

# Jeffrey Rubinoﬀ Sculpture Park

**SYMPOSIA IN THE COMPANY OF IDEAS**  
INTERDISCIPLINARY DIALOGUES ON MODERNISM



The symposia seek to contribute a counterweight to the trend toward opinions, cultural biases, and market demands as having primary agency in defining our understanding of reality. The danger of this trend is that it devalues rigorous contemplation and dialogue as a means to explore reality progressively. Without this methodological standard, reality is understood in a relativistic, shallow, and cynical way, to be the result of whatever truth claim is most popular or most forcefully presented. This situation leaves us morally unarmed to respond to the critical global exigencies of modernity.

The symposia seek conceptions that integrate the diverse historical forces of modernity with the essential identity of abstract modernist art: the identity of the imaginative intelligence with the historical forces of existence. This essential identity thrives in the authentic moment of artistic realization. By its nature, this artistic cognition is an existential moral act that deepens the understanding of truth.

**“Art is an act of will in accord with a mature conscience”** — Jeffrey Rubinoﬀ

## MODERNISM IN ART

According to Mark Daniel Cohen, the history of Modernism in art is coincident with the early twentieth-century scientific unmooring of our conception of solid reality. Conceptions and theories such as Riemannian geometry, multi-dimensional geometry, and Einstein's theory of special relativity initiated in modern artists, such as Kandinsky and Malevich, a complete break with the visual appearance of the world. Modern artists recognized that the truth of the universe is essentially different from what we readily observe. Art then was understood as a method for seeing into the hidden nature of reality, as a means of disclosing the hidden depths of nature, a nature that we are capable of intuiting because we ourselves are a portion of it.

It is the devotion to the disclosure of the hidden depths of truth that has marked the progress of Modernist Art. Abstract modern art thus can be understood as a progressive movement of increasing spiritual insight and knowledge.

"The mind comprehends more of reality than it normally reveals to itself, and only through giving release through art to the substance of imaginative thought, can the greater understanding of the truth of the world be discovered." —Mark Daniel Cohen (essay "The Historic Role and Significance of the Sculpture of Jeffrey Rubinoff," 2005.)

## WHO ARE THE PARTICIPANTS

The symposia are composed of practitioners in a wide variety of fields of intellectual inquiry, individuals selected for the extent of the larger understanding that they bring to their fields, as well as their experience as some of the leading practitioners. In each symposium, up to 12 participants from the arts, science, public policy, development, the private sector, and other fields integrate their diverse ways of understanding into a company of ideas. The expectation is that the active integration of knowledgeable individuals can find a working symbiosis, a process that is essential in an era of extreme specialization. Also, the symposia involve both younger and older practitioners, in order to facilitate an intergenerational transfer of the spirit of Modernism. Jeffrey Rubinoff serves as a participant in the symposia and gives personal tours of his work.

Of special interest is the specific encouragement of young artists and art students. It is the contention of the symposia that Modernism is the necessary outcome



of modernity, that Modernism remains at its earliest evolutionary stage, and that artists must regain their role at its center.

## MAIN OUTPUT OF THE SYMPOSIA

The symposia output is the dissemination of shared ideas of interdisciplinary resonance. There is no commercial intent to the output. The structure of the symposia and follow-up work is designed to stimulate dialogue and action beyond the immediate participants, among the community of professionals and practitioners with whom they work.

### Envisioned modes of dissemination of output include:

- Expanded publications on interdisciplinary topics, in print and online.
- Curriculum materials for university and secondary courses or modules.
- Support for extended, deeper research on the outcome of the symposia.
- Pre-symposia and post-symposia dialogues within the symposia participants' communities.
- Support for participants to give presentations to their colleagues or communities.
- An interactive website where the dialogue can achieve a broader reach.

## THEMES AND MODALITIES FOR DIALOGUE

Participants are asked to submit short presentations on how their selections from the following menu of themes relate to their fields of practice. Participants do not have to agree with the manner in which the themes are presented but must tackle the issues that are raised by the themes. Participants are then asked to generate several fundamental questions for their symposium to consider, questions that are salient both to their fields and to their selected themes.

The symposia address questions through facilitated dialogues that include small groups and plenary sessions. Throughout the dialogues, hypotheses are tested and honed, and additional questions are suggested for future symposia.

The following symposia themes are ideas that evolved with, and from, Jeffrey Rubinoff's work itself. These are insights that are reflective not only of his own individual view of the condition of the modern world and the way in which that condition has come to pass. They are reflective as well of the implications of Modernism in art, as it has been pursued by one of its primary contemporary practitioners. They are being offered here in order to organize initial discussion and to serve as the starting points for the further development of ideas. Participants are expected to function as precisely what they are: practitioners themselves whose role is to advance, challenge, and even contradict ideas for the sake of furthering this line of thinking. Above all, they are expected to think independently and creatively.

### Tribalism

Tribal behavior is an ancient evolutionary trait. By definition, a human tribe recognizes descent from a common ancestor. From this recognition, rules of membership are created. As populations grow and genetic distance evolves, the tribe becomes wholly metaphorical.

At the metaphorical level, tribalism is realized in religion, nationalism, and racism.

Tribal myths of origins are distributive memories of existence that substantiate the rules that separate tribes.



### The End of the Age of Agriculture

The domestication of animals is believed to have begun 13,000 years ago. However, with crop cultivation 9,000-10,000 years ago, a large majority of the population was required to be bound to the land. Cultivation leads to the first continuously settled villages and to civilization itself.

Security and continuity, rationalized by predictable food production, originated specialized political, civil, religious, and military institutions. Institutionalizing a warrior class was the most dangerous necessity of this social sea change. If the military were not directed outward, it would threaten the stability of the non-military institutions. Thus, a constant state of war became inevitable, and indeed the history of city-states and empires appears to confirm perpetual states of war.

The feasibility of escalating war has become absurd with the advent of strategic bombing and nuclear weapons. No military institutions can claim to guarantee security of territory.

Moreover, at the end of the age of agriculture only a minute fraction of the population is required to produce the current surpluses of food and thus the fundamental assumptions of the age of agriculture—security of territory as the means to secure food production—must be revised to the era of global vulnerability.

## Resurgent Tribalism

Agriculture not only failed to supplant tribalism, it extended tribalism through periods of technological development. As agricultural and civil practices advanced, continuously larger populations could be supported and larger armies with more sophisticated weapons deployed.

From the Renaissance through the mid-twentieth century, Europe led the world to modernity, scientifically and technologically, warring endlessly in ancient and re-invented tribal rivalries. Finally, much of Europe lay in smoldering ruins bearing the moral degradation of the Holocaust—mass theft and murder precisely organized and recorded by collaborating modern states.

The culmination of World War II was the profoundly ironic gift of nuclear weapons, given to us by science. With the reality of mutually assured destruction (MAD) becoming the ongoing policy of the nuclear-armed nations, modernity would have to adapt to a balance of terror if the human experiment were to survive.

As nation-states recognize the potential suicide of all-out war, the danger is that extant tribalism can continue to trigger genocide and continue the attempt to draw modernist nations into apocalyptic confrontation.

## The Importance of the History of Science

The history of the universe is the collective memory of the universe. The science of cosmology probes the limits of what we can know of the collective memory.

At the root of science is the simple idea that there can be a methodology by which intelligent people can agree on what they observe and, as a corollary, agree to disagree without murdering each other. Science itself evolved in the West as a necessity for stopping the ongoing murderous tribal wars lodged in separate arguments about divine truth and divine favor.

Science is a process that creates conventions of truth. It is the process that itself must be either accepted or denied. Necessarily, to accept science is to accept the process that has led to the scientific concept of evolution.

The evolution of life is the collective memory of life on our planet, and it determines what, at any point in history, we are capable of knowing of the collective memory of the universe.



## **Evolution**

Evolution is directional and progresses to ever more complex and adapted orders of organization.

Quite elegantly, the concept is constantly evolving rigorously validated evidence of itself. As rigorously validated evidence expands the idea of evolution, the human mind itself can evolve, thereby contributing to the collective memory of life itself.

Arguably, the theory of evolution supports the concept of the potential value of all humanity, as opposed to theistic or other rationalizations for the ascendancy of specific tribes.

## **Importance of the History of Art**

Art is the map of the human soul; each original piece is proof of the journey. As the artist navigates the unknown, the art adds to the collective memory.

The artist's journey on the path of art history takes him to the farthest reaches of his predecessor as his point of departure. The artist who follows that history then possesses the chart for evolution, which he in his turn is obliged to extend to his successors.

In its turn, art history is one strand wrapped around the historic cable of Modernism.

## **Modernism**

Modernism addresses the entire social spectrum implied by the evolving history of science. Modernism is by its nature progressive. A key concept is that life opportunities are not divinely ordained but can be distributed equitably based on merit and that the corresponding changes in social organization can be implemented. This is the means by which civilization itself can evolve.

## **Advanced Capitalism**

Advanced Capitalism has proven to be the best means of increasing production and distribution of wealth to insure the evolutionary goals of Modernism. As Capitalism evolves, it has in its own defense incorporated many of the principles of benign humanism previously claimed by institutionalized socialism. Continued evolution requires the ongoing incorporation of emerging moral imperatives.

## **Humanism and Integration**

In a post-agricultural age, political territories can no

longer promise security. Globalization demands not only a common basis of understanding and action over not only geographic but ideational space. Humanism is the conceptual thread with which to weave this common understanding.

## **Cultivated Ignorance**

The easy view that truth is only subjective leads to cultural lethargy. This view of reality does not represent ideas but opinions. These opinions are merely a means to intellectual and moral conformity and to the avoidance of the effort required by independent thought. For some, there is just a cessation of growth, for others a deliberate security of stasis.

## **Leadership**

The highly successful in any field are the masters of convention. In marketing, they are also the masters of the conventional. Learning from original art, true leadership is the quality to navigate beyond the boundaries of convention and to return with the charts of the newly explored. Leaders as navigators continually return to a vision beyond the horizon of convention. Like original art, the highest purpose of leadership is to serve the evolution of human consciousness.

## **Evolution of Mind**

Evolution of mind results from the dynamic engagement of truth with both analogy and metaphor.

Science has created conventions for truth by using analogies to model material reality. For much of their history, artists have been bound by their innate analogical ability to portray external reality. By science externalizing models of underlying structures of material reality and photography replacing the demand for illustration, art has been liberated to address the internal, intuitive reality of the collective human memory.

Analogies are tools, and as such they are accepted conventions; they are by their nature repeatable, measurable, and predictable. Metaphors exist beyond logic in the realm of intuition; they are the basis for truly original thought and are by their nature unique. Metaphors are self-contained truth, and they cannot be used as analogies.

Science is truth by analogy. Art is truth by metaphor. Resonating together, they are Modernism.

## APPLICATION

Participation in the symposia is at the discretion of the symposia director, Karun Körnig. Applications for participation in or volunteering for the symposia are available online at:

**[www.rubinoffsculpturepark.org](http://www.rubinoffsculpturepark.org)**, or by email:  
**[karun@rubinoffsculpturepark.org](mailto:karun@rubinoffsculpturepark.org)**.

Selection criteria for the groups of participants include:

- Diverse representation within key fields of human inquiry.
- Intergenerational balance between well-established and upcoming leaders.
- Geographic diversity of participants.
- Attachment to organizations that have dissemination channels.
- Group interest in participating in a genuine and free exchange of ideas.
- Commitment to seeking truth, not defense of opinion.

Volunteering as a rapporteur at the event or researching and creating symposia output is also available by application.

## REQUIREMENTS FOR INVOLVEMENT

- 1 Participants are given instructions for preparing a brief presentation on the symposia themes as the themes relate to their fields of inquiry. They are asked to prepare several challenging questions for the participants to consider before and during the symposia.
- 2 A web space is available where upcoming participants can post background information relevant to their questions.

- 3 Preparatory dialogue sessions within a participant's community or professional association may be held when appropriate and desired.
- 4 Before arrival, participants are expected to prepare information regarding themselves and their fields so that is accessible to the other participants.

## LOGISTICS

The site for the symposia is located in a 45-hectare park dedicated to the permanent exhibition of Jeffrey Rubinoff's sculpture. The park is on Hornby Island, British Columbia, Canada, spectacularly set among ocean and mountains. The symposia are held in a purpose-built facility, with ample natural light and open space. The sessions are fully facilitated and catered, and there is access to multimedia and internet services within the building. There are also multiple rapporteurs assigned, so that even in small groups, note taking need not distract the dialogue. Please observe that all proceedings are held in English. Participants are accommodated in individual rooms offsite and transported a few minutes to the site each morning. Participants are free to bring their spouses or guests. Please inform them however that, for the effectiveness of the dialogue, attendance at the symposia is limited to the participants.

The Jeffrey Rubinoff Sculpture Park covers the costs of food and accommodation for four nights for the participants. Participants are asked to cover their costs for getting to the location and are personally responsible for the additional costs of spouses and guests. Travel subsidies are available for those for whom participation in the symposium would otherwise not be possible.

