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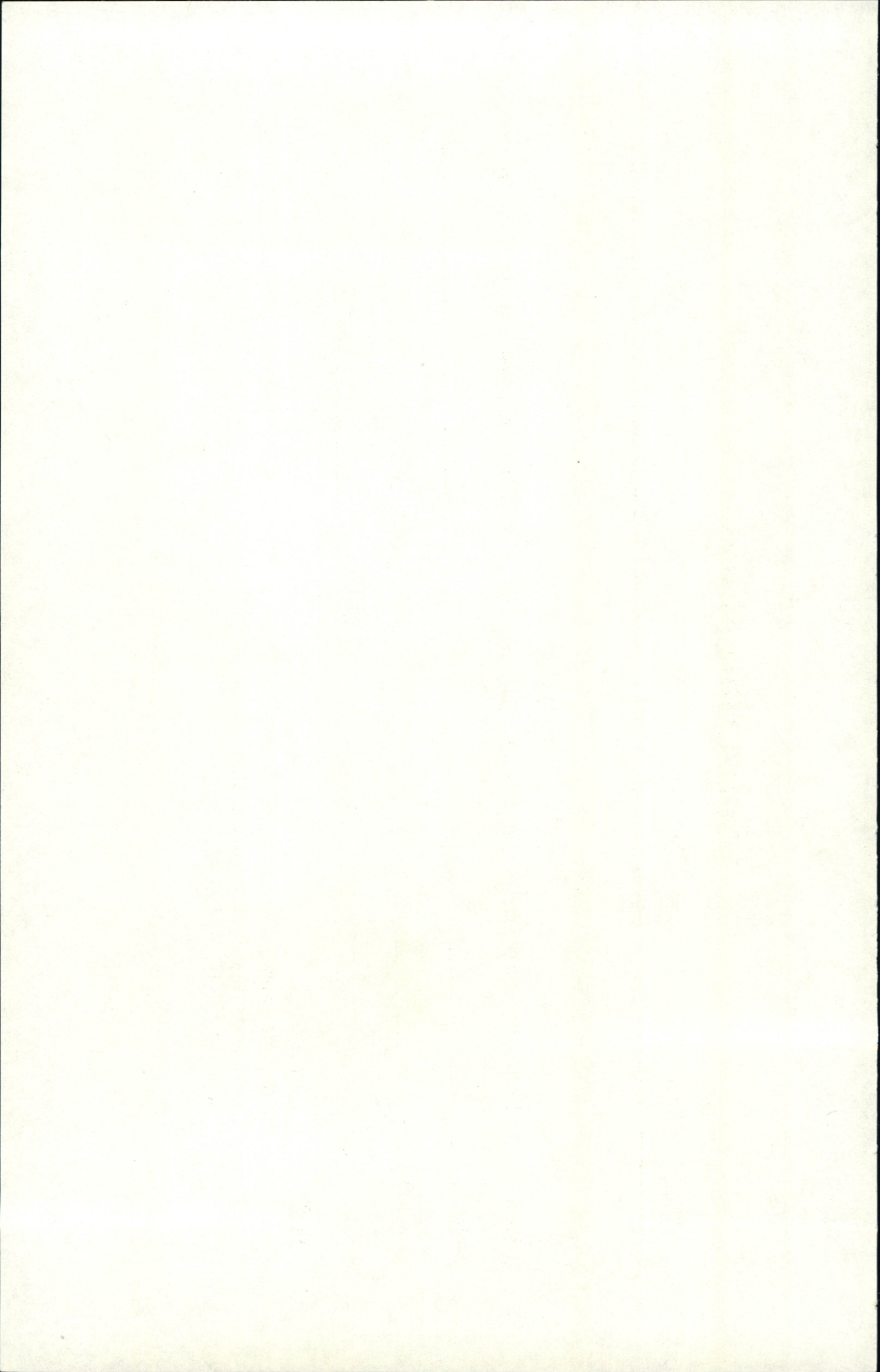
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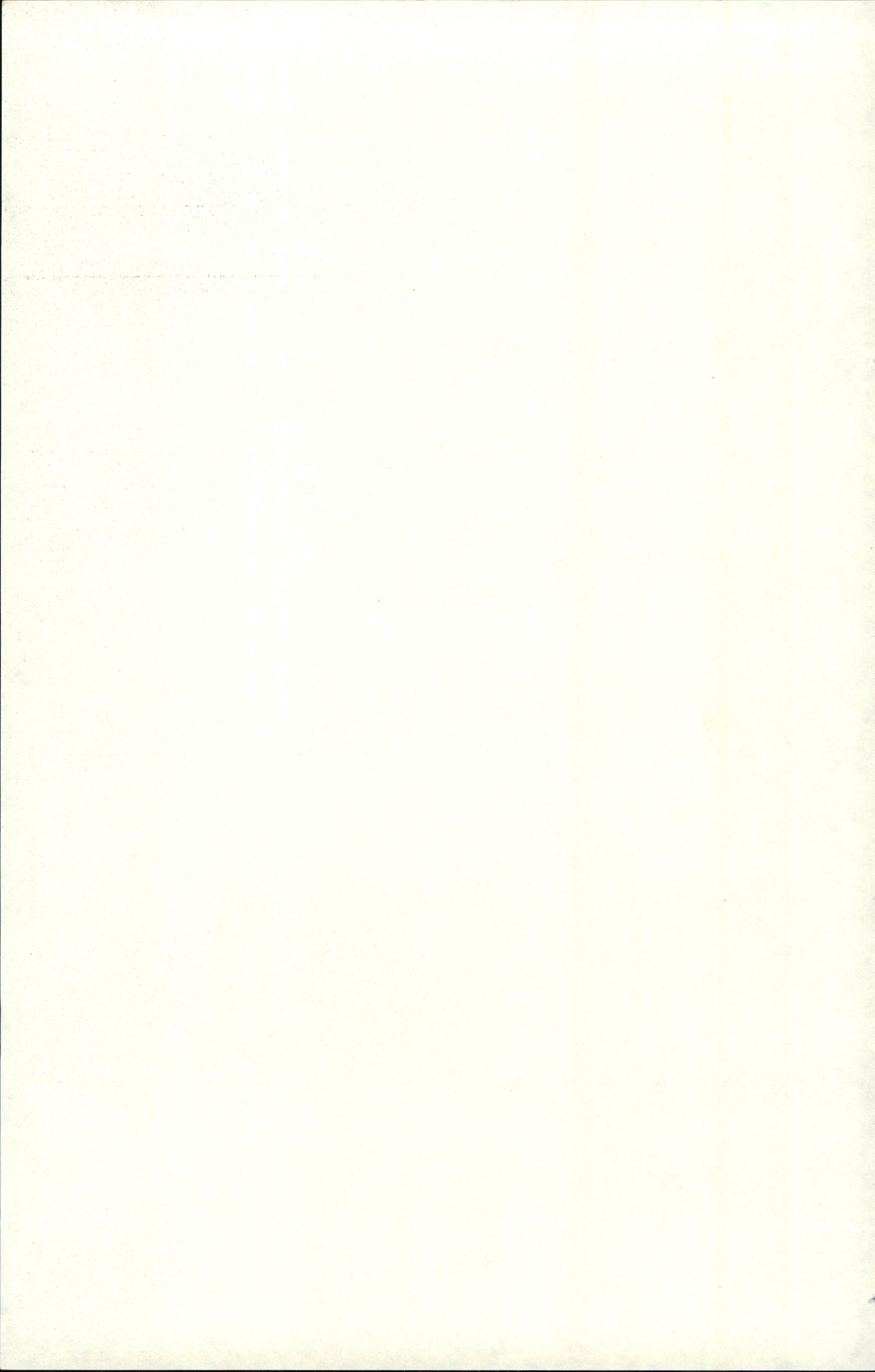
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# Art History, Art Criticism and the Ideological Birth of Modern Art

*From Art-Elitism to Modernism: Professors, the Avant-Garde and Creative Originality in Wilhelminian Germany*

By Rudolf M. Bisanz

"The greatest deeds are thoughts..."

"...the world revolves around the inventors of new values."

Nietzsche

## *To Crowd the Status Quo*

Any visitor to the yearly Chicago International Art Exposition, a Brobdingnagian amassment of contemporary art, or to a similar panoramic show, is familiar with the stylistic bedlam of advanced Postmodernism.<sup>1</sup> All modernist and many nineteenth-century styles appear there in their neological incarnations, including scores of Pm. hybrids. In search of guidance to that taste mania, bewildered art critics often turn to art history.<sup>2</sup> Though comatose for decades, that discipline seems ready to enter an "activist" phase.<sup>3</sup> Among the signs of its intellectual recovery is a gaggle of new publications that tries to stem the "crisis of the discipline" by challenging the *status quo*.<sup>4</sup> By once again espousing "deeds through thoughts," reaching for the center of the dialogue on art and "inventing new values" with which to assess the past, art history and criticism may be poised for redefining its nature while helping art to reinvent itself. To learn about the chances of this art critical process succeeding, we can study an historical model, a development that happened in Germany a hundred years ago.

Simultaneously with its own inception as a modern academic discipline, art history at that time helped decide a furious battle of styles by setting new artistic goals in art criticism.

### *"Ut Historia Ars" or How Idealist History Presaged Modernism*

Since about the 1820s, the end of Early Romanticism, German art practice lagged behind the theories about it that were being promulgated by aesthetes, art historians, and some thoughtful artists. This uniquely German condition intensified in the last third of the nineteenth century as the gap between energetic theorizing and the flagging spirit of art widened. By the turn of the century, all that a nascent Modernism, which thrived on vigorous feelings, lively imagination, and fresh new ideas, had to do as a movement was simply to push over the older shop-worn tradition in art. By then, that tradition was bereft of all but a certain residual commercial vitality, its theoretical *raison d'être* having been sapped by the attacks of the theorists. Most art historians and critics correctly refer to the emergence of Modernism as a "revolution." But a few still cling to the erroneous notion that it was also a "spontaneous event." The various German, Austrian, Swiss, and Russian artists who formed the first echelon of the Modernist avant-garde in Germany built upon French "pre-Modernism": Manet, the Impressionists, the Post-Impressionist "majors"—Seurat, Cézanne, Van Gogh, and Gauguin. German *Sonderimpressionismus* with Liebermann and Corinth, the *Worpswede Group* with Paula Modersohn-Becker, the Munich and Berlin Secessions, die Brücke group with Kirchner, Schmidt-Rottluff, Heckel, the Neue Künstlervereinigung and the Blue Rider Group with Kandinsky, Marc, Macke, and Gabriele Münter—all these were influenced by French art. And they also drew on other important visual models, e.g., on medieval art, on folk art and on certain nonacademic, empirical *Gattungskünstler*, especially naturalist landscape painters of the popular city schools.<sup>5</sup> But there existed yet another, equally cogent influence.

Despite the compelling nature of all the visual examples, virtually the entire body of ideas underlying Modernism existed prior to the emergence of that movement in a different place: it existed in German art theory. Conditions in Germany aided a prestigious and influential group of writers who advanced the causes of progressive art. While a "cultural elite" of bourgeois theorists and critics arrogated to itself the definition of "progress among themselves," art historians made sure that historical art "would take on the traits of contemporary art" as a consequence of their common intellectual roots in idealist history and the notion of her "manifestly destined" fulfillment.<sup>6</sup> Conversely, a "potential" Modern Art was being "projected" out of art historical lessons, e.g., out of the Baroque and its amalgamation of emotionalism and formalism (by Wölfflin, for example; see below), the Gothic and its spiritualism and expressive urgency (Worringer), Early Christian and its wilfulness in overcoming antiquity (Riegl), etc. All new terms from history found immediate entry into the dialogue on Modern Art. The

"points of contact between art production and art history" were so multifarious as to be practically limitless in their number and variety. In the process, the idea of progress in art history *per se* and progress of the avant-garde had all but congealed into one "universal art-historical/art critical paradigm." The motto was: as history goes, so goes art and, naturally by extension, modern art. All involved parties from the academic and artistic communities avidly waved the flag of that condominium of interests as they stormed the barricades of conservative opposition to jointly claim victory for the avant-garde.

### *Deliberate Choices: From Romanticism to the Fin-de-siècle*

German art history, theory and criticism which had presaged Modernism should command attention today because they tell us where we come from. Indeed, the art scene of the *fin-de-siècle* shares a lot in common with the present: a *recherche* climate of ideas, proliferation of styles and movements, a general feeling of mannerist ennui and self-consciousness, and a largely self-defeating sophistry or mawkishness affecting all ideative traffic in art. This was then (and is now), coupled with restlessness in art history and theory. Given these similar conditions, might not the future bring a similar outcome, renewal through cooperation and creative initiative? Naturally, the idea of the entire undertaking rests on the concept of avant-gardism. But the bourgeois fixation on "social progress," hence the demand for "creative originality," that commenced that concept may no longer hold interest. Nor is the Marxist dialectic in behalf of the same thing, progress (though without the accompanying fiat for originality), any more attractive. The Early German Romantics, believing that "ut historia ars," concluded that the death of the history of "old art" (and with it, presumably, Friedrich Schiller's notion of a blessed state of aesthetic primitivism and "naïveté") had occurred in their time. They then declared the birth of Romantic (i.e., modern) art out of the discipline of modern art history. Ever since, the art world has been faced with a conundrum: art history and Modernism as *Doppelgänger*; yoked for life, neither is viable without the other.<sup>7</sup>

When Kandinsky and Marc wrote their revolutionary theories about the primacy of creative experience, intuition, abstraction, the hegemony of form, and freedom of expression (and, incidentally, also practiced a good deal of what they preached), they continued a long German intellectual tradition of speculation about the nature and purpose of art that spans virtually the entire course of the nineteenth century.<sup>8</sup> Theirs was the culmination of a process begun by the Early German Romantics and such art theorists as Philipp Otto Runge, Friedrich Schlegel, and Heinrich Wackenroder, for example. Shocked by what they perceived as the death of the "old art"—antiquity, the Old Masters, the Baroque and Rococo—those early pioneers projected a highly original new aesthetic system. Amazingly, it incorporates elements (some are more vaguely perceived than others) of abstraction, nonobjectivism, expressionism, symbolism, conceptualism and

progressive universalism in art. The basic nineteenth-century intellectual themes also emerge clearly with the German Romantics: nineteenth-century art is a stylistic "orphan" cut off from history; it is a victim of total aesthetic disunity; new missions for art are desperately needed; art is a substitute for religion; it has pedagogical powers; it is a link with nature; it is the product of individual creative genius, etc.<sup>9</sup> The late nineteenth century rediscovered the theories of the Early Romantic movement, e.g., those of Runge, Wackenroder, Tieck, Carus. As to the older nineteenth-century German artists, e.g., Runge, Friedrich, Oldach, Kersting, Pforr, Janssen, etc., they, too, had been rediscovered by art historians and introduced to the artistic community in the waning years of the Wilhelminian era. With much official fanfare and excitement among the avant-garde, the epochal Centenary Exhibition in Berlin in 1906 finally celebrated the official "coming out" of these artists after their many years of neglect. Runge's gloriously ingenuous words (republished in some dozen different monographs within a score years) touched the hearts of more young artists than they had in all their previous decades of existence:

"When the sky above me abounds with countless stars, when the wind rushes through the wide space and the wave breaks roaring in the far night, when above the woods the sky turns red;...all resounds in a single chord, then the soul jubilates aloud and soars into the boundless space around me, and there is no below and no above, no time, no beginning and no end,"

then it is time for worship and for art.<sup>10</sup>

Emboldened by the enthusiasm and the ambitious theories of the Romantics, the young Modernists reacted with emotion, impatience and self-assurance—especially Franz Marc: "The battle seems unequal; but in matters of the spirit figures never win, only the strength of ideas." "We don't play around with ideas...they are the elements of a movement whose vibrations can be felt in all the world." "We shall carry on the good fight until we see our kind of art everywhere."<sup>11</sup> The Brücke artists, and especially one of their leaders, Ernst Ludwig Kirchner, were never more hortatory in their manifesto: "as youth who carries the future in ourselves, we intend to make room for ourselves in which to move and breath opposite the established older forces. Everyone belongs to us who produces directly and genuinely that which prompted him to produce in the first place."<sup>12</sup> Effusion of intuitive insights, gushing creative spontaneity and overweening self-confidence (and a touch of intolerance—totalitarianism) counted among the traits of the Expressionists. These were also among the traits of their immediate intellectual godfather, Nietzsche. His exhortations to urgent personal initiative, frenzied pursuit of private values, electrifying invocations to heroic cultural leadership, and pressing commands to unrestrained *Herrenmoral*—which, in our context, translates to a categorical creative imperative—were very widely read. They inspired artistic self-renewal in Germany in a creative "operation bootstrap."<sup>13</sup>

The German Expressionists partook of the labors of several generations of philosophers, aestheticians and art theorists ranging from Friedrich Schlegel—the occupant of the first academic art history chair at any university—and Wilhelm Schelling in the early nineteenth century, to Schopenhauer and Nietzsche. These men shared a common humanist belief that human beings, with their awesome powers of intellect and will, have the innate capacity to reshape themselves from within. They would rise to all such new challenges as might confront them, including building a new art on the ruins of the old, pre-Romantic art of Church, Baroque convention and hoary classic tradition.<sup>14</sup> Their high idealism anticipated what Marc and Kandinsky, for example, and others of their generation, actually later did: practice a radically redefined art as a creative act of individual personal will power, while crushing the established order and embarking on an alternate aesthetic course. But before such action could take place or could have been expected to succeed, the immediate intellectual ground for Modernism had first to be prepared more thoroughly. This work was done by the art-elite, the writers and professors—the avant-garde of the avant-garde.

### *Political Affinities and Emerging Practical Parallels*

While the political leanings of the individual intellectual reformers were varied, general themes emerged. During the Wars of Liberation, when “danger from without” (the Napoleonic conquest) and the founding of nationalism loomed large, the sympathies of the Early Romantics (e.g., Friedrich) coincided with the interests of the aristocracy. This was generally conservative thought in the defense of the “common front.” The decades of the *Vormärz* Era (prior to the National Uprisings in the 1840s) saw many leading thinkers—e.g., the liberal firebrand and communist sympathizer, Richard Wagner, or the cosmopolitan social satirist and sarcastic wit, Heinrich Heine—take up Liberalism to help the bourgeoisie overcome hypocrisy and assert itself against the entrenched interests of the church and the aristocracy. The Frankfurt National Assembly (1848) and the establishment of parliament laid the foundation of bourgeois power (and witnessed the emergence of the modern university; see below). Subsequently, a conservative reaction set in against the “danger from within,” i.e., conserving gains and protecting them against the emerging ranks of the proletariat. During the *Gründerjahre* (the 1870s) this trend was exacerbated, especially among the lower middle class, by the rapid rise of industrialization and its attendant social upheavals (due to the population increase, unemployment, pauperism, etc.). From that time onward, the upper middle class (including the *Ordinarien*—tenured professors), started on a steady slide into siding with conservatism, elitism, nationalism, and imperialism—the Wilhelminian era. At the turn of the century, the modern political spectrum—and an academic proletariat, including a massive and partly unemployed population of teaching fellows and *Privatdozenten* (non-tenured professors)—emerged. In the years prior to World War I the

situation had become very pluralistic, with sporadic radicalism among the intelligentsia: anarchism, Marxism, socialism, utopianism, labor unionism, etc.<sup>15</sup> Allowing for myriad regional and chronological variables, these general national political trends had their subtle effects on the development of art theory in Germany. Dim outlines of cause-effect relations or parallelisms seem to emerge between progressive art-politics (avant-gardism) and political liberalism, especially in the late years of the Empire. On the most evident level, the pattern seems to have been that the lower middle class favored conservative *Gattungskunst*, the upper middle class preferred academic art, while the highly educated upper middle class fostered "progressive" art and theory.<sup>16</sup>

### *Doctrinal Variables and Proto-Expressionism*

Working against formidable odds (principally the mighty forces of conservatism at the art academies) scores of progressive German critics, aesthetes, and art historians at the universities worked on perfecting their methodology while envisioning a new trajectory for art—Modernism. In this process, the critics usually advanced along two lines of argument. One went in behalf of a "national program," within an international or universal frame of reference. This approach drew upon all sources considered useful, e.g., selective aspects of French avant-garde art, visual models from medieval or non-Western sources, the "form-psychological" lessons of Late Antiquity/Early Christian art, the Gothic, the Baroque, etc. The intent was to serve the needs of Germany in an increasingly international climate of art and ideas while serving the needs of a universal model. From the Nazarene Peter von Cornelius to Runge and, later, Wagner—and on to the Moderns themselves, e.g. Lovis von Corinth and Marc, who lectured and wrote about the limits within the German context of such French "specialties" as Cubism or Fauvism—the dream of a "German national school of art" lived on. The German art writers also regarded a cohesive body of theories, in the form of a permanent, ideal and comprehensive program, as a basic requirement. They thought that French art criticism, despite its brilliant insights, had failed to achieve that goal because of its empirical, *ad hoc*, occasional, opportunistic, and piecemeal character.<sup>17</sup>

Richard Wagner was among the pioneers of the Romantic process of envisioning the future of art out of a critical study of its past. (He lived on the proceeds of his copious art critical writings for many years.) Among his other original insights—e.g., the principles of the *Gesamtkunstwerk*—is the crucial romantic concept of nature's *innere Notwendigkeit* (inner necessity) as the living roots of art.<sup>18</sup> Accordingly, he proposed that genuine art can only emerge from feelings and instincts that are based on the "vicissitudes (*Not*) of life," i.e., on private physical and psychological existence, and professional, social, economic, and political experience. He was particularly concerned with personal suffering, and the hardships that resulted from sociopolitical experiences, and their place in art. Moreover he felt that personal experience, and the spontaneous interaction of the artist with his environment, must precede the creative act as

a *sine qua non*. With these notions he placed himself among the earliest forerunners—e.g., the art theorists Runge and Schlegel—who advanced the seminal ideas underlying Expressionism. “The work of art is the living representation of religion; but religions are not invented by the artist, they evolve only from the people.” And “the people are the essence of all those who are subject to the common necessity” of nature and who share in common the *Not* of economic hardship, sociopolitical inequities, and the love of all humanity in the brotherhood of suffering.<sup>19</sup> Some of the more “socially conscious” Expressionists wanted to “activate” this sentiment by attempting to build a *Brücke* (bridge) between themselves and the people. But others—the apolitical Blue Rider—preferred spiritualism as a hoped-for common ground. Regardless, for each art had to grow out of “inner necessity.”

### *From “Kunstwollen” to “Einführung”*

The ideas implicit in Alois Riegl’s principle of *Kunstwollen* (will to art or will to form) overturned the supremacy of classicism with arguments based on psychology and religion.<sup>20</sup> He showed that historical style changes (especially the change from Late Roman to Early Christian art)<sup>21</sup> were not based on decay or a descent into Barbarism but rather on the development of a “higher spiritual affinity.” This sentiment was later adopted by the Expressionists to explain their “erratic” artistic behavior. His rehabilitation of a non-classical (indeed, anti-classical) style was promptly identified as an apologia (by Henry van de Velde, for example) for Art Nouveau ornamentation, a critical intermediate stage in the growth of Modern Art. Riegl’s theories also justified the Early Moderns’ absorption of massive amounts of non-Western and Primitive art into their own art. In addition, his theories served to buttress an Expressionistic art based on the assertion of will power—the will of the individual artist, his group, and his people.<sup>22</sup>

*Mutatis mutandis*, the same rationale can (and has) been used to indicate that since the dethronement of classicism as an absolute style, art has become a relative concept, a *Vereinbarungsbegriff* (arranged concept). This core aesthetic dilemma of Modernism—stylistic relativism—implies that there are no really compelling standards in art, and in effect allows each epoch to serve up its own “art concept.”<sup>23</sup> This principle embodies two older Romantic notions: the possibility of a “universal progressive” art (e.g., the theories of Friedrich Schlegel)<sup>24</sup> and the “death of art history” (a commonly held idea of the Romantics). The peculiar logic of the second idea may suggest that as art history dies—or slips into antiquarianism—so does art, and *vice versa*.<sup>25</sup> The same idea may also suggest that they can thrive together if they are “coordinated.” The present artworld can draw comfort from this notion, and hope for the coming of a second Golden age of avant-gardism. Of course, should the model of avant-gardism itself fall into further disrepute on account of its bourgeois insistence on individualism, originality, and progress, then such comfort will be short-lived.

As few critical art historians have, Wilhelm Worringer's theories shaped the development of Modernism in the early years of this century. His important book *Abstraktion und Einfühlung* (*Abstraction and Empathy*, 1908) was in part based on the theories of "Einfühlung"—the projection of one's self into what is seen—of the psychologist Theodor Lipps, the aesthetician Friedrich Theodor Vischer, and Riegl. Worringer tested his theories on Gothic art.<sup>26</sup> His doctrine stipulates the need for empathy in both the creation and appreciation of art and, thus, offers the possibility of an art that originates in aesthetics and is driven by emotion.<sup>27</sup> He was the first to use the term "Expressionism" in a sustained intellectual context. Moreover, his perception of intuition as the essential *modus* of art formed the "major part of the ideological basis of Expressionism." In him the interests of art history, critical art theory, and the practice of art blend seamlessly. He claimed that "in view of the enormous disorder of the world picture, man can only find peace" in abstract forms. His theory culminates in the proclamation that the autonomous work of art is "equivalent to nature but that in its deepest essence art stands in no relationship to nature." In this he echoes sentiments going back to Goethe's and Schelling's famous notion of "Kunst ist ein potenziertes Naturprodukt" (art is a magnified—or empowered—product of nature).

The Expressionists found confirmation of their practices in Worringer's insightful formulations. The Cubists were also influenced by them.<sup>28</sup> Worringer furnished Modernism with the most comprehensive overall plan for creative action. Aware of the immense variety of Post-Impressionist styles, his vision encompasses all expressive modalities and provides a common ground for the practice of art. Equally important, he brought order to heterogeneous German art theory by establishing a hierarchy of intellectual values for art. In essence Worringer decreed that the art of the future will no longer be mimetic—reflect a pre-existent reality—but rather eidetic or intuitionist, i.e., be created out of artistic resources alone. It will create new essences out of pure aesthetic logic and psychological compulsion, and concern itself with the construction of purely formal relationships. It will shape abstract worlds of original formal realities—an autonomous universe.

### *Options for Abstraction: Moods, Distillations, "Significant Forms"*

Basing himself on Riegl and Worringer, as well as on Burckhardt, Heinrich Wölfflin argued—in *Das Problem des Stiles in der bildenden Kunst*, 1911 and in such subsequent writings as *Kunstgeschichtliche Grundbegriffe* (*Principles of Art History*)—that concentration on form did indeed historically occur in art, and that it was necessary to examine and learn to understand this phenomenon in a critical history of art.<sup>29</sup> To demonstrate his principles, he compared Renaissance—i.e., a classic art—and Baroque art. This eventually resulted in a formalist art history, which is the mirror image of Worringer's art formalism. Here as there, the structures of art and its symbols preempt all other critical considerations. Wölfflin seemed to



have invented the essentials of symbolism—paralleling—(though influenced by) Gauguin's virtually identical accomplishment—with his famous motto "each mood has its distinct expression." This definition has become one of the basic building blocks of art based on the "will to form."<sup>30</sup>

Other German art theorists of the later nineteenth century whose works have become mainstays of formalist aesthetics include Konrad Fiedler and Adolf von Hildebrand. The writings of both men furnished useful points of departure for both Wölfflin and Worringer.<sup>31</sup> Fiedler and Hildebrand shared a belief that art must follow its own indelible laws to their unavoidable conclusion, wherever that may lie. In art, which is the co-equal of science in communicating knowledge (a Kantian notion), primal concepts, intermediate mental images, sketches and completed visual forms are inseparable. Their synthesis leads to new constructs which become original channels of penetration to essential knowledge. The artist arrives at significant forms through a distillation process involving analysis, comparison, elimination, simplification, alteration, and construction. Julius Meier-Graefe synthesized all of these ideas in a model "modern art history" that classifies nineteenth-century art according to minor and major lines of development.<sup>32</sup> He thought that the latter had found their apotheosis in the great Post-Impressionist masters and Early Moderns from Manet onward, and he became their first influential apologist. Among the Germans he was especially fascinated by Hans von Marees and the sculptures of Hildebrand, both of whom he established as major artists and their art as the perfect embodiment of Fiedler's and Hildebrand's own theories as well as those of the other writers we have discussed. Once the Meier-Graefian model had become *the* authoritative "reading plan" of Pre-Modernism in the years prior to World War I, there was no escaping its attractive force. Legions of "histories" followed in its wake, deviating barely a scintilla from the essential thrust of his arguments down to recent times.<sup>33</sup> The current revisionist wave and concomitant return to pre-Meier-Graefian, historicist accounts, reflects the Postmodernist disaffection with avant-garde theories.<sup>34</sup>

### *Potential Modernism Confirmed*

The writers who were among the heroes of the great critical debate of the century forged the intellectual foundation of Modernism. In the process, they helped lay the foundation of modern art history as an academic discipline. Until very recently, the discipline was more or less entirely based on the ideas just discussed: the mandate of inner necessity, the manifest resolve of the will to art, the commanding imperative of abstraction, the commitment to empathy with abstract images, the call to formalism, the demand for significant form, and the new abstract sign-symbolical iconography derived from the pure elements of form (to name the foremost principles). In short, the writers discussed prepared the whole program of what might be called "potential Modernism." Early Modernist artists in Germany found that program irresistible, and adopted it to their own intuitive awareness or improvisational tactics regarding art.

They looked to it as a grand strategy of approach or unifying credo in a confusing situation of myriad competing styles. Following as much the call of these intellectual leaders as their own consciences, Kirchner, Erich Heckel, and Karl Schmidt-Rottluff, for example, gave up careers in architecture to fling themselves into art. Emil Nolde gave up a successful career as an art professor and popular illustrator to "join" in Modernism for the same reasons.<sup>35</sup> The history of early Modernism is replete with countless such tales of "conversion." If there is a unifying theme among those pioneer artists, it is their uniform adherence to the intellectual and aesthetic construct that they had learned from the "professors," and which they intended to apply in practice. Their own frequent writings on art theory are embellishments on that general intellectual construction. Perhaps the most famous instance of "conversion" involves Naum Gabo, one of the originators of non-objective sculpture, who abruptly switched from studies of medicine to art after attending a lecture series by Wölfflin at the University of Munich. The Blaue Reiter artists were all steeped in the theories of the "professors," and especially the two pioneers of non-objective abstraction (and early Abstract Expressionism), Franz Marc and August Macke, both of whose writings in *Der Blaue Reiter* (1912) attest to their complete familiarity with these theories. Paul Klee's "practical" instructions in studio practice are unthinkable outside the context of those fundamental theories, as are also the famous "basic courses" at the Bauhaus.<sup>36</sup> Undoubtedly, however, the most important early artist-theorist of the group and perhaps of all Modernism was Wassily Kandinsky. Therefore, his example is the litmus test for my thesis.

### *Professional Progeny: A Cogent Example*

Kandinsky was a voracious reader. He had amassed a huge private library of books on art history, theory, and criticism.<sup>37</sup> He was an eclectic thinker with a gift for crafty summations of others' theories, and—metaphysics to the contrary—for converting abstract thought into practical application in the informal language of the studio.<sup>38</sup> These talents served him well as the leader of the *Neue Künstlervereinigung* and of the *Blaue Reiter*, and when he taught at the Bauhaus in the 1920s. More significantly, he drew the "final" consequences from the theories of the "professors" on which he built. Naturally, he was the only one who could make the actual leap into the unknown, however well others may have charted his course for him in theory. (Of course, the same is true for all the artists currently under review.) In their essence, however, his theories are a tissue of borrowings from others, ranging from Runge (e.g., the theory of "psychological color," the theory of the "artistic utilization of synesthesia," the theory of "symbolism based on non-objective elements of form," etc.) to Wagner (the theory of the *Gesamtkunstwerk*, the theory of "inner necessity"—inner need—as the root-cause of all good art), and on to the "professors." Kandinsky's home base during his *Sturm und Drang*—which climaxed in his *First Abstract Watercolor* in 1910—was Munich. Worringer, who lectured

there, wanted it clearly understood that the "history of the imitative urge is quite different from the history of art." Kandinsky (and Marc) refer specifically to Worringer's doctoral dissertation *Abstraction und Einfühlung*. It had caused tremendous excitement in the artistic community. "Worringer...who described himself as a medium of the Zeitgeist, is regarded as a telling example for (the thesis) that art historical reflections can have an exceedingly present-day importance." "There can be absolutely no doubt," about the fact, moreover, that Kandinsky's pictorial concept "starts with Fiedler's artistic concept of reality": "Each new work of art will express a new, never before seen world." Thus "abstract art places alongside the real world a new world," which only obeys the "laws of a cosmic world." The fact that Kandinsky's *Über das Geistige in der Kunst* "declared on paper a goal which would take the next four years for him to achieve on canvas" suggests that his art was the product of theory rather than the reverse. This puts the theorists on whom he relied for guidance even closer to the point of inception of Modernism's earliest practice.<sup>39</sup> The lives and thought of Kandinsky and Worringer, whose ideas on the "spiritualization of expression" (in Gothic art) underlie very similar language in Kandinsky's *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*, interpenetrate completely. This circumstance moved "Hans Tietze to refer to expressionism as 'having characteristics which became familiar to us through Worringer's book'."<sup>40</sup> Art history and theory "moved" the "shakers" of Modernism, the artists, thus contributing to "making new art." Simultaneously, the professors defined the modern guise of the academic discipline that they taught—*Kunstwissenschaft*.<sup>41</sup>

### *Universitarian Sanctions: Art Theory Institutionalized*

The ideas under discussion had been "prophesied" by artists and poets—Runge, Friedrich, Tieck, Novalis, *et al.* Then they were conceptualized by "philosopher-patriarchs"—Schelling, Hegel, Schopenhauer, Nietzsche—into vaulting systems of idealism, pantheism, and the assertion of will through evolutionism. In the later nineteenth century, the universitarian art theorists ("missionaries"?) transformed those romantic dreams of a vital, natural, spontaneous, sincere, direct, and scientifically authenticated, as well as deeply felt and meaningful art, into an aesthetic *fait accompli*. In closing the circle that had begun a hundred years earlier, they helped "convert" artists to actualize their "gospel" into neo-Romantic art practice. On the whole, the German art academies, regardless of their other accomplishments (in cultivating history painting, elaborating on *Gattungskunst*, refining historicist styles, perfecting technique, etc.) contributed barely one iota to this process.<sup>42</sup> But another German institution of learning did, the university.

Since mid-century, the German universities had evolved into models of progressivism and administrative liberalism. Going back to Wilhelm von Humboldt's advocacy of the free university in *Vormärz* Berlin, they had "invented" the revolutionary academic concepts of *Lernfreiheit* and

*Lehrfreiheit* (freedom to learn and freedom to teach). They also laid great stress on *Forschung* (research) and the dissemination of knowledge through vigorous publication. Thus, the German universities had, in fact, given birth to the concept and created the first perfect embodiment of the modern university, as we understand it today.<sup>43</sup> A fierce inter- and intra-mural competition to discover, explain, and disseminate new knowledge ensued between the universities, especially among those in the vanguard—Munich, Bonn, and Berlin. More than any other cultural, social or economic cause, this circumstance contributed to the “pandemic” growth of theory in art and art history in the Wilhelminian era. We can think of it almost as an institutionalization of art theory. And because art theory aided and abetted Modernism (as we have learned), this universitarian trend amounted to the virtual institutionalization of Modernism. Ironically, since the *Gründerjahre* (the 1870s) these “liberal” aesthetic developments coincided with a general political rightward drift toward conservatism by the *Ordinarien*.<sup>44</sup> Nonetheless, aesthetic speculation, art critical polemics, and art historical theorizing, carried out by “professors” who were institutionally encouraged, if not to say mandated, to experiment and expand the bounds of knowledge, laid the foundations of Modernism as an aesthetic-philosophical thought construct, independent of any and all other sources that may have contributed to the formation of the movement. The bourgeois “art-intellectual” elite at the universities was then as much in charge of the art enterprise in its highest form as were the aristocracy and clergy formerly. The former had replaced the latter as guardians of culture. The intellectual and emotional appeal of that art-political elite to students must have been mesmerizing.<sup>45</sup> Philosophy departments—they contained the art history “chairs”—grew by leaps and bounds. Their aesthetics and art history components attracted record numbers of students. At the century’s end, judging by the accounts of witnesses from all walks of life, these subjects were probably the most popular, prestigious, and intellectually challenging in the whole field of the humanities.<sup>46</sup>

While in France the slogan “art for art’s sake” was fashionable, the German battle cry could well have been “ideas about art for ideas’ sake.” Each country’s approach was, in its own way, marvelously productive in preparing, developing, and actualizing Modernism. Interesting with respect to the present, the highest intensity of theoretical development in Germany occurred during the 1880s and 1890s, when art practice had seemingly reached its nadir and, in super-nova fashion, exploded in a riot of “styles.” Equally germane to our times, art had fallen victim to critical cynicism and commercial exploitation at the hands of the *nouveau riche*. They dictated to it: their taste in fashion and politics, as well as their belief in economic advancement and chauvinistic posturing, were made manifest through art. This resulted in a mind-boggling plethora of neological stylistic “options,” literally selectable from style catalogues. It was the era of the spectacularly successful *Malfürsten* (princes of paintings)—the era of Makart, Henneberg, Lenbach, the Kaulbachs, Anton Werner, *et al*, and their imitators. In contrast, the first decade of the twentieth century witnessed a confluence

of the trajectories of art history, theory, criticism, and art—the art of a younger generation. As the interests of the art-elite at the universities and those of the artists coalesced, each strengthened the other and both became fully actualized. Many causes and stimuli, not the least of which were the official cultural policies of the Wilhelminian *Kaiserreich* who administered the universities, merged in a broad cultural current. The management style of the universities had made possible an unprecedented flourishing of historical, theoretical, and critical studies, and precipitated a groundswell of ideas in art. In turn, a cultural renaissance occurred—Modernism.<sup>47</sup>

### *Deeds Through Thoughts Again?*

As we ponder the stylistic chaos and aesthetic convulsions of a show such as the Chicago International Art Exposition, and the attendant art-critical paroxysms, we might ask some questions. Is it possible to hope that the discipline of art history will recover from its “crisis,” put its house in order and once more pursue visionary initiatives? Will it forsake its (middle age) habit of reacting only to the familiar, in order to strike out once again toward the experimental, polemical, exploratory, futuristic? Will art intellectualism be able to lend art practice and art criticism a sense of direction, suggesting new challenges for the future? Equally relevantly, will our universities be able to rise to the challenge of creating the proper climate of nurture for a resurgence of original ideas in art and general culture? Or has the spirit of Romantic evolutionism and progressivism, the era of “deeds through thoughts,” come to an end for good?<sup>48</sup>

### Notes

<sup>1</sup>Compare Rudolf M. Bisanz, “Die Neunte ‘Chicago International Art Exposition,’” *Weltkunst* 58/12 (1988): 1909.

<sup>2</sup>Compare “The Crisis in the Discipline,” *Art Journal* 42/4 (1982): entire issue.

<sup>3</sup>Hans Belting, *The End of the History of Art* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987). Belting’s title may be sensational, but his conclusions are mildly hopeful.

<sup>4</sup>Marxist, deconstructivist, and other innovative methodologies dominated the papers read at the CAA meeting in 1988. Compare *Abstracts and Program Statements* 76 (1988): passim (New York: College Art Association of America). Nineteenth century studies lead in the current methodological innovation of the discipline. T. J. Clark in *The Painting of Modern Life, Paris in the Art of Manet and his Followers* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1986) provides a good example of the trend. Victor Burgin, *The End of Art Theory and Postmodernity* (Atlantic Heights, N.J.: Humanities Press International, 1986) and Arthur Kroker, *The Postmodern Scene: Experimental Culture and Hyper-Aesthetics* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1986) further attest to the interest in theory relative to the current topic.

<sup>5</sup>See R. M. Bisanz, *The René von Schleinitz Collection of the Milwaukee Art Center, Major Schools of German Nineteenth-Century Popular Painting* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1980). Hereafter cited as *Major Schools*.

<sup>6</sup>Belting, *The End of the History of Art*, 12-15.

<sup>7</sup>*Ibid.*, 4. Belting bases himself in part on Hervé Fischer's, *L'histoire de l'art est terminée* (Paris: Balland, 1981).

<sup>8</sup>Wassily Kandinsky, Franz Marc, *Der Blaue Reiter* (Munich: Piper, 1912); facsimile (Munich: Piper, 1967).

<sup>9</sup>Philipp Otto Runge, *Hinterlassene Schriften*, Vols. I, II (Hamburg: Perthes, 1840); facsimile (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1965). Bisanz, *German Romanticism and Philipp Otto Runge, A Study in 19th Century Art Theory and Iconography* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University, 1970). See also Bisanz, "The German Romantic Reform of Aesthetic Education; Ph. O. Runge's Plan for Future Art," *The Journal of Aesthetic Education*, 22/3 (1988): 77-84. Idem, "Romantic Synthesis of the Arts: Nineteenth-Century German Theories on a Universal Art," *Konsthistorisk Tidskrift* 44/1-2 (1975): 38-46. Hereafter "Romantic Synthesis."

<sup>10</sup>Ph. O. Runge, *Gesammelte Schriften*, Vol. I: 9; translation by R. M. Bisanz.

<sup>11</sup>Franz Marc, "Die Wilden Deutschlands," *Der Blaue Reiter*, 28ff.

<sup>12</sup>Lothar-Günther Buchheim, *Die Künstlergemeinschaft Brücke* (Feldafing: Buchheim Verlag, 1956): 45; translation by R. M. Bisanz.

<sup>13</sup>Richard Hamann and Jost Hermand, *Gründerzeit* (Munich: Nymphenburger Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1974): 43ff. and passim. For characteristic examples see Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spake Zarathustra (Also sprach Zarathustra, 1883)*, trans. Thomas Common (New York: Heritage Press, 1967). Idem, *Beyond Good and Evil (Jenseits von Gut und Böse, 1886)* trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage, 1966).

<sup>14</sup>Compare for example Werner Hofmann, "Die Sattelstellung des 19. Jahrhunderts," in *Grundlagen der Modernen Kunst* (Stuttgart: Kröner, 1966), 166ff. Lionello Venturi, *History of Art Criticism* (New York: Dutton, 1964), especially 323ff. R. M. Bisanz, "More on a Discipline in Crisis and Some Possible Remedies; General Methodology in Art History and a Special Application to the 19th Century," *Art Criticism* 4/1 (1988): 1-11.

<sup>15</sup>Konrad H. Jarausch, *Students, Society, and Politics in Imperial Germany, The Rise of Academic Illiberalism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982). Fritz K. Ringer, *The Decline of the German Mandarins, The German Academic Community, 1890-1933* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1969). Charles E. McClelland, *State, Society, and University in Germany, 1700-1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980). Frederick Lilje, *The Failure of the German University* (New York: Macmillan, 1948). Daniel Fallén, *The German University, A Heroic ideal in Conflict with the Modern World* (Boulder, Colorado: Associated University Press, 1980).

<sup>16</sup>The problem of "politics and art" needs more study. Andreas Blühm's (Museum für Kunst und Kunstgeschichte, Lübeck) paper on "The Reichstag Debates (on art) 1871-1914" at the CAA meeting in 1988 (see *Abstracts*, 83) was promising. His tentative conclusions included the observation that Modernism was upheld against the Royalists by a loose coalition of Liberals and Social Democrats, acting on behalf of "an anti-monarchical force of workers and intellectuals." Compare R. M. Bisanz, *Major Schools*, 12-22 and passim; Heidi C. Ebertshäuser, *Kunsturteile des 19. Jahrhunderts, Zeugnisse, Manifeste, Kritiken zur Münchner Malerei* (Munich: Bruckmann, 1983); Hanna Gagel, "Die Düsseldorfer Malerschule in der politischen Situation des Vormärz und 1848," in Ekkehard Mai (and others), *Die Düsseldorfer Malerschule* (Mainz/Rhein: Verlag Philipp von Zabern, 1979).

- <sup>17</sup>E.g., *Lovis Corinth, Gemälde und Druckgraphik*, catalogue (Munich: Prestel, 1975). E.g., Franz Marc, "Die Wilden Deutschlands."
- <sup>18</sup>Richard Wagner, "Kunst und Revolution" (Art and Revolution) and "Das Kunstwerk der Zukunft" (The Work of Art of the Future), both of 1848, in *Schriften und Dichtungen*, vol. 3 (Leipzig: Siegels Musikhandlung, 1871).
- <sup>19</sup>See R. M. Bisanz, "Romantic Synthesis."
- <sup>20</sup>Alois Riegl, *Stilfragen, Grundlegungen zu einer Geschichte der Ornamentik* (Berlin: Schmidt & Co., 1893).
- <sup>21</sup>Idem, *Die spätromische Kunstindustrie* (Vienna: K. K. Hof- und Staatsdruckerei, 1901-23). Compare, Werner Hofmann, *Turning Points in Twentieth-Century Art: 1890-1917* (New York, George Braziller, no date).
- <sup>22</sup>Peter Selz, *German Expressionist Painting* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1957), 8ff.
- <sup>23</sup>Werner Hofmann, *Grundlagen*, 27.
- <sup>24</sup>Friedrich Schlegel, "Aphorismen," in *Athenäum*, 1797-1800 (Stuttgart: Cotta'sche Buchhandlung, 1960).
- <sup>25</sup>Hans Belting, *The End of the History of Art*, pp. 3ff.
- <sup>26</sup>Wilhelm Worringer, *Abstraktion und Einfühlung: ein Beitrag zur Stilpsychologie* (Munich: Piper, 1911). *Abstraction and Empathy* (New York: International University Press, 1953).
- <sup>27</sup>Bernard S. Myers, *The German Expressionists, A Generation in Revolt* (New York: Praeger, 1966).
- <sup>28</sup>Werner Hofmann, *Grundlagen*, 109.
- <sup>29</sup>Heinrich Wölfflin, *Kunstgeschichtliche Grundbegriffe; Das Problem der Stilentwicklung in der neueren Kunst* (Munich: Bruckmann, 1915). Idem, *Principles of Art History* (New York: Dover, 1932). Idem, *Renaissance and Baroque* (London: Collins, 1964).
- <sup>30</sup>Werner Hofmann, *Grundlagen*, 477ff.
- <sup>31</sup>Konrad Fiedler, "Der Ursprung der künstlerischen Form" (1887) and Adolf von Hildebrand, "Das Problem der Form" (1903), both in Werner Busch and Wolfgang Beyrodt, eds. *Kunsttheorie und Kunstgeschichte des 19. Jahrhunderts in Deutschland* (Stuttgart: Philipp Reclam, 1982), vol. 1, 256ff., 263ff. Clive Bell and Roger Fry elaborated the insights of Fiedler and Hildebrand in their famous doctrine of "significant form."
- <sup>32</sup>Julius Meier-Graefe, *Entwicklungsgeschichte der Modernen Kunst* (1904); 2 vol. edition (Munich: Piper, 1914; 1966).
- <sup>33</sup>This includes the essential critical emphases of most "general" texts on nineteenth-century art, e.g. those by F. Novotny, G. H. Hamilton, or J. Canaday.
- <sup>34</sup>The general texts on nineteenth-century art by Rudolf Zeitler, Jürgen Schultze, and, most recently, Robert Rosenblum, deviate markedly from that Modernist norm of writing. They return to earlier, pre-Meier-Graefian "panoramic outlines," such as those by R. Muther, L. Benedit or A. Kuhn. For a detailed discussion of this important methodological shift and its implications, consult R.M. Bisanz, "Nexus,

Flexus, Fidibus—Still, The Nineteenth Century Doesn't Add Up For Us; Review of R. Rosenblum and H. W. Janson, 19th Century Art," *Art Criticism* 4/1 (1980): 56-62.

<sup>35</sup>For example, compare Buchheim, *Die Künstlergemeinschaft Brücke*.

<sup>36</sup>The case of Macke is an especially compelling example of art history providing the impetus for creative development. See Ernst-Gerhard Güse, *August Macke* (Munich: Bruckmann, 1986), 43, 50, 127, 162, and passim. Cf. Paul Klee, *Pädagogisches Skizzenbuch*, Bauhausbücher 2nd series (Munich: Albert Langen Bauhausbücher, 1925). Cf. H. M. Wingler, *Das Bauhaus 1919-1933* (Cologne: Rasch, Bramsche, DuMont Schauberg, 1962). Idem, *The Bauhaus, Weimar, Dessau, Berlin* (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1969).

<sup>37</sup>Wassily Kandinsky, *Über das Geistige in der Kunst* (Munich, 1911). Idem, *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*, tran. M. T. H. Sadler (New York: Dover, 1977). Idem, with Marc, *Der Blaue Reiter*.

<sup>38</sup>Compare R. M. Bisanz, "The Romantic Synthesis," for a detailed analysis of the theories of Schlegel, Runge, and Wagner with an excursus on Kandinsky.

<sup>39</sup>Compare Werner Hofmann, *Grundlagen*, 81ff.; 313ff. Cf. Richard Stratton, "Preface to Dover Edition," *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*, viii.

<sup>40</sup>Peter Selz, *German Expressionist Painting*, 9.

<sup>41</sup>With *Kunstwissenschaft* art history and aesthetics became "near-verifiable" branches of science. With *Zeitschrift für bildende Kunst* (1866ff.) and its various later supplements (e.g., *Kunstchronik*, *Repertorium für Kunstwissenschaft*) and especially with the founding in 1906 of Max Dessoir's *Zeitschrift für Ästhetik und allgemeine Kunstwissenschaft*, writing about art changed from being passive, reactive and value neutral, to activist advocacy on behalf of Modernism and its presumably scientific inevitability, necessity, and predictability. This prepared the intellectual ground for J. Meier-Graefe's *apologia*, cf. *Entwicklungsgeschichte der Modernen Kunst*. Compare Ebertshäuser, ed., *Kunsturteile*. Cf. W. Beyrodt, et. al., eds., *Kunsttheorie*. Cf. W. Eugene Kleinbauer and Thomas P. Slavens, *Research Guide to the History of Western Art* (Chicago: American Library Association, 1982).

<sup>42</sup>For a detailed discussion of the city schools and the artists' associations (e.g., *Malkasten* in Düsseldorf and *Kunstverein* in Munich) see Bisanz, *Major Schools*.

<sup>43</sup>Writings on the German universities are extensive. See note 15, above for a sampling. *Lernfreiheit*, *Lehrfreiheit* and *Forschung* are universally recognized pioneering achievements. They revolutionized the university, furnishing the basic conceptual building blocks for the modern "ideal" university in the West. (Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore, Maryland, founded in 1876, was the first American university to be chartered on the basis of the German model.)

<sup>44</sup>As to the political shifts of faculty and students, the chronological, regional and "campus" variables are so great as to make generalizations virtually meaningless. Nevertheless, grand summaries have been attempted (most recently by Jarausch). But no consensus has emerged. Only the vaguest generalizations are really possible. The chaotic political situation in the 1920s and the disintegration of the German university system and its total destruction by Nazi barbarism are separate subjects for discussion. So is the depressing part that Nazi ideology and Modernism have some of the same ideational roots, such as philosophical Romantic evolu-



tionism, assertion of will power, the cult of the *Übermensch* (Schopenhauer, Nietzsche), Romantic nationalism and ethnocentricity (apparent in most German Early Romantic artists), etc. For a study of the "migration of ideas" involved in this issue see R. M. Bisanz, "The Birth of a Myth: Tischbein's Goethe in the Roman Campaign," *Monatshefte* 80/2 (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1988), 162-174; and idem, "Goethe and Tischbein in Italy, Aggrandized Eclecticism and the Beginnings of the Romantic 'Übermensch Cult': An Epigonic Painting Reconstructed," *Gazette des Beaux Arts* (Paris, 1988/89, forthcoming). Allan Bloom recently compared the university politics situation in Germany in the 1920s with that in America in the 1960s, finding them similar in many significant respects. He did this against the background of the "ideal university" in late nineteenth-century Germany. See *The Closing of the American Mind* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1987).

<sup>45</sup>Erwin Panofsky, in his autobiographical "Three Decades of Art History in the United States," in *Meaning in the Visual Arts* (New York: Doubleday, 1955), 321ff. offers a glimpse of both the extraordinarily high quality and the enormous size of the universitarian art history and theory "enterprise" in Germany. Panofsky is reminiscing about his student days in Hamburg.

<sup>46</sup>Statistics in Jarausch, *Students, Society, and Politics in Imperial Germany*, suggest an extraordinary growth in the number of faculties and humanities students in the early years of this century. (For example, in the two decades from 1890-91 to 1910-11, the number of students in the humanities increased fourfold, while faculty growth "exploded" exponentially, especially among the Privatdozenten. Extrapolating from these figures and anecdotal evidence, we can surmise exponential growth in art history "chairs," lectureships, and students. Specific figures for art history faculties and students are not available to me. See the relevant tables in Jarausch, e.g., Table 3-11. Cf. C. E. McClelland, "The Expansion of the Universities" and "The Growth of the Professoriat in Imperial Germany" in *State, Society, and University in Germany, 1700-1914*, 239ff.; 258ff.

<sup>47</sup>The crafty and partly true—if cynical and overly simplistic—"devil's argument" goes as follows: by avoiding controversy, German university professors succumbed to pressure from the increasingly authoritarian Hohenzollerns monitoring their "loyalty" to the state. That is, they turned their attention from political to aesthetic diatribe. The latter had no precarious political consequences; it afforded the professors the illusion of being revolutionary without jeopardizing their careers. They and the whole civil service culture to which they belonged vacillated in their citizen's duties, inching toward an anti-democratic status quo. Later they had no qualms of conscience about slipping into Fascist suzerainty. Inasmuch as they were ethically suspect to begin with, their contribution to Modernism, however demonstrable, may be morally contemptible. Although art criticism and *Kulturkritik* flourished then as never before or since, they were fatally flawed intellectual games because they were about "safe" subjects.

<sup>48</sup>This article is an adaptation and enlargement of a paper, "Modernism and the German Universities, 1850-1914," that I read at the national meeting of the College Art Association of America in Houston, Texas in 1988. Compare *Abstracts*, note 4. For recently published background reading on art theory see H. Belting, W. Beyrodt, R. M. Bisanz, W. Busch, H. C. Eberthäuser, W. Hofmann, E. Kleinbauer (all cited previously). For further comparative reading, see Michael Podro, *The Critical Historians of Art* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1982);

Hans Belting, ed., *Kunstgeschichte: Eine Einführung*, 3rd ed. (Berlin: Reimer, 1988);  
Udo Kultermann, *Geschichte der Kunstgeschichte* (Frankfurt: Ullstein, 1981);  
*Ibid.*, *The History of Art History* (Pleasantville, New York: Abaris Books, Inc.,  
forthcoming).

The following papers were presented at  
MOUNTAIN LAKE SYMPOSIUM IX  
IN PITTSBURGH—

“Artists in Locale: Beyond a Regional Critique”  
November 18, 19, 20, 1988

**There has been an attempt to preserve the articles in their original state.**

# A Narrative of Women's Experience

By Judith Russi Kirshner

In these remarks, I shall begin a selected inventory, a still sketchy map of a not so distant space, as Barbara Johnson calls it, a region in which riches yet to be inventoried sleep. My explorations of that region depend on, and are inspired by, the representations and narrations of women artists in the locale from which I draw my experience and will describe to you. For some of these artists, locale is still inscribed in or located on the female body, as well as in the self, albeit a self that is sexually and culturally split into self and other, a self that is finally fragmented or ultimately disembodied. For other artists, the locale is imaginary or made up, a narrative of women's experience. These artists—Christina Ramberg, Ida Applebroog, Hollis Sigler, Nancy Bowen, Jeanne Dunning, and Judy Ledgerwood—determine their existing locale—as the title of the symposium suggests—beyond a regional critique, at a margin. And that margin extends, transcends, or supplements any given region, whether it be a mainstream style or a commercial center.

gendered artists, in representations that recuperate traditional media, painting, and sculpture. My observations include one example of photography, but are not limited to politically correct techniques of post structuralist photography. Watching for misfits—for what Adrienne Rich has called lies,

secrets and silences, or unread letters—as well as unbound by rational or objective categories, I am moving towards a theory of feminist representation by women that reaches beyond the influential, spectacular images and media critique. Like so many of us in the past two decades, I have learned a great deal about the cultural conventions that stereotype and mask the female and the feminine. My observations constitute a response to the questions of our session and they will perhaps reveal and conserve messages, the radicality of which may not yet have been explored.<sup>1</sup>

But before an inventory is even possible, we have to recognize and locate our subjects and their context, and this in and of itself becomes a challenge to our ability to situate ourselves and our subjects. For these women, the search for subjects has become a search for subjectivity in conditions of possibility—whether regional, stylistic, historical, political or all of the above. I focus on just a few artists and three themes or three constructions upon which they build. The most well used, perhaps even overused since the beginnings of the feminist art movement of the seventies, has to do with the body, the female torso, as well as the head. Most important is the use of synecdoche, or how the part stands in for the whole—a by now traditional trope in some women's art that is celebrated, for example, in Louise Bourgeois and devalued in Judy Chicago. The second addresses the issue of makeup, and its associate, mimicry, another strategy that long has served disempowered groups who need masquerade to assume power, to represent themselves as something other than oppressed. Finally, I want to discuss a particular kind of narrative, which I shall call, continuing the pretense, "making it up." Self-consciously, then, these women construct a narrative with a disembodied voice, text and image, while others take apart their body, even as they make it up. My reflections depend on a materialist point of view that locates theory not only in the social and economic conditions central to our understanding of culture but also in the body. Moreover, my borrowings from deconstructive strategies are apparent as is the influence of psychoanalysis. Although I cannot suggest metonymic connections between the three themes, their overlappings and the different ways in which they are used to frame feminist subjects will be obvious to you.

One of the gifts of feminism has been an interpretive framework or elastic analytical perspective that has allowed, and in some cases even forced, me to question my ways, seeing, and probably even more importantly, where to look. The uneasy alliance struck between theories of poststructuralism and feminism is itself now being deconstructed. The liberating potential of Roland Barthes' "death of the author at the birth of the reader" has been acknowledged, but we also have understood how individuals who traditionally have felt excluded from authorship or authority might want a chance to produce texts and images. The formerly unvoiced want voices. Nevertheless, the linguistic revolutions of the twentieth century have brought with them the recognition that meaning is never simply expressed or reflected in language, but produced by it. Visual representation and language can thus be sites of political activity in a vocabulary that includes

subjectivity, sexuality, difference, and gender. Feminist analysis in the seventies demonstrated that apparent gender neutrality is impossible. Now gender is understood to mean not merely biological difference but a socially constructed and culturally transmitted difference. According to Barbara Johnson, "The profound political intervention of feminism has indeed been not simply to enact a radical politics but to redefine the very nature of what is deemed political, to take politics down from its male incarnation as a change-seeking interest in what is not nearest to hand, and to bring it into the daily historical texture of the relations between the sexes. The literary ramifications of this shift involve the discovery of the rhetorical survival skills of the formerly unvoiced." From my regional vantage point, feminism allows for a discovery of identity, a varied series of subject positions and multiple modes of visual representation. The three themes I focus on are only a sample from an expanded range of discourses.

Shifting between regionalism and feminism is as delicate and slippery as the shifts between poststructuralism and feminism. Both feminism and regionalism are states of otherness, or conditions of marginality. About a month ago, I participated in an architectural panel whose theme was "Looking for America: Failed Attempts to Heal an Irrevocable Wound." This highly personal and provocative title belongs to Stanley Tigerman, an architect who has practiced in Chicago for many years but whose self-image as exile, suggesting that he at least once had a home, has allowed him to extend his theories, if not his structures, to communities that lie far beyond the geographical. On that panel of architects and architectural historians, I was the outsider, speaking about aesthetic products which participated in exchange and were subject to critical evaluation, but had no function. In Chicago, the architectural paradigm is compelling, and despite the obvious differences between architecture and art—architecture by definition depends on patronage and is constituted by economics—the similarities between regionalism in architectural parlance and in the language of art are striking. Tigerman's "wound," postmodern negativity and resignation, was problematic. It is perhaps inappropriate and ungracious to admit that I am probably less interested in regionalism than in almost anything else I know, since I live in a region and have tried not to be confined by its stylistic and historical parameters. But there has also been a tinge of pleasure in the ability to participate from the fringes, from the region, without being a member. There is the possibility that this is also the pleasure of feminism, from the center which of course, leads me to the divided self in a region separate from the center.

How do artists locate themselves beyond a regional critique? In the midwest, regionalism is overdetermined by shadows cast by the Sears Tower, Kraft cheese, and Grant Wood. It is a category that is imposed rather than actively determined or chosen. Most of the artists I have come to appreciate and work with produce in locales outside of the mainstream or more directly outside of the market; thus, as difficult as mainstream is to define, regionalism is even more difficult. On a more general level, artists have always been part of society and outside it, simultaneously excluded

**ERRATUM** . Page 20, Second Paragraph, Line One:

The work I am describing takes into account gendered viewers and

and included as observers or seers. What we all recognize is that we are outside and when you are not in the mainstream you know your place; you are certain that you are not there. An immediate and glamorous example of the self-presentation of the mainstream insider is Jeff Koons' new advertisements, persona as cultural creation, now appearing in four different, influential art journals. Parenthetically, I can't help but notice that Koons' poses, positions, and posturings suggest a remarkable simulation of authority and profound comprehension of the desires of one's audience. There are multiple methods that one can use to shift the status of outsider, of other, to a more enabling or empowering position. There are several artists who have done this. Donald Kuspit has referred to Nancy Spero's maneuvers, for instance, as the apotheosis of the outsider. He has noted how Spero first valorized woman as outsider and then as artist. There is one group of artists who have consistently found themselves outside, without locale, and they are, of course, women artists attempting in their work a recuperation of the traditional media of painting and sculpture.

Let me set the stage for the divided self by reminding you of one of the most notable examples of "mistaken" gender identity, Marcel Duchamp's alter ego, Rose Sélavy. Duchamp in drag announces a self that is split, doubled along axes of sexuality. Even the name is doubled as a pun and a proper name in a "vicious circle of eroticism," which through elisions and inversions, "upsets the balance of meaning identity."<sup>2</sup> Of course there is the equally notorious inversion, the mustache and beard on the Mona Lisa added in 1919. In 1972, Julien Levy, a friend and Duchamp collector, wrote that the artist made "inventions," that it was "no coincidence that in 1919 Marcel added the Gioconda to a mustache." (*L.H.O.O.Q. Rectified Readymade*, Paris.) This combination of readymade and iconoclastic dadaism, this persona seems inevitable for the mythopoetic aesthetic Duchamp proposes. Rose is not only Belle Haleine but also Dulcinea, the Bride, the Statue of Liberty, the mannequin in Duchamp's clothes on Rue Surrealiste. She is also recumbent with lamp in hand in *Étant Donnés*.

For those versed in Dada and Surrealism, her fame parallels the Mona Lisa's and the need for Eros is clear. She allows Duchamp to be himself, gives him freedom in which to operate in any way he likes, not to fit, as Kynaston McShine has noted.

In a current advertisement for Chanel cosmetics, there is another double, both subject and object, swinging the Mona Lisa, one of the icons of high culture. It is not only a portrait of a great beauty, but also a most expensive painting whose value is inconceivable if a Jasper Johns painting is now valued at \$17 million. Our heroine striding across the street is empowered, also beautiful, expensive, and French. Her glamorous poise and pose are ruffled only by the intrusion of a phallic lipstick placed between her legs. But still how can one read this image? Is there an inversion in the idea that a man created it, incorporating masculine traditions and patriarchal values? The Mona Lisa is a possession of high culture. At the risk of simplifying, the woman then makes herself up, just as the culture makes her up and has made her up since the Renaissance. So perhaps there is



another kind of inversion, a sacrilege that sells a joking recuperation of the image. An active new woman repossesses the passive Mona Lisa, strides away with the inverted image, taking it back. Even before Laura Mulvey's oft-quoted essay on visual pleasure, John Berger noted that "Women's longing to disappear, to obliterate consciousness of the self as a physical presence is increasingly difficult to do when women have been turned into signs of consumption." He continues, "A woman's self being split into two. A woman must continually watch herself. She is almost continually accompanied by her own image of herself. Whilst she is walking across a room or whilst she is weeping at the death of her father, she can scarcely avoid envisaging herself walking or weeping. From earliest childhood she has been taught and persuaded to survey herself continually."<sup>3</sup>

### A Body

Christina Ramberg's powerful paintings of female torsos encased in lace corsets and bandages originate in an imagination that was female *avant la lettre*, *Lacanian avant la parole*. It's as though she understood that women have been asked to "fetishize" themselves because of the inherent domination of the male gaze and the construction of desire. If we subscribe to the idea that female mystery is a male construct, then, as Naomi Schor observed, "Woman covered herself, she became a riddle to male in order to implant in his heart the desire for the riddle's solution."

Ramberg's headless torsos constitute a sustained and often monumental examination of questions of identity. In the late sixties, her work was fixated on partial figures, captured in looking glasses; she also made immaculately detailed paintings of hairdos and closely observed and intricately patterned ornament. A hand becomes a personality with oriental grace; the twisted glove is an alluring veil and a prophylactic. In the seventies, Ramberg concentrated on that body that rests between the neck and knees, not female nudes but females encased, bandaged, corseted in women's paraphernalia. In these paintings, the link between detail and eroticism is clear. The repression of detail and ornament is usually carried out in the name of a certain moral code since detail has its role in pornography.

For some viewers these black, lacy, widely textured undergarments assumed sadomasochistic overtones as they bound up and objectified the female body. Indeed, art critic Dennis Adrian sees the brassieres, dress shields, corsets, silk panties, shiny and lacy stockings as stereotypes from girlie magazines having the whiff of s and m and fetishism. Like our Chanel model, Ramberg's women prepare to go out into the world made up, transformed by layered bits of artifice. Another observer, Carol Becker, finds that these amazonian fragments are like fashion parodying itself. Even though Ramberg always has formally considered her figures as urns, for Becker they are "cinched, wrapped, bandaged, bonded, constrained to signify psychic unfreedom....victims of fashion and style, few women have ever owned their own bodies, lived in them as if they were their own." Having lost their bodies, Ramberg's figures have also their place and

heraldically fill the canvases, even though they are fragmented, ripped, and in some almost violent depictions, coming undone or shattering apart.

*Shady Lacy, Black Widow, Satin Hanky, Waiting Lady*—these film-noirish titles from the early seventies reinforce the relationship between woman getting dressed, and her unseen but always present viewer. They insinuate the knowing menace of these stylized subjects and suggest that identities can be revealed and exposed by garments designed to conceal. Collecting old advertisements as source material, Ramberg produced the most astonishingly inventive repertoire of underwear, rendered with incredible patience and loving detail, tiny brushstrokes on a flat surface belying any trace of signature or gesture. In the seventies, her images became emblematic, the wrappings textured like leather, fiber, silk, and net until they became carapaces, part of the often grotesque figure, not only clothing it. Ramberg enticingly demonstrates how these garments segment the body into many parts, each adding to the body's alienation and to the culture's ability to fetishize and eroticize its bondage. Having lost their bodies to ornamental desire, Ramberg's subjects are dislocated from contingency but depend on their edges to serve as boundaries of the self.

But there is still another viewer, the artist herself. The presence of underarm shields, admittedly transformed and detailed, hints at the artist's, and perhaps the viewer's, childhood and the innocence of the daughter's perspective, watching the mother. As the mother's body is wrapped in adult garments, out of sight, it becomes more desirable as a model; and yet, it removes the mother from the oedipal desire of possession. And, of course, it limits the woman's freedom of movement. Again, Berger's acknowledgment of the woman as sight, an object of vision, is relevant and points to this artist's unconscious wish to accept the body's need for transformation. Some of Ramberg's transformations suggest androgyny, another gender split, but the most significant strain is the one that shows the urn figure as capable of production, seen for example in a painting called *Apron Core*.

After an intermission producing gorgeous quilts, Ramberg recently has whittled her paintings to elegant, sometimes spidery skeletons of those urns. Smaller in scale, they are incredibly spatial structures, volumetric and cosmic. No longer referring to wood, rope, or flesh, these black and white gossamer containers seem to hold the world despite their scale. No longer frightening in their muscular dismemberment, they are free and whole, stripped of flesh and garments, no longer fragmented but resolved and harmonious. These open urns, derived from the seemingly transparent apron paintings, do not depend on dissected figures but finally represented a presence that transcends private issues and become abstracted containers. They are less legible as anatomy than their earlier counterparts, and more open ended, formally and conceptually. They resemble constellations, heads or mechanical scaffolding for endless possibilities.

Nancy Bowen's sculpted heads, vessels and torsos—all transmuted bodies mounted on steel braces—probe the boundaries of self. Bowen has focused on body parts that are sexual but nonspecific as well as distorted, and sets them up for display, our viewing pleasure, in armatures. She also locates

monumental terracotta heads on the floor of a given exhibition space so that they appear like painted fragments from some early civilization. Bowen has moved away from the ornamental desires of decadent detail in her small-scale early interiors accessorized with shoes, clothes, and female accoutrements. In her recent work, for example *Inconjunct*, she joins strong twin heads together by thick braids that appear umbilical. Working with clay, Bowen has focussed in on details of body parts whose exact identity is questioned, as is their gender. In the classically titled *Omphalos*, meaning navel, coils are braided into legs and change is the subject of the sculptural work whose sexuality becomes twisted as one moves around the piece. In the *Dreamer, Listener* the three-foot long head is slit open at the back to reveal an inner ear, sea shell, or sexual cavity in what could be viewed as a sculptural and metonymic realization of the divided self.

### A Narrative

In the split between text and image, the feminine is usually associated with the image. But many women have mistaken and misread texts. The most obvious examples are Kruger and Holzer. There are, however, other ways to take texts and use the framing devices of film strips or scrolls as spaces for narratives. The amazing work of Nancy Spero comes to mind as do the paintings of Ida Applebroog, who calls herself a misfit whose works, which she labels generic, are often mistaken. Applebroog has traveled from conceptual art to modest artist's books with elliptical narratives of daily life and couples. Then came the more cinematic frames of rhoplex, the linear figures, and small-talk balloons of dialogue, which, in turn, have given way now to enormous canvases. Their ambition and scale coincide, but their readings remain separate, framed, mismatched, and misproportioned. In modernism the protagonists would be labeled isolated and alienated; the viewer outside of the scenes is offered voyeuristic glimpses of everyday life behind rear windows. These bits of voyeurism can be compared to the staged moments of psychic revelation in Hollis Sigler's paintings. Now Applebroog offers large-scale startling indictments, figures who wear grotesque masks or are constrained by corsets. They bellow from canvases whose smaller subdivisions carry images of couples, whose embrace can be read as both warm and violent. The smaller figures are like a paperdoll Greek chorus, or those small figures who held the thread of the narrative in Italian fifteenth-century predellas. They perhaps stand in for us and introduce us to the performance that Applebroog's paintings relate, like squares on the monopoly game of life we follow, but cannot understand. The quiet little phrases are quite literally understatements, handwritten. They are enunciations that soft-peddle the energy of the narrative, the declamatory posture and noise of the larger figures, the subjects. Applebroog represents the unvoiced; her inscriptions, not on the body, insinuate subjectivity and enable narrative to free itself from the conventional unity of time and space and from the mainstream. Book reading depends on rereading, on a retrospective succession of signs while visual art depends

on synchronism. We see the image at a glance, yet Applebroog holds us there, attempting to forge a narrative out of these mismatched images and come to terms with our reading of these institutionalized terrors of daily experience.

If written narratives are theatres in armchairs, then the bodiless tableaux of Hollis Sigler represent an oneiric theater. Sigler's paintings and drawings are all obviously made up, often to represent a stage with curtains, and lights that illuminate a domestic scene. Like those dreams where we find ourselves naked, both spectacle and spectator, her characters expose their thoughts, and things, but not their bodies. Clearly recognizable as the suburbs, her locale is simultaneously bourgeoisie, mundane, and fantastic.

As Simon Schama describes the interiors of Dutch painting, in the works of Peter de Hooch and Jan Steen so, too, can Sigler's tableaux be described as stages for the struggle between worldliness and homeliness, between domestic virtue and pleasure. Dutch seventeenth-century art was the first to celebrate the ideal ordering of the family home, as well as to satirize its disruption. Disorderly houses shocked because they erased the frontier between houses of license and homes of virtue. According to Schama, "Home as microcosm was indeed in the seventeenth century a Christian arcadia, with spotless, unrumpled beds without stain or suspicion. Just as the home itself was supposed to cleanse the external world of its impurities before being admitted across its threshold, so the wife within was its chief cleansing agent and moral, as well as mundane laundress. Trouble could be expected whenever the boundaries between the world and home, street and hearth, were not strictly observed." In Sigler's paintings, domestic container can become a constraining locale, a jewel-like cell for emotional acting out. There is a bit of "I Love Lucy" in the potentially dangerous, lit-up soap operas of Sigler's allegories, "their unbuttoned havoc." Kitchen implements are bloody weapons, mirrors shatter in these raucous spectacles where stockings and heels are tossed by vanity tables that become tabernacles to the feminine.

In Holland, the laborer of love cleans and purifies the home. In Prairie View, a Chicago suburb where Sigler locates herself, we see a melodramatic scene of passion, of turbulence, of ecstasy filtered through the rhetoric of gothic novels. Even when the rhetoric is cool, the image is hot, the palette is by Crayola and the style is sometimes childlike. The place Sigler creates is her stage where dramas are enacted. But then the inversion, this place of artistic imagination, is also recognizable; it is the suburbs, it should be comfortable. She is surrounded and signified by her possessions as in the novels of Diane Johnson, where the heroine always imagines the worst and it always occurs. But something always lurks in the aura of the TV or the lights behind walls that animate the spaces. Perhaps these are locations for a personality terrified to leave home, to leave the suburb for the center, the margin for the mainstream. The anxiety is palpable, the fear and terror as painful in the suburbs, in the painter's bedroom, as they are in the mainstream.

Also multilayered is the spatial representation of these vibrant locales: there is the object itself, its objecthood underscored by the elaborate frame, the depicted scene in the frame, and the space, as always, where we, the interpreters, stand to read the work. Then there is the space implied behind the scenes and up the stairs, and, finally, the space referenced in the language. All of Sigler's works are framed by language, small epigrams that trail in banners across the space or are inscribed in the ornamental frames. But the artist feels that everything is language in her work and finds an idea or an emotion before she finds the caption or the image.

This locale is about as egocentric as it can get; it is peopled with her high heels, her stockings, her dresses, her vanity tables, and her vanity; yet something is missing. The narrator, the subject of the private feelings that have assumed center stage, is absent or disembodied. Less overtly critical of society, these political personal narratives lack a heroine; indeed, they lack figures or if there is a figure, she is just slipping out the door or not yet arrived. It is as though her private feelings, her subjectivity, has taken the stage.

Her language stands in for her, speaks about her, and speaks to us—making demands, cracking a joke, and making up truths in lies, secrets, and silence. Sigler inscribes the following captions—supplements as well as captions to her work—to locales that are about as egocentric as one can get; they are avowedly sentimental. Sometimes they sound like Patsy Cline or Edith Piaf: *Her Habits Make Her Home, She Could Never Explain Her Pain, She Was Losing Control of the Situation, She Just Couldn't Face the Truth, She Has Secrets from Herself, Encountering the Loss of Mystery, What She Doesn't Know Won't Hurt Her, Where We Try to Keep Our Secrets* and *She Cried Out "This Can't be Real."* It is a kind of vernacular, loving with a vengeance; *She's Got Them Broken Pearl Blues* could have been written by Tammy Wynette or Marvin Gaye. The details of the language resonate, on the one hand, they are simple and aphoristic and on the other, when they signal the terrors of everyday emotional life, they are even more profound.

Sigler trades in sentimental messages in many voices, messages about a woman's emotions and her art. In other cases the language framing the spectacle is that of a director giving instructions—alternately it can be the super ego instructing the ego that thrashes about wanting to meringue, to party, to shop. Sometimes the voice is intimate and insinuating of narrator showing and telling us about the play within the play and the narrator, whom I believe is the woman who paints the tiny simple canvases like *The Sins of the Mother Pass to the Daughter, Why is Guilt Part of Temptation?, You Keep Tampering with my Heart and Isn't It Great to be an Artist?* In these small paintings, the bedsheets are canvases, the blood stains are paint. For me these paintings come close to being iconic, having their own internal illumination recalling the detail, the experience, and the charged intensity of the votive paintings of Frida Kahlo. How others see me, how I see myself, making a spectacle of myself, and, ultimately, the impossibility, or lack of signified results in the substitution of language

for subject in a complicated and subtle process in Sigler's charming to look at, but subtle and complex panels. The artist's need to make herself up is her desire to change and transform not only herself but her subjects. No longer disembodied, their voices give them subjectivity as seen in *The Lady is Divine*, *The Lady is Awesome*, *She Just Couldn't Face the Truth*, *Always Aspiring*, and *I Want What I Want*.

### *Mimicry and Scrupulous Faking*

In addition to regional versions of painting and sculpture, younger artists also have used photography to achieve their objectives. One of the last two artists whom I shall discuss briefly explores the body photographically, the other produces painted representations of unspecified locales. Jeanne Dunning's very literal photographs of decontextualized legs and arms turned body into landscape, but, this time, questioned our ability to read images that emphasize the unnatural and unattractive. Another set of photographs pictures sticks and leaves, seemingly natural objects whose fictional status—these were studio shots of fake branches and leaves against false blue backdrops—would have been obvious were it not for the Latin captions that misled the viewer into reading the images as matching the captions. Like many artists, Dunning questions the truthfulness of photography, confuses convention of vision with perception, and naming or language with pictures. Her elaborate, "arty" frames mimicked the environments pictured and also pointed out their figurative status.

In a portrait series, Dunning takes the transgressive traces that Duchamp left on the votive icon of Mona Lisa. She has appropriated his marks, inverting them to render herself and others masculine or masculine-like. Her gesture can be read in many contradictory ways, as mocking as that of Duchamp or as joking portrayals of women as slightly grotesque freaks. The transition from Baudelaire's essay on makeup as artifice, "In Praise of Makeup," and art to making it up seems almost complete. Making it up, and making oneself up and making up a self are all ideas that each of the artists, maybe every artist, has explored on the way to finding a misplaced identity. In the mid-seventies, Eleanor Antin fused art-making and identity in *Carving a Traditional Sculpture and Representational Painting*, a videotape of 1972. Antin elaborated on this pretense of artifice and created several persona and performances around a role of a ballerina and a nurse. Martha Wilson and Antin both explored the drag syndrome; Wilson in *Posturing Drag* when she first became a man then a man dressed as a woman. Obviously, this is a tradition that predates Cindy Sherman's exhaustive, critical inventory of selves or identities. Her use of photography annexes the role of woman as object in advertising and the media and is often as spectacular as her sources. Barbara Kruger's misfit images and admonitions are striking examples of the power of woman's language; Jenny Holzer's accomplishments are such that they have been recognized by the international committees to represent the United States at the next Venice Biennale. But there are others sending messages, secrets

and even lies, scrupulous faking it or making it up. Fascinated with attributes associated with one gender but shared by both, Dunning tries the mustache out on women, to see how they look, to see if she looks like a man, to locate her self as a woman posing with a mustache, to see if she fits.

Two bearded gentlemen pose as bathing beauties in a photograph which Judy Ledgerwood and Pam Golden used for the announcement of a recent exhibition. The beauties are Thomas Eakins and his friend J. Laurie Wallace, photographed by Thomas Anschutz. Ledgerwood's paintings are giant, fluffy landscapes that recall all the tradition and convention of sublime painting. In her representations of natural scenes, we find echoes of Titian, Constable, Turner, and the *National Geographic*. Like so much work of the eighties, Ledgerwood's turbulent rhetoric is produced from art history and photographic reproduction in the studio. Submerging herself in tradition, she imitates the picturesque and creates an illusion of an illusionary masterpiece. Once again, we see the time-honored strategy of the less powerful, mimicry. Ledgerwood is skeptical of her models but also admires their beauty so much that she imitates or mimics their style.

By viewing my own interpretation as a fiction-making activity, I can begin to locate my own subjectivity at the same time that I located a subject or some subjects of my work, in my experience. That dual focus on I, the narrator, has become a strategy of self-consciousness as a critical method for artists and critics. It means that we recognize a doubleness in the knowledge that we are our own subject matter just as women are our own subject matter. Whether we write, paint, or look after our children, all our activity is defined by gender constructs. One task of this late twentieth-century chapter of feminism is to recognize the all-pervasiveness of gender in shaping our experiences and our lives, politically and culturally.

Feminist deconstruction has allowed for an analytical position of "both and" that is characteristic of the duality in the personal and the political, the subjected and subjectivity. Women artists and writers have opened doors to the scene and the unseen, the scene and the obscene or what literary critics called "gendered reading," not unlike gendered viewing. Making gender visible, they have produced images that evoke different responses in different people. They have represented themselves as subject and addressed their work to other women as subjects. They have transformed their daily, private experience into creative expression that not only determines aesthetic meaning, but also offers the possibility of redefining the cultural as political. It is difficult to negotiate between a desire to transform not only our readings of culture, but also the ideology and material structure of our social life. In the late eighties, the contradictions of feminism have been recognized and forcefully debated, even represented so that all women "cannot be collapsed into a fixed identity" or sameness. For many of the artists that I discussed today, feminism is much more than "just one more critical approach in the marketplace of ideas." It provides a site in which we can locate subjectivity and attempt to change our subjects, but only if we are willing to tolerate productive contradictions and partial truths.

# Artist, Career, Mainstream, and Art

By Jacques Leenhardt

Last year, during preliminary discussions for this conference, we tried to formulate a specific problem: that of the career of the artist who, for various reasons, developed outside the mainstream. It looked fairly interesting and easy to formulate: what are the strategies of those artists who have not entered the mainstream?

When I started thinking of an appropriate methodology to investigate this question, I realized that the *concept* I was using was far from clear. I wanted to undertake a sociological investigation but felt it was first necessary to question the notions I was spontaneously using. What is an artist's career? What is mainstream? To what silent majority do these notions refer? To the common taste of a large audience or to the stockmarket of art values?

I think we should start by analyzing these notions. What do we mean when we speak of an artist's career? I suspect that the very notion of "career" can be profoundly *misleading* because the idea we immediately come up with is that a career develops more or less continuously. This notion thus refers to both a kind of natural development of a person, on



the one hand, who, like a tree, becomes stronger and stronger, bearing fruits and spreading its shadow further and further over the world, and, on the other hand, a kind of social alignment, where the artist has to follow social rules and fit into aesthetical molds.

The notion of a career therefore *implicitly* contains the contradiction between the natural aspect of biological development *and* the sociological aspect of social integration by the person and the work itself. Although the contradiction does exist, it would appear to be resolved, since it is related to an individual's personal dynamism. The concept of the social and aesthetic subject, as problematic as it may appear to people working in the art world, does, nevertheless, bridge the gap between the autonomous biological development of a human being and his/her necessity to adapt to the canon of social and aesthetical hegemonies.

Thus the sociologist who begins investigating the artist's career has to deal with two types of reality: the career as experienced by a *subject* who produces his/her own life image through dramatic delivery, and the career as a system of constraints elaborated by the dominant pole of the art world: the market. On the one hand *discourse* about subjectivity; on the other *negation* of subjectivity.

When we listen to artists who have not entered the mainstream, that is to say the market—be it at a regional, national or international level—the similarities between their discourses are amazing. Whether they complain or not, whether they explain that they have the feeling their future depends on fate or that they are full of hope or bitterness, they use the same discourse: the dramatic narrative of the preservation of the self, of their inalienable subjectivity.

We know that this discourse is both a claim and a fiction, for we know how brutal the process of integration of the subject is. In a world, art world, where everybody has to conceive him/herself as a unique being, the claim to be an autonomous subject frequently becomes an illusion and a fiction. Nevertheless, artists and critics have to deal with this as a part of the art world.

Now, if we listen to this discourse as a symptom of the artist's situation, we have to know, in order to understand it, how the art world functions.

The contradiction between the subject's own life-image and the system of social constraints was the one I had to face and the choice I had to make. Sociology has developed a topology of the artist. As Howard Becker points out, there are different types of artists: the *integrated professional*, the *maverick*, the *folk artist*, and the *naive artist*. Let me give you a short definition of the first of those types, according to Becker, in order to understand what could be considered as his/her career.

Integrated professionals have the technical abilities, social skills and conceptual apparatus necessary to make it easy to make art. Because they know, understand and habitually use the conventions on which their world runs, they fit easily into all its standard activity.... If they are painters, they use available materials to produce works which, in size, form, design, color and content fit into the available space and into people's ability

to respond appropriately. They stay within the bounds of what potential audiences and the State consider respectable. By using and conforming to the conventions governing materials, forms, contents, modes of representation, sizes, shapes, duration and modes of financing, integrated professionals make it possible for an art work to occur efficiently and easily. Large numbers of people can coordinate their activities with a minimum investment of time and energy, simply by identifying the conventions everyone should follow.<sup>1</sup>

The concept of the *art world*, as used by Becker, thus implicitly provides a definition of the career of the *integrated professional artist*, the principal notions being "to fit in," "to conform oneself to." It is clear that this definition only applies to artists working in a rather stable world, where norms of behavior are more or less explicit or at least easy to acquire. The best example to illustrate this is the art world in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

Hence the typology organized by Becker not only describes a segment of the contemporary world of art, it also applies to a specific historical situation of art, which sociology would call the *traditional mode of art production*. By "traditional" I mean a mode of production where norms and rules are dominant, where workmanship is therefore important, where the establishment determines the artist's personal behavior, and the works themselves. The profile of an artist's career is then that of an *apprenticeship*, and the formula for teaching young artists could be: how to keep up with the Jones', how to enter the mainstream, how to mold oneself in order to fit into the model.

I would stress the fact that this type of career is related, if not exclusively, to a historical period, in order to show that the *contemporary art world* only partly corresponds to this definition, since during the second half of the nineteenth century new ingredients entered into the definition of the artist.

Howard Becker calls the "Modern artist" *maverick*:

Every organized art world produces mavericks, artists that have been part of the conventional art world of their time, place and medium but found it inacceptably constraining. They propose innovations the art world refuses to accept as within the limits of what it ordinarily produces. Other participants in the world audiences, support personnel, sources of support or distributors refuse to cooperate in the production of these innovations. Instead of giving up and returning to more acceptable materials and styles, mavericks continue to pursue the innovation without the support of other art world personnel.<sup>2</sup>

The new ingredient is analyzed by Becker as the "inacceptable constraint." What does that mean? Why should a traditional constraint suddenly be perceived as unacceptable? Becker proposes an individualistic and psychological rejection of these constraints. Does this make sense?

On the one hand, under the figure of the maverick, Becker is actually describing the "autonomization" of the artist from the Church and from

the Court. Against the rules and norms decreed by Kings and Cardinals, he/she affirms his/her autonomy.

But on the other hand, this autonomization is made possible by a profound change in the value system itself. The traditional values of craftsmanship, of obedience and continuity, have vanished. In their place we now find revolutionary values such as the *new*, the *surprising*, the *unexpected*. Even the materiality of a work of art, its two-dimensional surface, the canvas, etc., all these traditional elements of a work of art, have become unessential.

What are, now, the transformations weighing on the career of an artist in this new art world? There is obviously no clear-cut separation between an *innovative integrated professional* and a maverick. As an example we can just look at the way Julian Schnabel, who is by no means a maverick, has been able to adapt himself to the architectural constraints imposed by the Carnegie Institute building where his work was exhibited. Becker's typology distinguishes between two different *modes of "being an artist."* We have to confront the different types of logic behind them.

Let us take as an example the now (commercially) famous painting by Jasper Johns. The title of the work, *False Start* (1959), immediately indicates that the painter is dealing with his career. What does *False Start* mean? It probably refers to many things at the same time. For instance, it is remarkable that Johns uses a metaphor borrowed from the sports world: it should make us think that the painter sees himself as a sprinter. A career then is no longer a long cross-country run but a short-distance race, where the *start* determines the finish and the chances of success. The idea of *False Start* also suggests a *mistaken orientation*, *wrong direction* or *dead end* taken by the artist. Two more examples will stress the importance of this idea.

In his own museum, a museum he dedicated to his own work, Vasarely calls the paintings he produced in the forties *Misguided Works*. By this he means that, after a good first period in the twenties and early forties, influenced by the Bauhaus, he turned to figurative painting after World War II, before going back to the formalism and optical geometrism he had already developed in the thirties. He thus had to reorient his career; and he considers the recognition of his errors so important that he himself underlines the magnitude of this mistake by *labeling* these paintings *Misguided Works*.

Another example of the importance of these reorientations during the development of a career is that of Christo. As everybody knows, Christo has been wrapping objects since 1960. In the late fifties, however, and particularly in 1959, a few months before the wrapping period began, he made *objects*, half sculpture half paintings, with flowing material over the surface. The way in which Christo recognized his false start is different from that of Vasarely: he simply discarded the objects he made, excluding them from his general catalogue. As if Mondrian had discarded all his pre-geometrical works!

Hence we not only have moments of reorientation, of stylistic change, but also a verbal strategy to give an ontological value to each of these styles. According to these principles, a history of contemporary art will explain that Christo was not Christo before he had begun to wrap, like Christ was not Christ—but only Jesus—before being wrapped in the famous linen shroud! You'll find the text in the Gospel according to Saint John, chapter 20.

Now let us go back to Johns and have a look at his interpretation of *False Start*. Shortly before painting *False Start*, Johns acknowledged

certain limitations in my work and I had the need to overcome those, to break with certain habits I had formed, certain procedures I had used. The flags and targets have color positioned in a predetermined way. I wanted to find a way to apply color so that the color would be determined by some other method.

As we can see, Johns needed to break off at a certain point with a *maniere*, a *thematic* and/or a *style* he had developed. Interestingly enough, the rupture does not consist in distancing himself from a school or a movement; it does involve a break with socially established aesthetical values, but only—as for Vasarely or Christo—an internal revolution, a rupture ensuring the identity and continuity of the work. Johns neither faces a general aesthetical problem, nor develops a particular theory of color. He is only instigating internal revolutions, because he knows that the painter no longer has to provide the public with a *world-view* (*Weltanschauung*). On the contrary, he has to make his *dynamism* visible. Reorientation in style and “*maniere*” is evidence of internal dynamism, and dynamism has become the mark of identity, the very commodity the market can invest in. Johns' explanation goes as follows. He had previously executed a series of monochromatic gray paintings in encaustic which emphasized the “objectness” of the canvas, as he says, “to avoid the color situation.” He then faced the color situation at its zero degree: “Flags and Targets have color positioned in a predetermined way.” Here, in *False Start*, he tries to challenge the meaning of colors or to bring new contradictions in the viewers' experience by opposing the name of the color to its physical reality. All that in a few months.

What I wanted to point out by this example is that there is an inflation in terms and internal revolution. When Johns speaks of “breaking habits” and “overcoming limitations” he is actually speaking of undertaking his work as a maverick, because the vocabulary of revolution and avant-gardism has become the language of the art career, the mainstream language, the *tradition of the new*. Thus the continuity of the artist's career is determined by the constant succession of ruptures. In Howard Becker's terms, the *integrated professional* who works in the field of avant-gardism (as one part of the art world and of the art market) has to emphasize the fact that he belongs to this field as an integrated artist precisely by making clear and evident his ability to break rules and norms. Here we are not only confronted with the lack of a clear-cut separation between an *innovative*

*integrated artist* and a *maverick*: we see how much the artist, in order to succeed in the avant-garde art world and market, has to demonstrate that the future is already here, that the constant movement of forms and ideas is the essence of his/her work, that past, present and future are simultaneously all in his/her work. That is the very significance of *False Start*, an art world adaptation of the old paradox of the liar: I tell you the truth when I tell you I am lying. Of course Johns did lie: *False Start* won the race, and became a model for future artists.

All this brings us back to the problem of the artist's career, to the problem of career as mastering of the lifetime in terms of social and economic legitimation.

At the beginning I stressed the fact that the concept of mid-career emphasizes the sociological aspect of the career. At the biological level, an artist in his/her forties could be considered, as anybody is, experiencing a turning point in his/her life. But, as we have seen in the Johns' example, an artist has to live as if he/she were constantly confronted with such a turning point. The concept of a career has lost its relationship with the biological process and therefore the notion of *mid-career* seems fundamentally delusive if we consider the art world as it functions, that is to say, as the speculative economical process has transformed it.

Of course we are aware of the fact that speculation in the art market has nothing to do with art as self or collective expression. Nevertheless the art market dominates the art world and in this respect we have only one possible attitude: that of *deploration of the past* and *nostalgia*. Is there another art world than the speculative one? To raise this question is to question the mainstream.

Are there many art worlds? Is there room for artists who do not belong to the speculative market? No doubt: there are as many art worlds as segments of the public. Each segment loves a specific spectrum of *works*, and therefore loves some artists. They buy from those artists because they love their works. Each of these segments of the market (be it lithographies, naive paintings, folk art, second rate works of so-called "high art") has built its own *average style*, in comparison to which aesthetic and economic values are established. Some will emphasize the so-called "poetic" size, others the "craftsmanship," the "modernity," etc.

There is thus room, among these art worlds, for many different skills, many contradictory talents, many artists, gallerists, magazines, and works. But the question of the mainstream cannot be solved simply by dividing the art world and art market into as many art worlds and markets as one can find and identify. There is a global art world system which encompasses these many art worlds as sub-systems and establishes an effective hierarchy of values. Aesthetic experience can undoubtedly occur in any one of these sub-systems or sub-art worlds but, given its lack of legitimacy, it will be largely without resonance. You can think of, or discuss a book or a work of art, only if the general system allows you to do so. If this system has not legitimized the work you are loving, you will be unable to construct a critical discourse or even a conversation around it.

What is the fundamental principle of this hierarchy? *To be the first*. Since the *new* becomes *old* in a handful of days because of the constant search for novelties by art world agents, the true value of a work of art is no longer *the new* but *to be first*. While the *new* brings substantial changes, *being first* gives a work of art only an abstract location on the historical time line. *Being first* is the concept of the radical new, the essence of the new, but not its substance. Who cares about substances today?

Look at the way the Brooklyn Academy of Music is selling its forthcoming Festival. The acronym itself is booming, it's a bomb:

BAM! The *next* wave begins!

The next replaces the new; it does not exist yet, but you will admire it. Be careful though, it is not only a matter of language nor verbal inflation. It has very measurable consequences in the art world and, particularly, on the way a career has to be organized.

Hierarchy in the art world is based on the capacity of *being first* and on *invention!* As a matter of fact, being first is the only criterion in art which is absolutely objective. Taste cannot be used for evaluation because it changes with time and depends on individual preferences, whereas the evaluation of being first is a question of information, a matter of facts.

Consequently the career of an artist starts earlier and earlier; you see art dealers and gallerists hanging out with art school students, cruising around, looking for young talents. Since craftsmanship no longer dominates the system of evaluation, age becomes a handicap when an artist does not break through when he is young.

The impact of these transformations on artists is detrimental: it constantly concentrates our attention on fewer names (the so called "firsts" of the new cult, or new culture). For example, at the Carnegie International Show, we get exactly what we expect, using the same seducing principle as Holiday Inn or Coca-Cola, who ensure you that you will get exactly the same product all over the world. As a symptom of a restricted world, this art has a full meaning, and is worth an analysis. I am not saying this art has no meaning, since no thing produced by human beings lacks meaning. Nonetheless, we used to think of art as an expression of the artist; but the system is making it an expression of itself. Looking at pictures, we used to be involved with an aesthetical and ethical experience. We looked at canvases where the struggle for a subjective or personal view was at stake. We are now facing the apotheosis of massive and gigantic alienated protests, but the person behind the protest has disappeared, the feeling of being confronted with someone's protest and doubts has vanished. This is because the works have become more important, more impressive than their meaning; their meanings are overwhelmed by their material appearance.

There are two things we can do to change this situation:

1. Maintain the idea that a work of art has a *meaning*; that, beyond its "objectness," which determines the relationship between the public and the work, there is an opportunity for personal dialogue, mediated by the work, between the artist as a frail person and the viewer as also a frail

being. (Even Wolfgang Laib's fragile works became monumental in the Carnegie International Show.) I am speaking of an off-mainstream way of displaying art: (a) against big spectacular shows and to restore intimacy; (b) restore aesthetic experience as a *private* moment (in a public space!).

2. As a consequence, small-scale art displays and low cost exhibits will automatically restore the diversity which the concentration on few names made impossible.

Am I dreaming? Of course, yes, but there is no place where it is forbidden to dream, even less at an art criticism conference.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup>Howard Becker, *Art Worlds*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982), p. 229.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 233.

# Mainstream Provincialism

By Charles V. Miller

Here in the most liveable American city, the eastern gateway to the Midwest, in my opinion, so far west of the Hudson, we've been asked to consider the mainstream and its import for working artists today. But what mainstream or which one of the mainstreams since we have the choice of three rivers here in Pittsburgh. (Or as we've already heard eloquently discussed, is the discussion of the mainstream a vain attempt to structure our cultural life in a time when it evades such structure?) Pluralism, fragmentation, Postmodernism—one can make a long list of terms that are currently being used to describe this lack of structure in our age and the supposed breakdown of a unifying or predominating mainstream. One can trace with an almost philological detail the philosophical arguments throughout this century that have led us to a seeming impotence to account for the simultaneity of the most varying expressions of artistic diversity. And this critical impotence which is readily visible in the major international art magazines and in a lack of critical discourse, has ultimately led to the feelings of marginalization by many members of the artistic community. The poles of mainstream and marginalization, which one can understand as esthetic criteria, do not, I believe, hold value as esthetic categories applicable with critical rigor to our contemporary artistic situation; rather,



these are categories of power, a power that is surmised by those outside the surmised mainstream. We are dealing with perceptions in the art world. We can discuss this kind of power using the only international exhibition of its kind in this country, the "Carnegie International" as its example.

Looking over the list of exhibited artists—for I consider these exhibitions an accurate barometer of one aspect of the mainstream—we can see that artists from the USA hold a slight lead over artists from West Germany, 18 to 12. Including Jannis Kounellis on the Italian side of the roster, Italy is in third position with (only) four artists, followed by Switzerland with Fischli/Weiss as a collaborative team, Canada, Denmark, England, and Spain with one artist each. (There are nine women in the show out of a total of 41 artists, including Anna Blume who works as a team with Bernhard Blume.) Roberta Smith pointed out in her review of the "Carnegie International" in the *New York Times* that such a predominance of American and West German artists does not make for an international exhibition. However, I would maintain this show is a measure for our perceptions about international art today—in the mainstream.

The history of the West German conquest of the American art market is a legend, and this conquest is a decisive factor both in considering this show and for the discussion of the mainstream, for the most important component comprising what I shall call the "international mainstream" is the art market and the unabashed power which it plays in determining our perception of the mainstream. (Tangentially, but I think important at this point is to reveal my personal, journalistic viewpoint which I feel is reportorial but nonetheless critical. I don't wish to offer an academic analysis, nor a philosophical diatribe on how the art market has poisoned esthetic considerations. We are at the point of critical history, I believe, where we must recognize the market as one of the factors which [very strongly] contributes to the formation of our ideas about contemporary art.) What this show points up then, is the strength of a market axis, New York-Cologne, a market axis that has developed in the course of the last decade. One can always quibble with curatorial choices—that's the stuff of criticism—and by and large when one compares the rosters of major international exhibitions over the past three years, and considers the coverage of artists in the major art publications, one can see justifications for many of these choices. There is however one artist whose career, I think, is more the product of a combination of "mainstream" events included here—Katharina Fritsch. To look at her career over the past three years is to better understand the forces that make up this international mainstream.

Katharina Fritsch's major appearance/disappearance for most viewers was in the 1987 exhibition of sculpture projects in the provincial West German city of Munster. She created a polyester figure of a golden Madonna—alluding to the strength of the Roman Catholic church in this city since the middle ages. This figure placed in the middle of a pedestrian shopping area between a new department store and a church, was destroyed by passers-by before the opening of the exhibition and was eventually replaced by a concrete model. (This Madonna is in fact very similar to Fritsch's ghost

on view here.) It is not the Madonna which attracted attention to the artist, rather it was the destruction of the piece. Its subsequent appearance on the cover of the London-based art magazine *Artscribe* lent it further import. One of her first major pieces, the green elephant (also life-sized) which was shown in the Kaiser Wilhelm Museum in Krefeld, was for me more successful as a piece of sculpture. However, it did not find the public resonance of the Madonna. While her exhibition in summer 1988 (along with Rosemarie Trockel) at the Kunsthalle Basel drew sympathetic fans, the one piece she exhibited there, this time as monumental as the green elephant, a banquet table with 32 seated men around it, was impressive and dramatic in its presentation. But the size and shock of seeing this installation in one room by itself did not compensate for its hollow resonance.

I believe we have in this artist's career a significant development—a development that is very different than the self-creation by artists themselves in the early 80s of a uniquely public persona. This is a career built on the public relations capabilities of the art market, consisting of museum curators, dealers, critics, and with a strategy of building expectations through a lack of work, due in part to the working methods of the artist herself. I don't mean to imply that the artist is victim; I simply wish to demonstrate that "the market" is more than the exchange of money, and it plays a significant role in developing what we consider an international mainstream. Certainly, one could expand this discussion into a consideration of esthetic criteria and how Fritsch, again on an international level, speaks an artistic language of changing our perception of a given reality and how her vocabulary compares to and differs from, for example, her American counterparts. This certainly contributes to her almost cult status, but forces outside the esthetic realm have made her their "chosen one" for the moment.

I think it is important in this regard to return briefly to those heady days of Neoexpressionism and remember the cult of personality which developed around artists who appropriated the power of the international mainstream and used them for their own purposes. Of those American, Italian, and West German artists the three who won fame in this period were Georg Baselitz, Francesco Clemente, and Julian Schnabel. All three, in many regards, were and maybe still are enfants terribles and provoke(d) as strong a reaction as Fritsch. But I believe there was a strategizing, a conscious coopting of those market forces for the artist's own intentions, a use of power, or perhaps, depending on what side of the table one sat, a corruption of it. But nevertheless, power.

Mainstream connotes power, be it used by one of the artists in this exhibition, or, for example, Andrew Wyeth, who can be reckoned to a mainstream as well, although not the one under discussion. We have thus reached a point where a division appears in my use of the word mainstream, for we can now posit a second mainstream represented by the likes of Andrew Wyeth. It is to be sure not one that interests me except perhaps from the standpoint of popular visual culture, but nevertheless, I feel one would not give the term its justice without bringing that popular or perhaps populist

side into it. And certainly there are those at the National Gallery (which mounted the much-touted "Helga" show) who probably believe in this definition of the mainstream. But this differentiation in how we view the mainstream is crucial for our view of art and for how the artist views his/her position within the artistic community. I would like to suggest that in these days of pluralism, and indeed if we look back, to a lesser extent ever since the turn of the century, there have been a number of equal, simultaneously functioning mainstreams. That this word and subject has become a burning issue today is based on the economic power that is associated with my first category of the international mainstream.

But let's turn the tables on terminology and consider for a moment the word mainstream from its opposite provincialism. Provincialism is one of the four-letter words of art discourse. Used freely it immediately connotes a back-water, out-of-touch attitude that is irreconcilable with art of the mainstream, i.e. art that is being made in the major centers. (If it is reconcilable as in the case of some outsider or folk art, it is a coincidence of style, taste, fashion—all terms to which I will have to return—that makes this art palatable for a wide international audience.) Provincialism is not, however, a term that wanes in certain times—it is not one of those nasty "-isms" like formalism for example that pokes its heads through the critical morass, is associated with one particular artist or critic, and then reappears as a "neo-ism." It is a term that has universal application to all aspects of our cultural life, and for this reason it is an intriguing term that might shed light on cultural activity at this juncture of the century. By looking at it in its relationship to the visual arts, I believe we can see how we can posit not only an "international mainstream" or a mainstream of Andrew Wyeth, but a matrix of simultaneously occurring "mainstreams" that can be differentiated on a taste of fashion level, on a level of artistic language that by more or less intersecting at various points validates itself on a market level.

If one extrapolates from art history along these lines, one may find many periods in which a geographical center provided the impetus for a predominating artistic force. Berlin, Moscow, Munich, New York, and San Francisco among numerous others have all had their "schools" which have to varying degrees of success permeated consciousness as a predominant mode of art during specific periods. They have transcended their "provincial" beginnings with a language that found universal appeal. But in our current media age, since perhaps the end of World War II, and in art-historical terms, certainly since the New York school, what the centers of art have proffered through the ever increasing art press is a homogenization of the language of art and therefore a qualitative judgement of one style over another, of one mainstream over another, of one provincialism over another. Indeed, we might even speak of an international-provincialism—which many outside the centers might want to call a Parisian, New York or whatever arrogance. But the newly forged international canon feeds off the wide accessibility of information of a particular sort: that art marked by success in the marketplace.

If we narrow our focus a bit to this country and the dissemination of information, we can see another way that perceptions about the mainstream are created. In a sort of statistical summary, the November 1988 issue of *Artnews*, *Art in America* and *Artforum*, the three major American art publications, *Artnews* contains 87 editorial pages, *Art in America* 76, and *Artforum* 75. *Artnews* published an almost special supplement on the market—from old masters, primitive art, and photography to contemporary art. But we are not dealing with critical articles here, it is voyeuristic reportage that, while purporting to be a response to last year's stock market crash, came just in time for the fall New York auctions. In its two feature stories, Jill Johnston writes on Jasper Johns on the occasion of his Philadelphia retrospective that premiered at the Venice Biennale in summer 1988, and Craig Bromberg discusses the plethora of collaborative works. *Art in America*, in four feature stories starts a series on contemporary Soviet art, Holland Cotter writes on the Swiss artist Markus Raetz on the occasion of his New Museum show in New York—he was also the representative artist for the Swiss pavilion at the Venice Biennale; there is one article on the California architect, Frank Gehry, whose retrospective has been traveling the country and opened in New York, as well as an article on the nineteenth-century American painter Raphaelle Peale on the occasion of a major show of his work in Philadelphia. *Artforum* published an article on the American artist Douglas Huebler, Judith Kirschner writes on the Chicago artists Tony Tasset and Hirsch Perlman, and there are articles on Francesco Clemente on the occasion of his Dia Foundation show; Miguel Angel Rios; the collaboration Issey Miyake/Irving Penn; an artist's project by the Portuguese artist Leonel Moura; and an art-historical article on the face. There is a wide variance in editorial focus, but for editorial content (in features) there is a reliance on museum-generated exhibitions for subject matter—a reactive mode that places critical and reportorial discourse in a retrogressive rather than progressive mode. Criticism is not leading the way, not forging our new paths for the possibilities of art, but acting in an almost *Good Housekeeping* manner of approval.

Reviews are a different story—by their very nature they are short, reactive takes on current exhibitions—and the number of reviews varies widely from 49 in *Artforum*—21 from New York, 14 from the US, 1 from Canada, and 13 from Europe—33 in *Artnews*—22 in NY, 7 in the US and 4 in Europe—to 27 in *Art in America*—20 in NY, 5 in the US and 2 in Europe. In all cases except *Artforum* where 28 reviews come from outside New York and 21 from New York there is a New Yorkcentrism. Certainly one could also breakdown these New York reviews to find which areas of New York predominate in each magazine.

This brings me back to the Carnegie show and its importance for the creation and substantiation for the idea of the mainstream. Like so many recurring international shows, this one is a barometer for what has taken place—for what has been substantiated over the past three years. Hence it too is reactive to the forces that forge our perception of the international mainstream. The question for me is primarily how does one move from

this reactive situation into an active one, and it is here where I see the role of criticism, for criticism can elucidate the points of commonality and divergence between the languages of the various mainstreams/provincialisms. It can serve to validate art outside the centers and at the same time remove the stigma of provincialism, and through this can move beyond its current reactive stance. In order to do this, art critics need to look more closely at methodologies that will enable them to move outside the market validating strategies that permeates so much criticism today. Art critics can recognize, analyze, and bemoan the market, but to serve it in such an insidious manner makes critics slaves to whims of fashion and taste. If critics seek out new ways of discussing the true variety of artistic production, we will see not only a new make up of editorial material in magazines, but it also might be possible to see a heretofore unseen divergence in exhibitions like the Carnegie International. Is it unthinkable that an artist living and working in Pittsburgh be included? Not for me.

# New Cuban Art: Identity and Popular Culture

By Gerardo Mosquera

My role in this symposium will be to review some problems and perspectives as posed by the most recent events of visual arts in Cuba. It will be an example of "regional art" and its idylls and contradictions with the "mainstream." This might not represent the most convenient sampling, since it is complicated with quite diverse particular factors. But Cuba's very singularity draws our attention to the field of complexities cubby-holed under the label "periferic culture".

In the late 70s a movement began to take shape in Cuban visual arts, which would transform the status quo through the implementation of new artistic orientations. Young people, born and bred in the revolutionary period, toppled the rigid structures and stereotypes of the time aimed at endowing art with an alleged political mission, also assertive of our national identity. The movement crystallized in the 80s and has not slackened its pace since then. No other sector of Cuban culture harnesses so much vigor and dynamism, favors so many different initiatives, or promotes so much debate. All this seething activity surprises visiting artists and critics, some of whom have now begun to talk about a "Cuban renaissance".<sup>1</sup>

This upsurge has social roots. First of all, artistic freedom and cultural support—so seldom intertwined—is a combination inherent to the cultural policy implemented by the Revolution from the start. Some have even suggested that new Cuban visual arts are a paradigmatic embodiment of this cultural policy. A more tangible element was the new atmosphere—more conducive to artistic creation—that prevailed after the establishment of the Ministry of Culture in 1976. It is not by chance that this institutional process coincided with the development of the visual arts movement since both responded to a new historical stage. Lastly, there is the direct influence of the system of artistic education which has guaranteed free training for all talents, from elementary to higher education, giving them facilities throughout the country. This is the only example of such widespread moral and budgetary support in the underdeveloped world.

The panorama of Cuban visual arts is so variegated as to make an identification of general traits hardly possible, save for its very diversity. This also holds true for the new art. This new art, however, can be characterized by its orientations in contrast to the spirit that prevailed in the cultural scene during the 70s: priority granted to the intrinsic values of art as opposed to extra-artistic compulsions; an opening to contemporary "avant-garde" experiences; focusing on the expression and discussion of man's and woman's overall problems in his relation to the world; an in-depth analysis of Latin-American and Third-World identity; an ethical sense and, particularly among the youngest, a concern over a more direct social role for visual arts.

There are two main lines which could be considered among the most promising. One has to do with a more profound insight into the essence of Latin Americanism, and the other with a closely-knit contact with folk culture. Both are familiar with and take advantage of "international"—metropolitan—developments in visual arts, but they transform these developments to suit their objectives, recontextualizing them, using them as a means, not an end. For obvious reasons, these lines often overlap.

Although, in a general sense, Latin American culture can be classified as Western—of European tradition and characteristic of capitalist development—its singularity results to a large extent from the decisive presence of non-Western elements in its composition. These elements are not so much ethnocultural (for example, African or Indian-American) as they are historical and social (precapitalist). This synthesis is both a privilege and a disadvantage. Whereas an Asian, an Arab or an African can feel himself torn between his traditions and a Western culture he is forced to accept at least partly if he wishes to exert an effective influence on contemporary issues—art as a self-contained activity is a Western concept, more so in the case of *paintings* and *sculptures* destined for exhibitions in galleries—we are not faced with that dilemma. Non-Western culture is our culture, but Western culture is also our culture. However, the peripheral and neocolonial conditions we live in hamper their full intermingling and we frequently either become Westernized, complex-ridden derivations of the metropolis, or we execrate all things Western and entrench ourselves

in a narrow folkishness. Furthermore, our countries are multi-ethnic, boasting large communities that are not integrated into the "mestizo" cultures that bear our nationhood.

The artists of the first main line I mentioned seek to commune with the roots of the non-Western elements that characterized our essence, not through a superficial *rapprochement*, a mere exposure of indigenous or African traditions—the germ of so much tourist art—but through a substantial and highly personalized assimilation. More than finding inspiration in shapes, rites or anecdotes, they seek to introject the ideology, values and, in general sense, the *Weltanschauung* of these peoples, all factors that are blended into the new nationalities or that remain repositied with the ethnic groups.

To this end, they make use of certain openings provided by conceptual trends, often resorting freely to the recovery—for different functions—of the procedures of "primitive" cultures. It is a well-known fact that in the 60s and 70s some Europeans and Americans (Beuys, Hesse, Long, Holt, Puryear...) did conceptual art that was based in their interest in "tribal" societies. Their knowledge of these societies, derived from anthropological readings, paved an artistic way which led to the non-literal reinterpretation of some aspects of their practices and conceptions. Cuban works in this vein are profoundly different, regardless of methodological similarities. A Beuys or a Hesse always tried to incorporate external sources into their own avant-garde artistic practice. A basic trend in their work is to "deviate" from their culture along somewhat exotic paths. A Bedia and an Elso, however, take up elements from their own culture, throbbing in their everyday context. And they do so to "steep" themselves in their culture, thus firmly enrooting their identity. What is more important, they do not try to ensconce themselves in it to flourish in the comfort of narrow folkishness; they seek to project values, accents and views from our tradition (capable of concrete action in the contemporary world), into a global human perspective.

It could be said that the art of these young people, however "Western," is, in a certain sense, "non-Western" from within, as in Latin-American culture. It could likewise be suggested that, as in the case of the latter, it is at once "primitive" and "contemporary." They pursue a synthesis, fully attainable only by those who partake not just of the hybridization or coexistence of traits from widely different cultures but also of forms of awareness from various stages of historical evolution—the *métissage* of time, to coin an expression.<sup>2</sup>

In Cuba, the importance of this Latin-American assumption transcends the merely artistic. Due to its historical and geographical determinations, perhaps no other country in the continent was so much divorced from Latin America and so subjected to the overwhelming ideological and cultural colonization of the United States. The Latin-Americanist concern of the youth is to find a way to reinsert themselves in their own environment, not behind the standards of a programmatic course, but as a spontaneous process of introjection that stems naturally from the political and cultural changes underway in the country.



Allow me to insist on the sense of universality in this Latin-Americanism and, particularly, on its vocation at present. It is no escapism, no "return to the roots." It is the reaffirmation of our own values as a means of influencing contemporary reality, the presence of a Third-World will—not always consciously perceived—to impose a new international cultural order, a new perspective of universality that would take into account the interests of all the peoples, in opposition to a Manhattan island-made cosmopolitanism.

The second line mentioned above is also in keeping with these general assertions. While in the foregoing, conceptual orientations prevailed, this line evidences, to a large extent, a post-modern *penchant* towards the vernacular and *kitsch*, as part of an inclusive, expressionist, parodic and metaphoric poetics. But this line's unique trait is the artists' deep-rooted belonging to a folk culture which they have never relinquished.

It often happens that, despite his folk origin, the artist tends to draw away from it in the course of his activity. Even though his work reflects this background, he forfeits his environment to adopt a different one. For various reasons, this has not been the rule in Cuba lately. On the one hand, the new social conditions have allowed young people from all population strata to study art; on the other, jointly with various factors, they have fostered their continued immersion in their own natural environment, thus preventing their "cultured" artistic activity from becoming a differentiating barrier.

Consequently, besides expressing folk culture and deriving nourishment from it, their work somewhat overlaps that same culture. In other words, it could be considered a paradoxical "cultured" manifestation of folk culture, in the sense that it is a professional—not traditional, naive or spontaneous—creation based on popular manifestations, produced by active bearers of and participants in these manifestations and in the conditions, customs, values and psychology that originate them. This situation persists despite the adoption of a critical approach, which often accompanies this work.

It is to this integration that so many works owe their festive, carnivalesque character, as well as their exuberance, colorfulness, and shrill baroque quality, which can make us detect even a Caribbean touch in works where there is a tangible influence of Borofsky, Clemente or Scharf—sometimes to the point of a cheeky parody.

These young people are charged with having made an "incorrect" appropriation of conceptualism and postmodernism, because they have incorporated some of the resources, but not the overall "philosophy" of these trends, consistent with their own historical, social and cultural problems. Actually, this has been a common occurrence in the history of the peoples' interrelations. Boris Bernstein states that "the reception of external influences presupposes their insertion in the system of relations of a given cultural unit, where received phenomena inevitably acquire new meanings and, at the same time, as happens with all innovations, in some way restructures the system that receives them."<sup>3</sup> Bernstein illustrates this through young national cultures "for which an intensive reception of 'alien'

experience is a vital need."<sup>4</sup> He further makes it clear that this "does not in any way mean that alien experience has been assimilated "correctly," or organically. On the contrary, it can be taken externally as a loan, without an understanding of its *locus* and meaning in the other cultural system, thus receiving a totally different meaning in the context of the recipient culture. Nevertheless, the transplant took place, and it created a new situation, restructured the mesh of relations that had theretofore existed and influenced development prospects."<sup>5</sup>

This could also be said of "old" cultures vis a vis the "young," as when the Cubists, totally ignorant of the meaning of African visual arts very productively made use of them to suit their purpose. We would be all the more justified in doing the same with some resources extrapolated from an alien, although not unknown, background. Indeed, any artistic manifestation can make use of elements of universal value in other manifestations regardless of all considerations of ethnic, historical or social relativity, and of the differences in meaning they may have.

Eloquent proof of this is the fact that postmodernism has furnished instrumental propositions for its own action while others are disregarded. Postmodern openings are used when they respond to contextual concerns or when they act as detonators, in the same way that conceptual orientations served, above all, to deepen into Latin-American cultural foundations. This is what I would term an affirmation on the rebound.

Enmeshed in all festive paraphernalia, bubbling over with folk *kitsch*, we perceive an ethical concern in this new Cuban art. Despite its criticism of very concrete behaviors, it is more of an attitude of general assessment. There's nothing redolent of a holier-than-thou stance, quite the opposite. All these artists—followers of the first and the second line alike—share a very complex view of human beings and their relations with the world. This ethical perspective can be felt in the very substance of the works, whether they deal with the equilibrium of cosmetic forces or a marginal conduct, even when moral issues or any of their aspects are not the gist of the work.

Such a perspective is part of a broader one, typical of Cuban visual arts in the 80s. As a reaction to the guidelines of the previous generation, an interest in man's and woman's most general problems and their development in the universe is seen to prevail. There is a genuine "philosophical" concern, no matter what the subject treated or the language used may be. The final view of these problems is positive, over and beyond the interest to express contradictions. There is no nihilism or alienation. This positive sign is another important factor in the content which singularizes Cuban art despite language similarities with present Western trends.

On more than one occasion foreign left-wing critics and artists have wondered at not discovering in contemporary Cuban art the direct political or social orientation they expected to find. Although this is a very complex topic which deserves a thorough discussion, and despite the fact that this concern is perfectly logical, I believe, first of all, that all sorts of expectations have been placed on Cuban realities due to the demands posed

by a different situation. In Cuba, where there is a different social participation, where the most pressing social problems have been solved, wouldn't art tend to develop its potentialities in an effort to derive deeper into the general human aspects and focus on spirituality? Is this not a superior social perspective?

Certainly, this does not presuppose that art is unable to deal with politics, and much less that it has lost its ability to criticize. I am referring to an anthropological tendency which might be conditioned by transformations in the social infrastructure. In any case, the answers—always more than one—and most likely contradictory—will emerge from artistic practice, since individual creative freedom is an essential prerequisite which implies art's "spontaneous" evolution and the fact that social control can only be exerted—for better or for worse—indirectly. For the Cuban Revolution, this has not been a "liberal" premise, but a principle which stems from the very essence of art, which—so far, at least—is an activity intimately linked with individual subjectivity, with the "black box," even in cases of purposefully direct social search.

Be that as it may, there is a growing inclination among the younger artists to link art with concrete social problems. This has introduced a critical perspective which, despite its immediacy and imperviousness to "transcendental" implications, still maintains the ethics and universal projection referred to above. Moreover, there is a will to transform the role of art and turn it into a more direct and active social function: a crucial purpose because to date, in none of the socialist countries has the function of art been transformed, so that art continues to develop within the same education-production-distribution-consumption system based on the "creative genius," the museum, the gallery, the critic, the passive spectator, the communication gap between art and the people, the "cultured" elite as target group, etc., regardless of the transformation of the system's contents and ends in favor of society. What we should ask ourselves is whether it would be possible to revolutionize art or if it is doomed to continue becoming more and more complex as a highly-specialized activity, sharing its work with a "mass culture" as is now the case; or whether it would be possible to revolutionize the people so that they can appreciate art; or whether they will revolutionize us, the "cultured."

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In another paper we could examine how Cuban visual arts are inscribed in multiple coordinates: creative spontaneity, socialism, affirmation of national identity, Latin-Americanism, opening to Western trends, Third-World idiosyncrasy, social function... but here we have touched upon some of these aspects. In my view, what is most interesting is the way in which Cuban visual arts show a possibility for action on the part of Third-World culture.

There is no need to elaborate on the contradictions extant in the aforementioned culture. Present are the problems bred directly by

underdevelopment, poverty, neocolonialism, economic and social structural deformations, among others. Present are the more concrete problems dependent on or related to the others; such as a low educational level, metropolitan control over the mass media, disregard for our values, cultural colonialism. Influenced by all this, there are several polar tensions between which our cultures now blaze their trail: tradition and contemporaneity, localism and universality, "cultured" culture and "folk" culture, colonialism and liberation, West and non-West, mimicry and identity... In regards to the more general problems, on the basis of their specific social condition—a specificity that does not isolate them from the overall Third-World panorama—Cuban visual arts have spontaneously adopted stances which, in my judgment, may turn out to be very fruitful.

—"Nationalization" of whatever may be useful in metropolitan visual arts, adapting them to our own needs [without fears or guilty qualms]. This "nationalization" implies a transformation of formal aspects such as content and social function, the latter requiring a radicalization towards more direct action, much the same as to be much more blatant in making use of any artistic development in our benefit.

The transformation I am referring to often produces quite different results from those derived from the original trends, through the process of satisfying our own particular requirements. But this is not limited to a local use of "international" elements when there is a metamorphosis of universal magnitude—only that it is a universality which originates in our zone, from here outward. In this connection, there is at once an expansion and enrichment of the possibilities in "international" trends. Hence, since this is an active, creative "nationalization," the "nationalized" nuclei, valuable on a broad human scale, develop toward new perspectives.

—The above is possible, to a large extent, due to a familiarity with these trends, since they are felt as belonging to an entire cultural ambit in which we participate. It is very clear for young Cuban artists that—as the Minister of Culture Armando Hart has said<sup>6</sup>—Cuba has never departed from the West, considered as a geographical and cultural meridian. It is also clear that we have a personality of our own, characterized to a large extent by the significant presence of non-Western ingredients in the national ethnogenesis and the contemporary existence in our countries of non-Western peoples and cultural manifestations not blended into our national cultures. In other words, Latin America is distinctly recognized as a synthesis between the West and the Non-West, and as a multinational entity, with rich non-Western cultural values. A clear-cut awareness of our profile may be extremely fruitful since it would make us the masters of a very vast cultural spectrum. Instead of considering ourselves second-rate Europeans, or "Indians" or "blacks" who have nothing to do with the West, or victims of a chaos, we can stand on our own ground and make use of the multilaterality of our culture and work on the basis of our own synthesis, which allows us to adopt the most variegated elements naturally.

—Identity, understood as action, not exhibition. In the "search for our identity" there has been a much-touted "expression of our roots" which

has led to serious cultural misconceptions. False solutions to the problems of our own expression have been put forth by resorting to folkishness, local color, traditions, and even by trying to revitalize some—long time dead—of which we have little knowledge. The solution to the problem, it was thought, lay in showing off the things of the blacks, Indians or *criollos*: a dangerous mistake because it is not a matter of exhibiting our identity; rather of *acting* in keeping with it, from within, of projecting it. It is a matter of *being* ourselves. Indeed due to cultural colonialism and to our own diversity it is still necessary to complete the definition and identification of our own profile. But this should be done always from the point of view of our action from within, towards the outer world. Of certain relevance is the debate on “negritude” and “tigritude” in Africa during the 60s. Wole Soyinka said that a tiger does not announce his tigritude, he pounces. A tiger in the jungle does not say, “I’m a tiger.” When you walk by the place where the tiger is and you see the bones of a gazelle, you know that the place is flooded with tigritude.<sup>7</sup> Cuban youths are taking steps in that direction. There is no programmatic search for an identity, and this is another trait which differentiates them from the generation of the 70s. If their works express a Cuban and Latin American identity that is because this identity has been exercised; this identity has determined, from within, values and their artistic projection.

—The above ties in with the resolution of contemporaneity of tradition. Our cultures have often fallen into the pitfalls posed by the call of tradition, which restrains our potential to cope with the present-day world. Once a bulwark against penetration, it can become an easy chair and a pair of slippers that can comfortably isolate us from the pressing demands of our time. These are the two faces of tradition so eloquently described by Ambrosio Fornet twenty years ago. Indeed, very few things can be more comfortable—and more conservative—than culture taken as a postcard, self-complaisant in its baroque volutes and colorful drums. We are neither to deny tradition nor to dress up in its frills and laces: we are to make it something that lives in this day; in other words, we must build our present on our worthiest values in order to act our way in the midst of contemporary problems. Fornet stated: “In a revolutionary society, the past is assumed as a force for a projection into the future, for man’s return to his roots while projecting them with a new meaning towards humankind as a whole.”<sup>8</sup> The artists we are discussing are working in this direction. One of their achievements is their contribution to closing the gap between ancestral values and modern action. Current artistic openings help them in identifying and projecting them broadly, while the artists themselves can even get to transform the meaning of these openings. Thus, it is possible to foresee tradition, not as granny’s hopechest, not even as a live source, but as a main trunk in constant growth, which expands its green branches in all directions.

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—These four, closely overlapping, attitudes are ideal, somewhat rhetorical abstractions of the perspectives present in the Cuban artists' work guidelines, in their initial stages of implementation. Even if they were fully realized, we would only be in a phase of the process of total definition and self-reliance of Latin-American culture.

The goal will be attained only when our continent is able to undertake the making of contemporary culture on its own; that is, when it is able to produce its own present-day culture as an active lineament in today's world. And this will be the day when, paradoxically, we in the Third World make Western culture, or, in a nutshell, when we de-Europeanize current culture. Because at this point in time European-based culture cannot be disregarded. The issue transcends the ethnic problem: it was Western culture that corresponded to planetary expansion of industrial capitalism and, consequently, it was *this* culture that developed the instruments for action at this time. Our dilemma cannot be solved by throwing it into the trashcan and then returning to pre-capitalist options. Nor can it be solved by going into the third millennium following its turrets, adapting it; not even by nationalizing it—which would undoubtedly be a transitional solution. The actual solution would be to make Western culture by ourselves, following our own criteria, or at least to participate actively in its evolution...little by little, increasingly so. And when this happens, it will no longer be Western culture.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup>Luis Camnitzer, "La Segunda Bienal de La Habana," *Arte en Colombia*, Bogotá, n. 33, May 1987, p. 85.

<sup>2</sup>Gerardo Mosquera, "Mendive, mestizo del tiempo," *Resumen Semanal Granma*, Havana, a 19, no. 15, April 8, 1984, p. 4; "Introduction," *New Art from Cuba*, Amelie Wallace Gallery, SUNY College at Old Westbury, New York, 1985, p. 1; "'Primitivismo' y 'contemporaneidad' en artistas jóvenes de Cuba," *Universidad de La Habana*, n. 227, January-June 1986, pp. 135-36; "Africa en la plástica cubana," *Cuba Internacional*, Havana, y XVIII, n. 203, October 1986, pp. 40-41.

<sup>3</sup>Boris Bernstein: "Algunas consideraciones en relación con el problema 'arte y etnos'," *Criterios*, Havana, n. 5-12, January 1983 to December 1984, p. 266.

<sup>4</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 267.

<sup>5</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>6</sup>Armando Hart, "Nadie podrá separarnos de nuestra América" (speech delivered at the Second World Conference in Cultural Policies, Mexico, July 26 to August 6, 1982), *Revolución y Cultura*, Havana, n. 122, October 1982, p. 54.

<sup>7</sup>Quoted by Janheinz Jahn, *Las literaturas neoafricanas*, (Madrid: Ediciones Guadarrama, 1971), p. 310.

<sup>8</sup>Ambrosio Fornet, "Las dos caras de la tradición," *Casa de las América*, Havana, y VIII, n. 46, January-February 1968, p. 180.

# The Eighties Reviewed

By Howard Risatti

The appearance of a pluralistic art in the mid-70s was a clear indication of the extent to which the modernist mainstream was fractured. According to Alan Sekula, "the ideological confusions of current art, euphemistically labeled 'healthy pluralism' by art promoters, stems from the collapsed authority of the modernist paradigm. 'Pure' artistic modernism collapses because it is ultimately a self-annihilating project, narrowing the field of art's concerns with scientific rigor, dead-ending in alternating appeals to taste, science and metaphysics."<sup>1</sup> The crisis of the modernist mainstream, as Sekula notes, is thus imbedded in the very core of modernism itself, relating to the basic definitions of art and culture that evolved under modernity.

Max Weber developed the concept of rationalization to explain what he saw as the systematic modernization and industrialization of society. For him, this concept represented the historical penetration under capitalism of all spheres of social life—the economy, culture, technology, law, politics, and eventually daily life itself—by the logic of formal rationality.<sup>2</sup> This logic can be understood as the orientation of all human action to what are abstract, quantifiable and calculable, and instrumentally utilizable formal rules and norms.<sup>3</sup> In contrast to enlightening and emancipating reason, this

instrumental reason or instrumental rationality—derived from the logic of formal rationality—merely provides, without reflection, without human concern, effective means to execute any proposed task.<sup>4</sup>

One of the obvious consequences of this rationalization process was the fracturing of culture; culture was broken into three autonomous spheres or realms of knowledge—science, morality, and art. The differentiation of culture into these autonomous realms, writes Jürgen Habermas, “has come to mean the autonomy of the segments treated by the specialist and at the same time letting them split off from the hermeneutics of everyday communications.”<sup>5</sup>

It is this splitting off which has precipitated the general crisis of alienation of modern society and the separation of art from everyday life experience. As a result of this, the mainstream is unable to continue to legitimize modernist artistic practice, especially in terms of everyday life experience. And, it is also unable to re-articulate a new artistic practice. This, in a sense the double bind of Late Modernism and Postmodernism, can not only be traced to the fracturing of culture into separate realms, but also to the reduction/restriction of culture to these three realms.

In the struggle of modern science against anthropomorphic nature, philosophy is to be found another of Weber’s important observations, the tendency of rationalization to eliminate all that is unpredictable, irrational, qualitative, sensuous and mysterious from both theoretical explanation and the practical conduct of life.<sup>6</sup> Weber identified this tendency as the demagicization (often translated as dis-enchantment) of society. One of the important consequences following this dual process of rationalization and de-magicization, was not only the redefined and restriction of culture to the realms of science, morality, and art, but also the altering of proportional influence each of these three realms was to have on the continued development of society. Morality was redefined in terms of instrumental reason thereby ultimately losing its original normative qualities to regulate behavior to economic interests.<sup>7</sup> By contrast, science—with its method of objective (non-moralizing) observation—was elevated to center stage because of its symbiotic relationship to industrial and technological development.

Art was thus left the remaining vessel of traditional culture in modern society. In many ways, however, this was destined to be an empty vessel, no more than a mere sign of traditional culture. For, as the last realm of traditional culture, the last realm of enchanted, irrational, unpredictable, and qualitative behavior, art was pushed more and more to the periphery of intellectual discourse, a discourse increasingly dominated by “scientific” and “objective” thought.

One effect of this on the status of art and artist is revealed by the term “pathographic” used by Freud to describe his method for the study of art.<sup>8</sup> Freud viewed the artist as an unsatisfied person who “turns away from reality and transfers all his interest, and his libido too, to wishful constructions of his life of phantasy....”<sup>9</sup> Freud believed that the artist turns to art as a way of gaining the attention he desires, “without pursuing the circuitous



course of creating real alterations in the outer world."<sup>10</sup> This view characterizes the artist and artistic practice as peripheral to the real world, as fantasy that cannot create real change.<sup>11</sup> Increasingly, the modern artist, living at the fringe of society in Bohemia, was viewed as a social misfit, as someone who dabbles in fantasy and the magical, but who is not engaged in a serious social activity. Thus, while the modern artist was the bearer of traditional culture, it was culture seemingly cut-off from any role of social consequence.<sup>12</sup> Later, as the rationalization process was thrown into question at the end of the Late Modern period, as one who dabbles in fantasy and the magical, the artist came to symbolize resistance to this process. This notion of the artist still exists, but as the popular, romantic figure of the outsider, a notion entertained by the general public and institutionalized by the art establishment.

In his essay "Avant-Garde and Kitsch," written in 1939, Clement Greenberg invoked Kantian self-criticality as a universal aesthetic principle. He did this, I would argue, for two reasons; one was in the hope of saving art from the contamination of popular culture which he termed kitsch; the other was to regain a position in the center-ground of intellectual discourse for art by demonstrating that art too relied upon objective critical standards as did science. This was to place art on an equal footing with science by emphasizing phenomenological aspects as the basis of works of art. Doing this, Greenberg solidified art's hold on its autonomous realm, in particular against the onslaught of popular culture. He thereby articulated most clearly the concept of mainstream: the mainstream in Greenberg's scenario was genuine culture, high art; high art was aware of itself through the critical method and stood out in relief from popular art, which was non-mainstream, non-genuine culture. In this way, Greenberg traded what Walter Benjamin had characterized as mere information for communication; he traded art's magical qualities for verifiable facts and thus signaled resignation to what seemed the inevitable, that art could no longer lay claim to support culture in the traditional, broader sense of communal experience based on ritual, mystery, magic.

Greenberg, in accepting the rationalization process as the aesthetic basis for art, promoted the idea that culture was no longer to be understood in the sense of an ensemble of interpersonal relationships and intersubjective traditions with the meanings and values and the institutional rituals, customs, and behavioral activities characteristic of a traditional, non-rationalized social structure.<sup>13</sup> Artistic experience and identity was now to be validated via the notion of a mainstream that was itself formulated in reaction to the ground swell of popular culture in terms of objective self-criticality; art was now acknowledged part of the new experience, that is, the fractured social experience of modern society.

In his essay "The Storyteller," Walter Benjamin commented on the increasing loss of communicable experience after World War I, a loss that had not yet halted when he wrote about the war in this essay in 1936. "For never has experience been contradicted more thoroughly," wrote Benjamin,

than strategic experience by tactical warfare, economic experience by inflation, bodily experience by mechanical warfare, moral experience by those in power. A generation that had gone to school on a horse-drawn streetcar now stood under the open sky in a countryside in which nothing remained unchanged but the clouds, and beneath these clouds, in a field of force of destructive torrents and explosions, was the tiny, fragile human body.<sup>14</sup>

What Benjamin was lamenting in this essay and in the essay "Some Motifs in Baudelaire," written in 1938, the year before Greenberg wrote about kitsch, was the destruction in the modern world of genuine experience. Genuine experience, which, for Benjamin, rested on communication, was being replaced by information, by simple verifiable facts.

For Benjamin, there could be no communication without a shared structure of meanings within the collective memory. Through the workings of capitalism and the rationalization process, Benjamin, like Marx, Weber, Georg Lukács, and others, recognized a transformation that was occurring through the movement from *Gemeinschaft* (community) to *Gesellschaft* (society), a movement that was destroying the communal bases of such memory found in ritual, ceremony, and festival.<sup>15</sup> This is something that Greenberg himself suspected was occurring when he contended that urbanization was the ultimate factor behind the creation of kitsch, a debased form of high art to placate the newly urbanized masses who, coming to the city, were no longer content with the folk art of the countryside.

Following this line of thought, I would argue that the current inability of the modernist mainstream to legitimize artistic practice or re-articulate a genuine new artistic identity is a crisis growing out of the replacement of communal structure of meaning with a societal structure. While economic and social values coincided (were in synchrony) in early Modernism, by the late 60's, it was clear that this was no longer true. The extent to which the rationalization process had gained control of human experience had become apparent, revealing mainstream Late Modernist formalist art as a cultural sign devoid of any larger social meaning or purpose. The result of this, as Guy Debord and Gil Wolman wrote as early as 1958, was that

all aware people of our time agree that art can no longer be justified as a superior activity or even as an activity of compensation to which one could honorably devote oneself.

They felt the cause of this deterioration was

clearly the emergence of productive forces that necessitate other production relations and a new practice of life.<sup>16</sup>

Neither the pleas for the eternal aesthetic values of abstract painting made by Barbara Rose in her catalogue to the exhibition "American Painting: The 80's," nor the insistence upon the virtues of aesthetic purity made by Hilton Kramer in the pages of the *New Criterion* could prevent the loss

of validity that overtook artists working within the modernist mainstream, a mainstream now institutionalized as culture in an institutionalized system, the art world.

While traditional institutions of socialization—school, family, religion—were identified by Louis Althusser as “state ideological apparatuses” through which people are assigned their roles in the hierarchical system that has to do with class, gender, race,<sup>17</sup> with the breakdown of community and the institutions that supported it, that is, these very institutions of family, school, religion, it is more and more apparent that the consciousness industry—the media—is the primary institution shaping reality and generating “experience” in late twentieth-century society. Thus, it is not surprising that artists have been drawn to the popular culture of the media for their models in an attempt to bridge the gap between art and life. Fredric Jameson, seeing various types of postmodernisms as reactions to the forms of High Modernism that had dominated art in the mid-60s, lists as a key feature of these postmodernisms the effacement of boundaries, “most notably the erosion of the older distinction between high culture and so-called mass or popular culture,” what he goes on to identify as schlock, kitsch, T.V. series, *Reader’s Digest* culture.<sup>18</sup>

Any attempt to re-integrate art and life, however, must confront the fact that the identity and legitimization crisis requires more than simply the abandonment of abstraction and formalism and a return to figuration and realism (in the form of popular culture models). Greenberg had already noted in 1939 that popular culture, which he labeled “kitsch,” used for its raw material “the debased and academicized simulacra of genuine culture,” that

Kitsch is vicarious experience and faked sensations....Kitsch is the epitome of all that is spurious in the life of our times.<sup>19</sup>

What bothered Greenberg was that kitsch was not genuine culture, but received culture; it was not culture owned by the masses, but “culture” generated for them to occupy their leisure time and fulfill their expectations; it was not based on any kind of genuine experience that emanated from their lives.

Little has happened since Greenberg wrote his essay almost fifty years ago. Not only has culture been institutionalized in the form of art, but the conception of what it is to be an artist and of what art is have also been institutionalized. This institutionalization has reduced high art itself to the equivalent of received culture.

In the 80s, the strategy of appropriation has come to characterize Postmodernism and can be seen as an attempt to reinvigorate art with meaning. However, with the combining of modernist and anti-modernist art-historical styles stripped of context, as Thomas Lawson realized,

we are presented with what amounts to a caricature of dialectics in which the telescoping of elements cuts off the development of meaning, creating instead fixed images—cliches—which we are expected to associate with the proper attitudes and institutions (high art fit for museums).<sup>20</sup>

For this reason, Lawson pointed to the strategy of David Salle. Of Salle's paintings, Lawson says,

they are dead, inert representations of the impossibility of passion in a culture that has institutionalized self-expression. They take the most compelling sign for personal authenticity that our culture can provide and attempt to stop it, to reveal its falseness....They operated by stealth, insinuating a crippling doubt into the faith that supports and binds our ideological institutions.<sup>21</sup>

However, the question that must be asked is whether these paintings really do insinuate crippling doubt. Do they really challenge ideological institutions? From the institutional success and acceptance of Salle, it seems highly doubtful. The same can be said of other so-called radical artists such as Sherrie Levine, Cindy Sherman, Richard Prince; their work critiques art, revealing its institutionalized nature and its decontextualized position vis-a-vis society, but, it cannot withstand the voraciousness of the system that simply absorbs it as the latest art-world wrinkle.

What needs to be questioned is the very nature of what it means to be an artist and what the value of art itself is or can be in current society. The discussion of these questions cannot, must not, accept *a priori* the notion that art is a privileged activity that automatically represents larger social and cultural concerns as opposed to simply art concerns; it cannot accede to the generally accepted idea of the successful artist as one who has a loft in New York, makes paintings, sculpture, or perhaps photography, and lives off of work sold in a gallery situation.

Benjamin identified the change from community to society as a process destroying the structure upon which meaningful communication depended, this process should not be accepted as complete nor as an iron cage without escape as Baudrillard would have us believe. For the standard received notion of art as culture, a notion continually renewed by art institutions with a vested interest in keeping such notions alive (including university art departments), does, in fact, provide an example, for it does locate artists within what can be called community: the art community. However, because the shared meanings around which this community is organized are generally dominated by art issues—usually how to succeed making objects—this idea of community is not a conception generating profound meaning and real engagement at this point in late capitalist society. This is a crisis *if* (and only if) meaning and engagement are the goals of the artist as I believe they should be.

The example of Third World countries makes it clear that the current crisis of art in the West is a crisis stemming from modernist rationalization of society. Modernization, especially evident when Third World countries begin Western style development, is a giving up of community based upon interpersonal experience to act upon the larger stage that is socialized experience. For the artist, it is to trade an identity defined by communal culture for art culture, an enlargement of audience but a restriction of meaning. To the extent that the notion of community still survives, so does the possibility of reinvigorating meaning in Benjamin's sense.

The current interest in folk art is an instructive example for it is a result of the belief that it represents one of the last examples of unmediated experience of reality. (According to Baudrillard, we are living the age of the simulacrum in which the real no longer exists, there is only the hyper-real—"This hyperreality puts an end to the system of the real, it puts an end to the real as referential by exalting it as model."<sup>22</sup>) But surely, all experience is mediated; mediation of reality has always been one of the primary roles of art. The question should be, not about the real versus the mediated, but to what end is mediation occurring? In the case of folk art, it is generally believed that mediation is not through commercial media for commercial ends. It is mediated through a communal structure in which meaning is fabricated to integrate a life system that is responsive to the physiological and psychological needs of its members—a communal structure generated in the service of life patterns and not-for-profit patterns. However, even in modernized societies it is possible to engage in broader meaning of the kind suggested by folk art if one exploits the sense of communal structure existing in geographical, sociological, psychological, biological identity; these are regions where remnants of communal structures are still capable of generating meaningful life-patterns fulfilling intersubjective human needs.

The example of John Cage shows that an adversarial position continuing resistance to the rationalization process is still possible and somewhat effective, even in America, the most modernized of societies. Another more pertinent example is that of Joseph Beuys. What Beuys did was to construct his life around a re-enchantment of art through "shamanic" rituals that rejected the received (institutionalized) notions of art by locating his work within a surviving vestigial structure of communal meaning not yet extinguished by Modernism. His activities, not meant to be strictly a critique of art, transcended the institutionalized concept of art-community. For German artists who followed Beuys' example, such as Anselm Kiefer and Rebecca Horn, art is not a matter of appropriating styles in order to insist upon their opacity, making them deconstructive tools of critique. Rather, it is to insist upon style as transparent sign, a sign with meaning located within a particularly German experience, a communal experience surviving as a psycho-social formation. The strategy is to prevent the work from becoming opaque, to simply be art-culture which then can be institutionalized. By focusing on issues that are too real, too powerfully connected to a historical German identity, such works have side-stepped the critiquing of art-culture and have come to critique German culture in the wider, broader sense beyond the high art practice of the Late Modernist mainstream. That such works mediate reality is hardly an issue as it is in the works of so-called deconstructive artists. The important issue is, to what end is reality being mediated by such works? This is an entirely different question.

Beuys's life work, irregardless of motivations, pointed out the communal aspects of a certain part of the psycho-social structure of German culture, viewing it as if a region of communal structural meaning. He has indicated a way by showing that the engaged artist must insinuate himself or herself,

not, as Lawson contends, into the apparatus of the art world as an artist and object maker, but into whatever vestige of shared communal structure of meaning still haunts rationalized society.

The situation surrounding feminists has been similar, in many ways, to that of some of the German artists and it is for this reason their work has taken on such a powerful life across otherwise rigid institutional lines. It is an endeavor located within a community (feminism) and has all the vital structural meanings that only such a community can generate. Feminist art is not restricted to art-culture, the art community, but is part of a community with an interest in the alteration of society to better serve human needs; the impetus among feminist artists to work for change is not an issue of the artistic community, but of a larger psycho-social community.

The work of artists such as John Ahern, like that of Tim Rollins, is another example of this strategy in action in the South Bronx. Similarly, the work of Richmond artist Baylor Nichols locates itself within neighborhood. His *Dandelion Man*, from "Grace Street Revisited" series, is the portrait of a schizophrenic from Nichol's street in Richmond. Such works as these develop meaning by exploiting the socio-economic concept of community.

The pin-hole photographs of Willie Ann Wright from her "Re-Enactment" series focuses on the South as a geographic region identified by the Civil War. In her *Chancellorsville* image, she constructs meaning through the historical, social, political, and psychological structure of region obsessed with its past.

All of these artists seek to excavate and re-construct structures of meaning that mediate experience along communal lines that reinforce life patterns by acknowledging the psychological and physiological needs of individuals. In this way, they challenge the rationalization process of modern society with its profit patterns. In so doing, they re-invest art with a larger purpose and articulate a position for the individual artist in relation to earlier modernist art practice that locates the artist within a larger community.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup>Alan Sekula, "Dismantling Modernism," reprinted in *Theories of Contemporary Art*, ed. Richard Hertz, (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1985), p. 165.

<sup>2</sup>Andrew Arato, "Esthetic Theory and Cultural Criticism-Introduction," *The Essential Frankfurt Reader*, eds. Andrew Arato and Eike Gebhardt (New York: Continuum, 1982), p. 191.

<sup>3</sup>ibid.

<sup>4</sup>Michael Landmann, "Introduction," in Zoltán Tar, *The Frankfurt School: The Critical Theories of Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno* (New York: Wiley, 1977), p. ix.

<sup>5</sup>Jürgen Habermas, "Modernity versus Post-Modernity," *New German Critique*, 22, 1981, p. 9.

<sup>6</sup>Arato, "Esthetic Theory," p. 191.

<sup>7</sup>This is not to say that religion has disappeared, but to say that the role of religion in determining moral, ethical codes of behavior has been taken over by secular institutions—legislative bodies. Where religion still persists, it has been relegated to the margins of society, that is, to more provincial areas of society where it continually encounters difficulties with secular authority. The issue of Creationism is one of the latest examples of this residual conflict.

<sup>8</sup>As Jack Spector has written, Freud "provided the model for the pathographic criticism of art, which looked down to the neuroses before finding a way back up to the art that presumably had spurred the critic's interest initially." Jack Spector, "The State of Psychoanalytic Research in Art History," *The Art Bulletin* (March 1988), p. 54.

<sup>9</sup>Sigmund Freud, lecture XXIII, "The Paths to Symptom-formation," *The Complete Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis*, ed. James Strachey (London: G. Ailen and Unwin, 1971), p. 376.

<sup>10</sup>Freud, quoted in Craig Owens, "Honor, Power, and the Love of Women," *Art in America* (January 1983), p. 7.

<sup>11</sup>As Donald Kuspit has said, many people view art "as at best a fortuitous pleasure and more often as the symptom of a maladaptation to reality;" Kuspit, "Artist Envy," *Artforum* 26 (November 1987) p. 116.

<sup>12</sup>The early modern artist did entertain a messianic, spiritual mission to transform the world into a universal utopian paradise.

<sup>13</sup>Arato, "Esthetic Theory—Introduction," p. 185.

<sup>14</sup>Walter Benjamin, "The Storyteller," *Illuminations*, ed. Hanna Arendt (N.Y. Schocken Books, 1969), p. 84.

<sup>15</sup>Andrew Arato, "Esthetic Theory—Introduction," p. 210.

<sup>16</sup>Guy Debord and Gil Wolman, quoted in John Miller, review, *Artscribe*, (Nov/Dec. 1987), p. 74.

<sup>17</sup>See Louis Althusser, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses: Notes Towards an Investigation," in *Lenin and Philosophy and other Essays*, trans by Ben Brewster (New York and London: Monthly Review Press, 1971) and quoted in Griselda Pollock, "Art, Art School, Culture: Individualism After the Death of the Artist," *Exposure*, vol. 24, no. 3, 1986, p. 23.

<sup>18</sup>Fredric Jameson, "Postmodernism and Consumer Society," *The Anti-Aesthetic*, ed. Hal Foster (Port Townsend, Washington: Bay Press, 1983), p. 112.

<sup>19</sup>Clement Greenberg, "Avant-Garde and Kitsch," *Art and Culture* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1961), p. 10.

<sup>20</sup>Thomas Lawson, "Last Exit Painting," *Artforum*, (October 1981), p. 42.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid.

<sup>22</sup>Jean Baudrillard, *In the Shadow of the Silent Majorities...Or the End of the Social* (New York: Semiotexte, 1983), p. 85.

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