Revolutions—Forms that Turn* is a contemporary exhibition that returns to and perpetuates avant-garde tropes to contemporary audiences. The modern aesthetic is for this reason part of the contemporary because Christov-Bakargiev's decision to use movement as a tool for reevaluating contemporary art history is what Smith would describe as a 'remodernist' action (Smith 2009, pp. 5–7). However, more importantly for the focus of this book, an effect of this remodernist perspective is that a reevaluation of the roles and effects of kinetic art in relation to understandings of movement and time are encouraged. *Revolutions—Forms that Turn* is indicative of a renewed art historical evaluation of kineticism in practice. The biennale aligned modern avant-garde mechanical kinetic works alongside contemporary mechanical installation, thereby strengthening the association between kinesis as a continued tool for contemporary artists. Rather than bringing together contemporary artworks that represented a digital contemporary avant-garde, Christov-Bakargiev made a conscious decision to present to the international artistic community a disregard for digital determinism, and presented modern industrial kinesis as an informant to contemporary art historical canons and characteristics of contemporaneity today. This encourages new relationships between avant-garde kineticism and the contemporary to be formed. Considering Christov-Bakargiev's approach to contemporaneity, *Revolutions—Forms that Turn* is presented as a contemporary art historical view that does not necessarily frame technological art as a move from mechanical towards virtual art, but builds as a multiplicity of time codes and the machine aesthetics within it.

This perspective results in an opportunity for interpreting kinetic art history that resists the assumption that mechanical kinetic sculpture is a rudimentary form of digital art in motion. Another consequence of the arrangement of *Revolutions—Forms that Turn* is for the dichotomy between the mechanical and the digital to be destabilised. Considering Christov-Bakargiev's approach to contemporary art history, the artists in the exhibition were arranged as pioneers of contemporary art and were themselves to be regarded as contemporary. Kinesis was therefore used in the biennale as a tool for demonstrating that the modern avant-garde is at once considered historical and contemporary in contemporary art. This challenges the idea of digital art as the 'more refined' technological art to modern mechanical media, because as I have highlighted, the biennale indicates a construction of art history today that collapses temporal distinctions between the historical and the contemporary and continually reconstructs by drawing from the recent past.

While Horn and Eliasson's works are engineered with motors that are not experimental by present-day standards, technological media is used as a means of achieving their formal and conceptual intentions. This is unlike the kinetic artists from the 1920s or 1960s in the biennale who were concerned with building or critiquing a machine aesthetic in their artworks. Christov-Bakargiev's perspective

of contemporary art, one that is *with-time*, indicates, as I will argue throughout this book, that there is still a strong desire to express and consume modern and contemporary kinetic sculpture because of its association with temporality. The contemporary works such as those by Eliasson and Horn use movement and time to assert identity through a process of entropy that attempts to locate and dislocate viewers through the use of motion (Smith 2009, p. 7). Both artists depend on entropy, control, movement and duration as ways to draw attention, and affect their audiences in spectacles of movement similar to the early European avant-garde kinetic works they were presented alongside with at the exhibition. They are playful the limits of human perception through experimentation of form, and depend on shocking their audiences with suddenness to create new sensations.

Christov-Bakargiev's direction is also useful for unpacking the peculiar expressions of temporality in modern art to contemporary audiences. *Revolutions—Forms that Turn* returns to the space-time conceptions that were popular at the time of early avant-garde, while also encouraging discussions about the use of movement and expression of time through contemporary kinetic sculpture. Unlike Bourriaud's proposition of a new modernity, which he called 'altermodern' (2009), she is concerned with the contemporary artists that signify one of many returns to modern avant-garde tendencies such mechanical aesthetics, and the use of shock, chaos, and repetition. This return is also considered as a greater condition of the cycles of form and aesthetic in art history, and is demonstrated by kineticism, specifically through works such as those by Eliasson and Horn next to Tinguely, Medalla, Lye, and Duchamp. This presents actual movement in art as a key concern for modern art history, and just as importantly, as a site for understanding of contemporary art. Christov-Bakargiev's approach compliments Smith's emphasis of art institutions that contemporise modern art, as well as contemporary artists perpetuating modern aesthetics.

Terry Smith's description of contemporary art today is useful for understanding some of the mechanisms behind the return to modern kinetic art in these three exhibitions. Smith's claim that a remodernist tendency is one of many emerging trends within contemporary art today is one explanation behind the desire to reassess art history, and reframe the influence kinetic sculpture has had on the artworld today. The biennale can therefore be considered as an engagement with contemporary audiences by resensationalising modern tropes of art such as revolution, shock, temporality and the machine aesthetic.

The relationship between time and mechanical movement in *Revolutions—Forms that Turn* in contemporary art history is valuable for discussing further the changing interpretations of modern kinetic sculpture, and confront the art historical assumption that considers modern kinesis as a precursor to digital art. Christov-Bakargiev's provides room for considering alternative historical narratives that run parallel to dominant narratives linked to digital art. *Revolutions – Forms that Turn* is a unique example of a contemporary art institution forming and reconstructing art historical lineages, not only because of the scale and breadth of the exhibition, but also because, as I have argued, it stands as an explicit divergence from traditional curatorial plans of biennales. Rather than focusing on emerging and

ever-changing contemporary artistic tendencies, as most biennales do, the sixteenth Biennale of Sydney encourage reflections on contemporising modernity, as well as drawing divergences and references between contemporary art and art history.

## 2.4 Conclusion: Contemporary Exhibition of Modern Kinesis

Christov-Bakargiev's curatorial direction at *Revolutions—Forms that Turn* has projected a nature of contemporaneity and contemporary art history that collapses temporal distinctions among modern, postmodern, and contemporary periods in art. The biennale is an articulation of the present as a process that unfolds in time, while also accumulating and preserving the past within it. This arrangement encourages considerations about movement, particularly a reflection on the cyclical, linear, or heterogeneous ways art history has explored the tropes of revolution, form, movement, and time. By exhibiting a higher concentration of modern avant-garde than contemporary art, construction of contemporary art history that depends on the above-mentioned modern tropes is emphasised. These approaches to temporality and contemporary art history also open new ways to think about the artists and their works that feature in the biennale, in relation to contemporary art and the social and political milieu. An effect of this spectacle of modern kinetic art in contemporary art history is that it re-situates kineticism as a driver of contemporaneity today that resensualises modernism. This perspective suggests that actual movement in art can be used as a resource for unpacking aspects of contemporary art and society today, particularly in regards to a number of approaches, expressions, and conceptualisations of time today. The biennale enframes an historical lineage between modern kinetic sculpture and contemporary installation that breaks away from associations of kinetic as a purely modern machinic tendency in art, but is also valuable to unraveling aspects of contemporaneity today. Therefore, a reconsideration of how artists have used movement to express and engage with time in the past is valuable for understanding contemporaneity in contemporary art.

*Revolutions—Forms that Turn* is a significant exhibition that brought to the fore discussions about the roles and effects of kinetic art for contemporary audiences. This is particularly in relation to sculptural movement as a way to engage audiences and influence their understanding of what it is to be with time in art. The next chapter addresses this connection in more detail. It presents the 1960s as a significant period because kinetic artists in the decade of the 'kinetic krazee' were devoted to mediating time with technology in different ways. The technological expansion after WW2, and the domestication of communications and computing technologies, gave rise to new polemics and perceptions of movement and time, and this is significant for understanding how and why the term 'kinetic' has been framed by contemporary art history.

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