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With respect to the color of the cover:
If works of art are to survive in the context of extremity and darkness, which is social reality, and if they are to avoid being sold as mere comfort, they have to assimilate themselves to that reality.

T.W. Adorno, "Black as an Ideal," *Aesthetic Theory.*

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Baudelaire's Exposure of the Photographic Image

JOSEPHINE DIAMOND

Baudelaire is a crucial figure in the articulation of modernism, both in his innovative poetry and in his critical writings on literature and art. The Symbolism which he prototypically represents embodies the crisis of art in bourgeois society as it intensifies in the mid-nineteenth century. At this time, the ritual function of art which had marginally survived under mercantile capitalism is transformed, to use Walter Benjamin's formulation, into a theology. Symbolism in France appears to mark the moment when art separates itself from life. As Peter Bürger writes in his *Theory of the Avant Garde*: "The apartness from the praxis of life that had always constituted the institutional status of art in bourgeois society now becomes the content of works."[1]

In contrast to the demystification of Art advocated by the Avant Garde, Symbolism and Aestheticism imply the autonomy and elitism of art and the social uselessness of the artist. They are commonly

criticized for rejecting life for art. Baudelaire has often been negatively interpreted for taking such a position. Walter Benjamin, in his brilliant illumination of Baudelaire's urban landscape, *Baudelaire: A Lyric Poet in the Era of High Capitalism*, points out how critics have stereotyped the poet as a kind of "fixed (sterile) agitation," deficient in his sense of history and economics.[2] And Sartre, who is as haunted by Baudelaire as he is by Flaubert, criticizes him for his lack of engagement in life, for his failure "to resolve the theological complex that transforms parents into gods."[3] For such critics, Baudelaire exemplifies the limitations of an aesthetics bound to collapse into aestheticism.

However, the distinction between art and life (more easily applicable, for example, to the symbolism of Mallarmé and Moreau) is inadequate for an understanding of Baudelaire's modernism. While he celebrates Beauty in ways that recall Romanticism and anticipate Aestheticism, his work is permeated with the concrete details of a city in the process of industrial transformation. He is a poet of the streets, of prostitutes, rag-pickers, drunks and the anonymous crowd. He is like a roving camera, the unobserved observer, registering the new realities of a changing consciousness. His critique of the invention of photography is inherently paradoxical and cannot therefore be easily dismissed as a typically elitist rejection of life in its immediate phenomenality.

Baudelaire's work catalyzed Walter Benjamin's understanding of art in the age of high capitalism and particularly brought into focus transformations of perception epitomised by photography. In his *Baudelaire*, Benjamin points out that one of the first uses of photography was repressive: it expedited identification of criminals in an increasingly bureaucratised society. Incorporated into a social mechanism that aims to fix the identity, to "freeze" a potentially threatening and anonymous mass the mechanism of photography fixes reality by, to use Benjamin's verb, "shocking" it. (The verb "to shoot" even more graphically suggests the violence of this process.) Benjamin equates the development of photography with the loss of the aura associated with the work of art traditionally conceived as unique and unreproducible, and with the loss of self-reflective memory based on a privileged depth of inner experience. Displacing the subjective I of the reflective subject, the photographer's eye expands the domain of voluntary memory equated with external, material and surface impressions. Baudelaire's poetry, according to Benjamin, grasps this shift of consciousness which affects all aspects of the relation of art to society. However, Benjamin does not share Baudelaire's uncompromising rejection of photography. Because of its capacity to destroy the bourgeois mystification of the auratic, elitist and individualistic conception of the artist, he sees it as a democratizing process which can be used for positive political ends.[4]

Baudelaire's critique of photography in "Le public Moderne et la photographie" ("The Modern Public and Photography"),[5] his review

of the Salon exhibition of 1859, considers the relation of art to life from a narrow angle which nevertheless opens up wide horizons. This ironic but passionate essay begins with the problem of the general mediocrity of contemporary art. As examples, he refers to two paintings and a sculpture. However, he has seen neither of the paintings and does not mention who painted them. Rather, he focuses on their titles as listed in the exhibition catalogue. They seem to him to encapsulate the degradation of art in its relation to the public. At first, he ascribes this degradation to the lack of *natural* talent in French painters. Such an explanation, of course, is typically bourgeois in its reduction of the artist to a force of nature or to an expression of the genius of the race. It situates him outside of social praxis and history. However, he immediately supersedes this explanation by showing how the titles reflect bourgeois consumerism, comparing them to a sugar coating which makes the "bitter medicine" of the painting palatable.

From the title *L'Amour et Gibelotte* (*Love and a Fricassee of Rabbit*),[6] he attempts to imagine the painting. He rejects his first grotesque vision of a dead rabbit decked out with wings and a quiver of arrows, realizing that the allegorical pretensions of the title probably mask the reality of two lovers relishing a meal. However, the appeal of the painting to the bourgeois viewer resides in the title, in the transfiguration of material appetite into a world of transcendental essences. The title of the second painting, *Monarchique, catholique et soldat* (*Monarchist, Catholic and Soldier*) suggests a mediocre caricature of the heroic Christianity of a Chateaubriand or the decline of the imperial words of Napoleon into the "farts" of his reigning namesake.[7] Through the title he visualizes the absurdity of a single figure simultaneously engaged in killing, taking communion and assisting at Louis XIV's *lever,* or, alternatively, a naked warrior tatooed with fleurs de lys and sacred imagery. Once again, the appeal of the painting for the modern public wholly resides in the title, in this case the caption celebrating an authoritarian and complacent political order.

A third example where Baudelaire begins with the work of art itself makes the same point. Admiring at the exhibition a sculpture representing the Assumption of a young girl in the arms of a skeleton, he cannot find its title in the catalogue. Only after extensive inquiry does he uncover the vague and sentimental *Toujours et Jamais* (*Forever and Never*), a title which cancels out the hard reality of the work with a sweet and easily digested emotional cliché.[8]

What the public looks for in art is the cliché. Significantly, the original meaning of the work in the nineteenth century is a stereotype block, the cast or "dab," used for reproduction. It is now the common French word for a photographic negative. The template of an original, the word, applied to language, has the negative connotation of the reification of an idea or the reification of an experience. The domination of the cliché is co-extensive with the popularity of

photography. The cliché pursued by the bourgeois public is the reflection of its own ideology. It has the effect of a mild stimulant which, like a mirror, produces a jolt of pleasurable recognition. The mediocre artist is complicitous with the public in the production of clichés and the creation of false consciousness: *"...car si l'artiste abêtit le public, celui-ci le liu rend bein. Ils sont deux termes corrélatifs qui agissent l'un sur l'autre avec une égale puissance."* (p. 616) ("...for if the artist stupefies the public, he is stupefied by it in turn. They are two correlative terms which act upon each other with equal power.")

Baudelaire's conception of the "natural" as opposed to the mediocre artist is formed by the romantic and idealist identification of beauty with truth. The pursuit of the beautiful produces awe and wonder and, through the mediation of the imagination, dislocates familiar modes of consciousness. However, truth and beauty have become separated. Truth for the modern public has been reduced to what can be positivistically defined as the real. Satisfied by meretricious surprises and predigested experience, contained within clichés and trained to think within a linear and analytical frame, it resists the derangement of the senses and disruptions of chronological time implicit in Baudelaire's conception of aesthetic experience. It is in this context of the rejection of the beautiful for the "true" that Baudelaire introduces his specific remarks on photography.

The modern public believes that art should exactly reproduce nature. Photography, therefore, is the god it has been waiting for.[9] Throughout this essay Baudelaire highlights the apparent paradox that faith in materialism coincides with faith in an illusory and narcissistic image. Thus he writes of the public's response to the invention of photography: *"A partir de ce moment, la société immonde se rua, comme un seul Narcisse, pour contempler sa triviale image sur le métal."* (p. 617) ("From that moment on, swinish society rushed, like a single Narcissus, to contemplate its trivial image on the metal plate.") Describing the mass hysteria of this public in pursuit of the latest false god, he mockingly evokes the apocalyptic fate of the Gangarene swine. In its idolatry, the public transforms itself into cardboard stills that grotesquely mimic figures from ritual and history. Thus he comically depicts the bourgeois couple posing for a photograph, smiles fixed for the necessary duration of the process, pompously decked out like costumed figures in a carnival, or striking poses like heroic characters from an ancient tragic play. These references to carnival and tragedy bring out the contrast between the empty poses of the subjects in front of the camera and the very different social reality their costumes suggest. The comic reversals of the carnival and the ironies of tragic drama—constituent elements in Baudelaire's own aesthetic consciousness—are reduced to both literal and metaphorical clichés. Baudelaire perceives the eye of the camera as a vast hole which promises to etherealise but actually absorbs the bourgeois subject. One might say that the aura stolen

from the work of art has not disappeared but reemerges as the halo—the proper lighting—of the photograph. However, the reality of the photographic session which produces a flattering image of the bourgeois is narcissism and voyeurism. Pornographic photographs emerged at the same time as the self-admiring studio portrait. And Baudelaire points out that the same bourgeois who try to turn their solid respectability into an everlasting icon, surreptitiously circulate obscene pictures readily available through the new technique of reproduction.

In his comments on photography in *The Theory of the Avant Garde,* Peter Bürger warns that the decisive turn in the development of art in bourgeois society must not be traced monocausally to the development of technical reproduction. With this warning—directed primarily against Benjamin's emphasis on the new techniques of reproduction—he concludes: "...because the advent of photography makes possible the precise mechanical reproduction of reality, the mimetic function of the fine arts withers."[10] Such is not the case in literature for, he maintains, there is no technical innovation that could have produced an effect comparable to that of photography in the fine arts.

Baudelaire does not isolate photography as the cause of the degradation of painting. "The god the public has been waiting for," emerges as the apotheosis, the logical expression of economic and philosophical materialism. It is the ultimate gratification. Since it simultaneously confirms the public's belief in the miracle of technological progress, satisfies its desire for realism and substitutes the illusion of identity for its loss of identity in the growing anonymous mass, it threatens to displace art altogether. Thus, the transformations brought about by the invention of photography express a generalized and radical transformation of consciousness which extends well beyond the fine arts. Epitomizing the cult of the real, defined as material evidence, photography from Baudelaire's perspective, necessarily affects all the arts.

Continuing his review of the 1859 Salon, he sums up, in "La Reine des Facultés" (The Queen of the Faculties) the aesthetic ideal of the modern public: "*Copiez la nature; ne copiez que la nature. Il n'y a pas de plus grande jouissance ni de plus beau triomphe qu'une copie excellente de la nature. Et cette doctrine, ennemie de l'art prétendait être appliquée non seulement à la peinture, mais à tous les arts, même au roman, même à la poesie.*" (p. 620) ("Copy nature; copy only nature. There is no greater joy nor greater achievement than an excellent copy of nature. And this doctrine, the enemy of art, claimed application not only to painting, but to all the arts, even to the novel, even to poetry.") In fact, the technical innovation of Daguerre affected literature as much as the fine arts. Less debatable than its withering of the mimetic function of the fine arts (a problematic notion given that Courbet founded Realism, in opposition to the clichés of Salon academicism, in 1855 when the cult of photog-

raphy was in full swing), it created a taste in the public for the easily assimilable and recognizable image. One might also recall that the invention of photography affected literature in facilitating the development of magazines, especially those promoting women's fashions. Not only did these pictures compete with the written word, they modified it especially since they offered the more immediate promise of some ultimate fulfillment of desire. As Baudelaire was lamenting the reduction of painting to predigested captions, Flaubert, in *Madame Bovary* was describing his heroine's fascination with images depicting sensuous ecstasy, and the pervasive reduction of language to the clichés. The images that destroy Madame Bovary function in exactly the same way as the photograph as described by Baudelaire: they provide the illusion of immediate transcendence. Like that of Courbet, Flaubert's "realism" which, in the history of French literature, is just as often called "symbolism," constantly undermines the clichés and reductions of positivistic bourgeois ideology. Both Baudelaire and Flaubert uphold the order of the imagination against a reality which they perceive as pure illusion, shadows, clichés, vicariousness, the "negative" of materialism. If they seem to withdraw into a symbolist ivory tower, it is because they grasp that the bourgeois lives in fantasmatic images that mediate or, in the case of women, replace action. Madame Bovary is exemplary of the power of the illusory image to consume as it is consumed.

Baudelaire contests the positivistic definition of the real in the name of the imagination, not conceived as its binary opposite but as a different epistemological order. Whereas the modern public relegates the imagination to the hot house of the ivory tower, Baudelaire describes it as the faculty which alone permits a communion of experience—"through the eyes of the other." Nor is it the synthetic faculty in opposition to that of analytical reason. It both synthesizes and analyzes. The queen of all faculties, it generates reality through analogy and metaphor, which, according to Baudelaire, coincides with creation as described in sacred texts. The oppositions life/art, matter/idea are not conceivable in such a figurally conceived universe. This symbolic order is inherently moral, the only protection against the cruelty, sterility and bigotry that Baudelaire attributes to the literalization of the sacred. The imagination is not blind to the phenomena of contemporary existence that fascinate the camera's eye, but it reconstellates these images from an inherently critical perspective.

The painter against whom Baudelaire measures French painting and photography is Delacroix, the catalyst of his own poetic theory. Further reflecting on the nature of the imagination, in "Le Gouvernement de l'Imagination," (The Rule of the Imagination), he recalls a conversation with Delacroix in which the painter described nature as a dictionary which unimaginative artists—namely, landscape painters and those concerned with external reality—merely copy but which imaginative artists use as material for the composition for a vision.

Painting for Baudelaire thus originates in an instant of imaginative transfiguration which can only be expressed through rapid but exact execution. Expanding on the theory of correspondences implicit in Delacroix' conception of nature as a dictionary, Baudelaire describes the different emotional tonalities produced by colors to which he gives symbolic value; for example, he associates yellow, orange and red with joy, glory and love.[12] Just as the creation of nature, he writes, consists of superimpositions which complete what went before, the creation of a painting consists of a series of superimposed layers which bring the dream to greater degrees of completion. He contrasts this model of composition, again based on Delacroix, with that of Vernet who functions, throughout the *Salons*, as the romantic painter's foil. Vernet painted his canvases piece by piece with the result that unfinished paintings—Baudelaire recalls a visit to his studio—were complete in some parts and empty in others. Baudelaire compares this mode of composition to manual labor in which a certain amount of work has to be covered within a determinate time. Vernet is a journeyman of art.

Vernet embodies, for Baudelaire, what he especially hates in modern public taste. As he writes in "Horace Vernet" in the *Salon* of 1846, Vernet exemplifies the Frenchman, a vaudevillian who becomes dizzy in front of a Michelangelo and stupefied before a Delacroix. To use Baudelaire's charged analogy, sublime paintings to such a viewer are like political uprisings. In contrast to the revolutionary vision of Delacroix, Vernet represents patriotic order. He mimics the *vox populi*, filling his canvas with factual detail and soothing historical anecdotes. Without passion but with a photographic memory he records every button on a uniform, every turn of gaiter, every shade of brass. Through vivid analogies Baudelaire brings out the connections between Vernet's military background and the style of his painting which he compares to armed aggression and the maintenance of law and order: *"Je hais cet art improvisé au roulement du tambour, ces toiles badigeonnées au galop, cette peinture fabriquée à coups de pistolet, comme je hais l'armée, la force armée et tout ce qui traine des armes bruyantes dans un lieu pacifique."* (p. 469) ("I hate this art improvised to the roll of a drum, these canvases covered at the gallop, this painting made with pistol-shots, as much as I hate the army, the armed forces and everything that hauls clashing arms into a peaceful place.")

Baudelaire correlates these images of law and order with that of masturbation, calling Vernet the "grand masturbator" of the French public. Indeed, his critique of Vernet prefigures his critique of mediocre painting and photography as media for the extension of law and order, for the ideology of positivism, and for narcissistic gratification. He justifies his ironic and mocking tone as being representative not of a merely individual bias against the painter, but that of a silent collectivity, the enemy of war and patriotic foolishness, a collectivity that he himself embodies.

In contrast to Vernet, Delacroix gives a modern shape to the beleagured imagination. He is a romantic painter, according to Baudelaire's definition, precisely because he grasps the contemporary moral climate in his paintings by means of an analogous vision. At the same time he is the most suggestive of painters, creating what Baudelaire calls a mnemotechnique, a skill for initiating historical configurations and associations which has particularly endeared him to poets. Indeed, unlike most modern painters, Delacroix exemplifies for Baudelaire the interpenetration of the arts through his deep and applied knowledge of matters other than painting, especially of poets, such as Dante, Ariosto, Shakespeare and Byron. Baudelaire nevertheless rejects the common association made between Delacroix and Victor Hugo, Victor Hugo being too systematic and symmetrical in his poetic conceptions, "born to please the Academy."

In defending the order of the imagination, Baudelaire often uses strong political and military metaphors, particularly in the earlier *Salon* of 1846 where he assumes the ironic voice of an insurgent against the established bourgeois order. Even in the more temperate *Salon* of 1859, he conceives the imagination in terms of a reality that has been displaced and driven into its last redoubts to be defended by a few heroic visionaries. In this sense, the artist is the true hero of modern life.

As is evident in Delacroix and *a fortiori* in his own work, Baudelaire does not dissociate the imagination from the critical faculty. On the contrary, as he writes in "La Reine des Facultés," the imagination contains the critical faculty and supplements it. Illustrating this supplementarity, he gives the example of the insightful and penetrating review of Delacroix and his contemporaries by Alexandre Dumas, a novice in art criticism but whose imagination leaps over gaps in factual and technical knowledge.

Just as Delacroix' vision constructs a cultural tradition that includes Dante and Shakespeare whose characters figure in his paintings, Baudelaire's conceives the imagination as that which initiates historical correspondences. For example, tracing the itinerary of the essay, "Le Public Moderne et La Photographie," he indicates the imaginative, intertextual stages of his own critical writing. The essay began when he was travelling in a carriage and musing about the reversals that had brought about the overthrow of the moral faculty of the imagination. He then discovered by chance, thrown randomly on a cushion, the very copy of *L'Indépendence Belge* that contained Dumas' review of Delacroix. Picking up the article, he encountered an elaboration and continuation of his own reveries in which the figure of Delacroix came luminously into focus.

Thus Dumas, whose own visionary strength had enabled him to comprehend Delacroix becomes a catalyst for Baudelaire, initiating his essay on photography which can only be understood in terms of the counter tradition of the imagination represented by Delacroix. What Baudelaire describes is a process arising from the rhythms of

reverie, while he is literally being "transported," that predisposes to the transformation of the random into creative correspondences. In fact, literary historians have "proved" that Baudelaire did not come across the Dumas article in the circumstances he describes; he may only have heard about it from a friend.[13] This is precisely the kind of positivistic history that Baudelaire's account displaces. What he traces is an exemplary itinerary in which the material details—the carriage, the review, the cushion—assume an emblematic significance in this construction of a tradition. The itinerary moves not from the past to the present, but from the present through an analagous past, one in which the constitutive difference generates a return beyond the initial point of departure. Thus the imagination spins out its historical affiliations. Unlike the solitary idealist frequently identified with Romanticism, Baudelaire, like Delacroix, self-consciously weaves and is woven by a cultural text.

In his essay "A Quoi Bon La Critique" written for the *Salon* of 1846 Baudelaire explicitly addresses the question of the apparent uselessness of the critic, a by-product of the uselessness of art in bourgeois society. Even the artist reproaches the critic for his incapacity to educate the bourgeoisie or to teach anything to the artist himself on whom the critic is a parasite. After deflating both artists and critics for their dubious relations to the market place, Baudelaire describes the best criticism, in contrast to that which would analyze and totalize a work of art, as poetic and playful. Anticipating the postmodernist deconstruction of boundaries between genres, he suggests that the appropriate criticism of a painting might be a lyrical poem or an elegy. True criticism, he insists, must be partial, passionate and political, written from an exclusive perspective but one which opens up the widest horizons. Thus defining the relation of the critic to the artist is one of reciprocal implication, he dissolves the structure that casts the critic in the role of authoritarian educator or parasite.

Although Baudelaire's aesthetic situation is inscribed within the bourgeois tradition that separates art from the praxis of life, his conception of the imagination radically contests the epistemological and historical bases of such a division. His analysis of the meaning of the photographic image for the modern public exposes the transformation of the imagination into images that consume and are consumed and which generate narcissism. Although he deploys the anachronistic figure of the "natural" artist to embody the resistance against this process, the imagination he describes prefigures the more explicit democratization of art advocated the Avant Garde. However, given the subtlety of his understanding of the subversions of the imagination by the illusory image during the period of high capitalism, his modernism critically contextualizes efforts to demystify art in a socioeconomic structure that denies the imagination any epistemological value and converts its products into objects of consumption. His analysis of photography in relation to the modern public is not simply elitist. Rather, in contrast to the imagination which, in his

definition, generates social and historical community, photography is a medium of narcissism and hysteria. Whereas he casts the imaginative artist in the role of revolutionary in the conflict with nineteenth century capitalism, he places the photographer in the ranks of oppressive order. Nothing could be further from the Avant Garde's espousal of photography as a means of aesthetic and social subversion.

Footnotes

[1]Peter Bürger, *Theory of the Avant Garde*, University of Minnesota Press, 1984, p. 27.

[2]Walter Benjamin, *Charles Baudelaire: A Lyric Poet in the Era of High Capitalism*, translated by Harry Zohn, NLB, 1973.

[3]Jean-Paul Sartre, *Baudelaire*, New Directions Books, 1950, p. 55.

[4]For Benjamin's reflections on photography and its use for politics see his classic essay "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," in *Illuminations*, Schocken Books, 1969, and his "A Short History of Photography," in *Walter Benjamin: One Way Street and Other Writings*, NLB, 1979.

[5]Baudelaire, *Oeuvres Complètes*, (Parish: Gallimard, 1976), vol. 2, pp. 614-619. References will be included in the text.

[6]*Amour et Gibelotte* is the title of a painting by Ernest Seigneurgens, student of Eugène Isebey.

[7]In fact, the title of this painting by Joseph Gouezou, student of León Cogniet, comes from a speech given by Napoleon III (in Rennes, August 20, 1858) and represents a young soldier hanging over his bed the portraits of the Emperor and the Empress. The other significant details in the painting are his musket and Holy-water basin. The propagandistic effect of the title makes the painting superfluous.

[8]The sculptor of *Tourjours et Jamais* is Emile Hébert.

[9]Baudelaire, does not for a moment believe that photogrpahy exactly reproduces nature but the modern public does: "...ils croient cela, les insensés!" (p. 617).

[10]Bürger, p. 32.

[11]The work of Jacques Lacan has been very useful in revealing the illusory nature of such modes of consciousness which, pertinently, he calls the "imaginary," identifying them with the child's enthrallment to his image of himself in the mirror as a "total" reality. Louis Althusser has applied Lacan's insights to his definition of bourgeois ideology. They both reveal the delusions of the postivistically conceived real.

[12]One recalls that Huysmans' aesthetic "hero" Des Esseintes in *A Rebours* was greatly influenced by Baudelaire's theory of correspondences and in fact decorated the main room in his house in such symbolic colors. However, he exemplifies the degradation of symbolism into aestheticism. Perhaps not so paradoxically, he is enamored of technological progress, despises women and seeks to destroy nature.

[13]Baudelaire was at Honfleur when the first of four articles by Dumas on the *Salon* of 1859 came out. Internal evidence suggests that he did not have a thorough knowledge of, at least, the first article. The "real" story may have been that a friend in Paris wrote to Baudelaire about it and summed up its contents.

Spectacle in Recent Art

DAVID GLASER

The concept of spectacle is familiar to us as something (or someone) exhibited as unusual, notable, eye-catching—a kind of object of curiosity, perhaps an object of contempt. Originating in the West in ancient Greece, art as spectacle has a long history. In Renaissance and Baroque Italy "artists manifested work in every form possible to the technology of the day and were encouraged in their pursuit of their multimedia concerns"[1]—Leonardo's pageants, his creation of automata; Bernini's theatrical spectacles in which he "wrote the scripts, designed scenes and costumes, carved sculpture, planned effects of lighting and sound...including elaborate feats of engineering."[2] Multimedia events were a means for generating the effect of the spectacular. With the dissolution of aristocratic and feudal social structures, the rise of capitalism, the industrial revolution in the 18th century and the more recent electronic revolution, art as spectacle has taken on new dimensions and consequences.

Henri Lefebvre has used the concept of the spectacle to describe the present form of mass consumption in which architecture, art, shop window displays, interior design, entertainment, news, advertising, etc. form components of a seeming totality—daily life as per-

manent theater replete with displays of consumption and the consumption of displays. The utopia of consumer goods represses and replaces that other spectacle—of the job, the office, the family—through its hyper-visibility which directs need and desire, creating the myth of the disappearance of deprivation and want while the simultaneous overstimulation and frustration of those needs and desires fixates the consumer to a position of permanent dependence. Thanks to satellite communications and computerized information technology, contemporary consumer culture has enlarged, engorged horizons—the mass media contribute enormously to the contemporary sense of spectacle—and the sheer number of commodities advertised and available approaches the scale of the infinite.

The spectacle of the glut of consumer culture confronted the 60s Pop artists who, utilizing images taken from that culture, intuited that the artistic problem was no longer the creation of new, original images, but how to give an existing image staying power in the *Weltanschauung* of the theater of mass consumption. Perhaps despite themselves, Pop artists were involved in a competition concerning control of the images of society. And in order to simultaneously deflate high art's privileged status and its pretension while inflating its public accessibility, many artists mimicked the commercial production techniques of the popular culture. These production techniques, particularly that of the mass media, provide overwhelming amounts of information and imagery so that no one thing appears more important than any other—events large and small democratically become part of the spectacle. The mass media, whether in a fast-paced, journalistic style or in the puerile programming which makes up most of its broadcast menu, tend to reduce individuals to stereotypical images (particularly in their romantic presentation of the "creative artist") and gloss over "difficult, abstract, artistic" ideas. In an anticipatory (and from its perspective, perverse) application of the later modernist-formalist idea of "using the characteristic methods of a discipline to criticize the discipline itself,"[3] Andy Warhol attempted simultaneously to appropriate and expose the media's devaluation of art and individual to image, by denying the unique, individual creativity of the artist in his own production. In his "collaboration" with the media in its reduction of his art (and himself) to sheer image, Warhol willingly encouraged the media's spectacle-brokering through the production of an art that allowed for quick consumption; while his deliberate exhibition of the "inauthentic" artist attempted to expose a media that powerfully—repetitively—reinforces standardized conceptions and perceptions for display in the permanent theater.

Warhol's approach toward the reductive stereotyping produced by the mass media is today well over 20 years old and has lost its power to generate critical awareness. Itself a stereotypical strategy, the exhibition of the inauthentic self of the media celebrity is rou-

tinely accepted as part of the contemporary cultural landscape. Warhol's artistic productions have achieved the status of permanent cultural icons testifying to the popular culture's insatiable appetite and power to incorporate, and thereby neutralize, critical activities that invade its precincts: in the permanent theater, Warhol's subversive style became a style of subversion.

A somewhat unquiet hiatus was reached with the emergence of conceptual art—a hiatus that prepared the ground for the late 70s re-emergence of a rested and revitalized art market—spectacle with a vengeance. What conceptual art, in part, emphasized was the awareness that the meaning of a work of art has a tenuous connection to the configuration of its material substance; that meaning is contingent rather than immanent. This awareness, as part of a cultural/historical legacy, and the ubiquitous presence of the mass media, has convinced contemporary artists that no act, regardless of how genuine, how deeply felt, how "critical," is accorded cultural meaning unless represented through the mass media. Indeed, it has been argued that the original work of art is simply the residue of the mass distribution context. "The work of art's dignity in its museum paradise seems trivial, a kind of negative definition of it, compared to its positively heroic character as a mass media celebrity. We finally come to prefer to see it as mass media produced, not simply reproduced, for we realize that its entire power of displacement, its whole effect on us, depends on the politics of its display."[4] Walter Benjamin's idea of art's loss of aura in an age of mechanical reproduction has had to be abandoned in the face of a cultural situation in which "the media have become the model for art."[5]

Under pressure from the mass media, the individual or the original work of art appears as a simple, naive prop, lost within the scale, the glamour, the spectacle of mass consumption. The individual or art exhibits only intermediary status; it is seen as an inchoate form that yearns toward a greater, more encompassing state of incarnation. Today it is impossible to separate artist from art, for both come under the magnifying power of the mass media's relentless "star search." Only through incorporation in the mass media can the artist mature, grow out of a restructured and circumscribed "art world" (Laurie Anderson has said of the New York art world "It's like a dormitory there, it really is,"[6]) and become part of the "real life" of culture.

The problem, of course, is that with very rare exceptions, the spectacle created by the mass media distorts what it illuminates, homogenizes self and art into sheer image because it operates off of an ideological impulse which seeks gratification through constant change, the new and exciting, the extravaganza. Some artists, like Robert Longo for example, have become fascinated by the power of the mass media. "I mean the Third Reich knew all about visual seduction, and the idea of visual seduction is very fascinating to me. Seduce somebody with an image? That's amazing stuff."[7] Longo denies any interest in "fascist" art as such—it is the power of seduction

that the mass media generate which he finds of interest.

While the overall scale of Longo's work directly competes with the movie screen, the materials that embody much of his two-dimensional and three-dimensional "combines" have a sleek, synthetic look—apparently an effort to simulate in the elegance of its clean lines the "technological ideal of art" rather than an ideal stemming from nature. Longo juxtaposes the mechanical clarity of his formal elements—his romance with the look of technology—with appropriated images in a variety of media and size that broadly iterate the disjunctive syntax of surrealism and certain Pop artists. In 1982 Carter Ratcliff described Longo's work as examining "the 'seductiveness' of oppressive images...and that if he is not to lose himself to the seductiveness of the spectacle he creates, he must turn the glance of the authoritarian imagery back on itself."[8]

Longo chooses to confront a situation similar to that of the earlier Warhol (Warhol is Longo's declared choice of role model)—but the strategy applied by Warhol for dealing with the spectacle of mass consumption, the authoritarian images that reinforce the sense of normalcy, even naturalness, of business as usual, is no longer available to Longo. The seductive power of the mass media, the aura of spectacle it creates, has rendered that strategy impotent. In the same article Ratcliff asks, "What is to prevent Longo from positioning himself to absorb that aura, that mechanistic glamour, in his own person?"[9] Longo's interest in the "seduction of oppressive imagery" is a screen writ large, only slightly masking his consuming self-absorption and self-promotion. Longo's well-known verbal logo "the artist is a guardian of our culture" articulates his consciousness of the powerful forces that make the public realm of culture a battleground for competing ideological and economic interests.[10] But Longo's fascination with the power of visual seduction also reflects his own sense of impotence, his fear of "being lost in the crowd."[11] Longo wants "people to recognize my art—and my film—not by any style, but by the way it *feels.* When they get a physical reaction, they should know they're looking at Longo."[12] Longo wants to seduce the spectator to an experience of his own personal power. His appropriation of the imagery of mass culture is a way to "identify, dominate and feel superior at the same time."[13] Longo's seduction does not function in the service of dismantling powerfully symbolic authoritarian imagery; does not seduce the spectator (etymologically "seduction" means to bring to oneself) in order to engage in a visual/critical I-Thou relationship, to help call the other into being, to re-empower the spectator, but serves instead to create a fascinated, adoring audience. The claims that Longo's works are "Herculean meditations on the collapse of art mediums and art categories" and that Longo "asserts the self as the will that imposes a contingent order on the culture's fragments,"[14] are sheer hyperbolic rhetoric and spectacle-mongering. For it has long been a fact that the self is the ultimate career under capitalism: "It is plain that commodities

cannot go to market and make exchanges of their own account. We must, therefore, have recourse to the guardians, who are also their owners.... In order that these objects may enter into relation with each other as commodities, their guardians must place themselves in relation to one another, as persons whose will resides in those objects."[15] This, I believe, is the unconscious meaning of Longo's claim to cultural guardianship. Longo wants to "produce things that go into our culture quickly"[16] and he speculates with his ability to create a trademark, a feeling we will recognize as "Longo" and that will stand out among the crowd of artistic goods. Longo wants to further codify experience into an emotional spectacle, finally exhibiting his fascination with a hyperbolic, imaginary self-image that he hopes will provide succor for his narcissism.

From her first performance in 1972, Laurie Anderson has become increasingly involved with the use of media technology and the mass media. Her performances, based on appropriated imagery taken from many areas of past and contemporary life, are in part composed of spectacular effects (the single stroke of a violin bow can initiate dramatic changes in the visual, aural environment) that focus on the technological-human interface (her high-tech altered vocals can be seen as a contemporary equivalent to the 18th-century castrato). She has said that, "Now, in terms of technology affecting people's lives on a daily basis, this is what my work is really centered on.... You turn on a TV and it doesn't work, and unless you're a technician or an engineer, you probably can't fix it. You're living in a world that's extremely alienating."[17]

Anderson's work has been seen as a recreation/critique of the spectacle created by the mass media. She utilizes the authority of high-tech multimedia displays as a "subtle critique of media culture." Her performances are "effective critical tools" that help us to examine the gap between the technology, especially media technology, that increasingly affect our lives but which operate beyond our control. Anderson's conception of alienation describes the social situation of the individual confronted by a society that can increasingly regulate his or her life with apparent technocratic ease, a society split between the structurally public and individually private sectors. Corporations "not content with the status of economic unit or with political influence, tend to invade social experience and set themselves up as a model for the organization and administration of society in general."[18] These huge public institutions establish networks, relations of power and meaning, that distort or alter the individual's intended aims. Corporate America does not operate according to a common plan. It, like society in general, is free to act independently and engage in exchange with little concern for others in pursuit of its aims. Society appears to be made up of individual units of competitive power, each experiencing the other as sheer hostile "facts" to be manipulated for survival and profit. But this situation masks the vast complex of actual social dependency under-

lying the freedom to act independently, and it is this underlying social dependency that becomes experienced as alienating. Anderson implicitly extends her idea of alienation into a "critical tool" through her description of a type of neutral information—a split between form and content. "Art as propaganda is dangerous"[19] because people can be seduced by beautiful form before they can evaluate the idea/propaganda content—as in a song in which the lyrics are buried.[20] Her solution is to create a sensual form, but one "airy enough"[21] to permit evaluation of ideas.

Anderson's myth of neutral, "airy" form or information dissipates in the network of relations of meaning, entrenched cultural codes, enforced by the prevailing structures of power. The problem with her work is that it all too easily becomes a part of that which it seeks to critique. Her work is "not a social document. It's not meant to explain things. I am an artist who creates images. I'm not persuading, I'm describing."[22] Anderson refuses to follow the logic implicit in her own concept of alienation by refusing to see how her actions and images are not simply descriptive but become species of propaganda in a belief system in which she voluntarily participates.

Perhaps claims about Anderson's "subtle critical" methods are simply anachronistic. "I've become a part of the pop culture. I'm happy about this development. I always thought it would be wonderful for more artists to enter their own culture rather than to increase the gap between the avant-garde and the general public."[23] Anderson's acceptance of and by the popular culture tends to decrease the sense of alienation of both: Anderson has greater access to more sophisticated media technology (which she is allowed to play with since she in no way threatens the ideological hegemony of the powers that be) while her corporate sponsors reap increased market share in the theater of consumption.

The spectacle of the appropriators appropriated—the artist as puppet—has sometimes been given self-conscious, humorous form, as in Jonathan Borofsky's well-known *Dancing Clown* (1983). A life size ballerina doll wearing a clown's mask "dances" atop a three-dimensional cubist-derived sculpture to the tune of "I Did It My Way." The spectacle in recent art often takes the form of parody. When he is not painting huge pictures of cartoon characters for the art market, Kenny Scharf makes installations in which every available inch of space is obliterated with day-glo, fluorescent drawing and littered with department store schlock images, toys and gadgets. In a culture that abhors a vacuum, Scharf's installations are parodies of cultural pollution and a mass media that conflates politics, science, art, fashion, sports, etc. The difficulty is that this work seems like a last resort; it has been coerced into a mode of ineffectual parody because art seems no longer capable of generating a sense of antagonism. (Scharf's "chaotically crazy" installation at the 1985 Whitney Biennial was neatly confined in its "appropriate" place). Parodic art has become a caricature of itself, lost its power to generate alterna-

tives by becoming a cliché, and has become increasingly gratuitous: thwarted in its ability to address psychosocial issues it becomes spectacle for spectacle's sake.

While the spectacular is given its peculiarly contemporary sense through the mass media, the use of grand scale also conditions and signals the sense of spectacle. It was customary in the Roman Empire for an emperor to be sculpted about life-size during his life-time; after death, when he became a god, about twice life-size. In this century "Matisse was the first...to give free expression to the bodily act of painting; to render the sense of expansion which is the literal truth about freedom."[24] Pollock, of course, in a certain phase of his *oeuvre*, expanded the idea of the bodily act of painting—his integration of physical involvement, spontaneity and directness requiring a large "arena" in which to "act." Newman's large scale painting and sculpture were used in the service of his vision of the transcendent,[25] an encompassing infinitude.

Whereas at one time it might have been possible to believe that grand scale could, if not correlate with, at least facilitate a sense of freedom or transcendence, that belief is no longer possible. The appealing myth of expansion, transcendence and individual movement which is the "literal truth about freedom" has been revealed as delimited by a social structure which it helps to constitute. Richard Serra's huge (12 foot high, 120 foot long, Cor-ten steel) *Tilted Arc* is a case in point. Installed (1981) in New York City's Federal Plaza, the *Tilted Arc*, a "site-specific" work based on "extensive studies"[26] of the site, is delimited by that site and "was constructed so as to engage the public in a dialogue that would enhance, both perceptually and conceptually, its relation to the entire plaza."[27] Serra's *Tilted Arc* has continually met with public resistance (most recently the subject of public hearings in March, 1985). It is a public which generally experiences the work as a monolithic, aggressive imposition thrust upon it as if by fiat (no neighborhood discussion, dialogue or consultation took place), leaving it with a feeling of powerlessness to control the environment in which people live and work. In this regard, *Tilted Arc*'s obtrusive aggressiveness provides an unwitting critique of the myth of expansion as a "sign" of freedom associated with an earlier art of grand scale. That Serra may have intended his work to be a critique of the rather oppressive architectural environment surrounding the plaza pales beside the fact that this work is experienced as participating and exacerbating that same oppressiveness. Upset at the public's response, although expressly desirous of engaging "the public in a dialogue," Serra has threatened to leave the United States if his work is relocated. A year after his commission for *Tilted Arc*, Serra, in an article whose subject was his *St. John's Rotary Arc* (located near the Holland Tunnel in lower Manhattan), wrote: "Works which are built within the contextual frame of governmental, corporate and religious institutions run the risk of being read as tokens of those institutions. One way of avoiding ideological co-optation is to

choose leftover sites which cannot be the object of ideological misinterpretation."[28] But Serra chose a highly populated, governmental site, and the real-life experience of an outspoken public cannot be reduced to "ideological misinterpretation." Through its assertion of its scale and physically willful aggressiveness in the face of public resistance, Serra's arc can be seen as an objective correlative, reproducing in its physiognomic attitude the spectacle of individualism that underlies the spectacle of recent art: in the name of (artistic) freedom, Serra's arc iterates the impersonal disregard for the individual which characterizes (both in the external impersonality of its facade and in the production and enforcement of its social politics) the surrounding institutions of power.

Today large scale—when not overtly oppressive—tends to simply mean big, and big means important. From Abstract Expressionism to color field painting to Minimalism (Minimalism never referred to minimal size or scale) to the more or less current neo-expressionism, large scale has become required form, part of the bloated vocabulary of the theater of consumption. Large scale has become a convention, a rhetorical mode attempting to compensate for its inability to match the mass media's electronic "spread"—in the double sense of expansiveness and sumptuous meal. Large scale denotes serious business and its bombastic presence signifies the transition from the grand to the grandiose. Very few artists want or are able to defeat the sense of the willful grandiose while retaining the use of large scale. Oldenburg's burlesque monumental sculptures come to mind as early poseurs rendering the spectacle of the overblown and gigantic a ridiculous self-conceit. By contrast, the later work of Leon Golub overcomes the spectacle of the hyperbolic self's use of large scale by revealing the "will to power in all the immedicacy of its ugly, raw reality."[29] Golub's scale helps to attract the public, to "win their baffled acceptance of the [depicted] events, to compel their intensely emotional participation in them, as if at a horrifying yet festive public execution."[30] In the theater of mass consumption, Golub's paintings fight against the devaluation of the viewer to consumer status by implicating and establishing the viewer's complicity in the horrific scenes depicted. Golub neither seeks to depersonalize nor to turn the viewer into an adoring admirer, but to awaken the viewer to a consciousness of his or her complicity in publicly sanctioned violence.

In the end, the spectacle in and of recent art is a reflection and amplification of the spectacle of individualism that is so much a part of our cultural character. The personal, pervasive and generally accepted experience of our society (so pervasive it is usually taken-for-granted) is the sense of the independent, free individual engaging an external social reality—the myth of individualism, what Richard Lichtman (following Marx) calls "a basic phenomenal illusion."[31] It is a myth because underlying the individual's freedom to act is a social system—managed and administered by the prevailing institutions of

power—upon which he or she is dependent and which itself is free and independent of the individual's will. It is because the individual has no control over these dependency relationships that they are experienced as an imposition, as alienating. The interplay between the individual's freedom to act and his or her underlying social dependency stands in general relation to that of an appearance to reality: "the phenomenal forms of free individuality are dialectically related to the structure of real dependence which constitutes the essential relations of the (social) system."[32] There is a dialectical relationship—not one of mere contingency—between the "phenomenal forms of free individuality" and "real dependence" because the myth or illusion of free individuality can only be sustained by granting some degree of individual "movement"; without granting this modicum of movement the entire illusion would collapse. But it is just this modicum of freedom, this freedom to act as an individual, this voluntary compliance, that reproduces the system of social alienation and dominance because it dialectically constitutes the social structure of dependence. Caught in a vicious cycle, alienation and dominance are sustained by the active engagement "of the phenomenally formed consciousness of the individuals who continue the system. The essence of the system, its structure of exploitation, is dependent upon the realm of appearance."[33]

By reason of the fact that free individuality is a phenomenal illusion, the realm of appearances plays a crucial role in the reproduction of the social system. In contemporary life the realm of appearances is dominated by the mass media with its incessant image flow that flattens the modicum of individual freedom into easily managed stereotypes. The world not only becomes a spectacle for the alienated subject, individuality itself becomes the spectacular subject: the production and consumption of individuality constitutes the real spectacle of life in the permanent theater. But it is only because we have some understanding of our actual social dependence that our self-conceptions are kept within certain limits—within the limits of the expectations of others. Yet today the power of technology—which can reduce the individual to a robot—seems also to offer such expanded possibilites for the self (in the biological sphere, recombinant DNA or the transplantation of organs, for instance) that the limits of the expectations of others seem unclear. The seductive illusion of miraculous re-birth, of the regeneration of selfhood and the creation of new self-images distilled into a spectacular and exotic array of media-born stereotypes through the fecund power of mass mediation—a media destiny within the constantly expanding limits of the media's horizon—renders self-definition unclear. At the same time, the concept of self seems capable of enormous expansion. Such loss of limits makes social dependence—social powerlessness—that much more acute, since it exacerbates the myth of individual sovereignty. As Lichtman writes, "The more profound the sense of social powerlessness, the more

luxurious the growth of personal hyperbole."[34]

The spectacle of and in recent art is the expression of this personal hyperbole which masks a sense of helplessness—social dependence ultimately experienced as a form of terrorism. The "happy consciousness" of the art of the spectacular makes a mockery—a spectacle—of its pretended and pretentious hyperbolic criticality, turning it into new forms of entertainment. If it is true, as Sidney Tillim has said, that "the ethic of affluence has simply replaced the ethic of alienation"[35] in the phenomenally formed consciousness, then it may also be true that "alienation is spreading and becoming so powerful that it obliterates all trace or consciousness of itself."[36]

Footnotes

[1]Attanasio Di Felice, "Renaissance Performance: Notes on Prototypical Artistic Actions in the Age of the Platonic Princes" in *The Art of Performance* (eds. Gregory Battcock and Robert Nickas) (New York, E.P. Dutton, 1984), p. 5.

[2]*Ibid.*, p. 19.

[3]Clement Greenberg, "Modernist Painting" in *The New Art* (ed. Gregory Battcock) (New York, E.P. Dutton, 1973), p. 67.

[4]Donald B. Kuspit, "Art in an Age of Mass Mediation" in *Art Criticism* (1981) p. 72.

[5]*Ibid.*, p. 78.

[6]Quoted in Robert La Fernais, "An Interview with Laurie Anderson" in *The Art of Performance*, p. 262.

[7]Quoted in Paul Gardner, "Longo: Making Art for Brave Eyes" in *Art News* (May, 1985), p. 64.

[8]Carter Ratcliff, "Dali's Dreadful Relevance" in *Artforum* (October, 1982), p. 65.

[9]*Ibid.*, p. 65.

[10]Rupert Murdoch, for instance. One magazine called him "the business speculator of the age." He wants to create what he calls "a great and considerable media corporation," in addition to his half dozen television stations, his ownership of "The Village Voice," "The New York Post," and other investments catering to a broad sociopolitical spectrum. (*Investment Decision Magazine*, June 1985).

[11]Quoted in Paul Gardner, "Longo: Making Art for Brave Eyes" in *Art News*, p. 59.

[12]*Ibid.*, p. 65.

[13]Sidney Tillim, "The View Past 50" in *Artforum* (April, 1984), p. 69.

[14]Carter Ratcliff, "David Byrne and the Modern Self: 'How Do I Work This?" in *Artforum* (May, 1985), p. 97.

[15]Karl Marx, "Capital " in *The Production of Desire* by Richard Lichtman (New York, Free University Press, 1982), p. 240.

[16]Quoted in Paul Gardner, "Longo: Making Art for Brave Eyes," p. 59.

[17]Quoted in Robert La Fernais, "An Interview with Laurie Anderson," p. 264.

[18]Henri Lefevbre, *Everyday Life in the Modern World* (Harper and Row, 1971), p. 66.

[19]Quoted in Robert La Fernais, "An Interview with Laurie Anderson," p. 258.

[20]"It's an incredibly beautiful song and you just immediately love it, but you can't understand the words; the lyrics are buried. You listen to the song 50 times and finally you understand the lyrics and they're awful...they're stupid. But it's too late, the song is inside you, there's nothing you can do. This to me is the principal difference between ideas and art." Quoted from "An Interview with Laurie Anderson," p. 258.

[21]*Ibid.*, p. 258.

[22]Quoted in Charles Bermant, "Laurie Anderson's Country Music" in *What's New Magazine* (Multicom 7 Inc., Issue #66, May 1985), p. 100.

[23]*Ibid.*, p. 99.

[24]E.C. Goosen, "The Big Canvas" in *The New Art*, p. 61.

[25]See "Transcendence in the Vision of Barnett Newman" by David Glaser in *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* (40/4, Summer 1982).

[26]Richard Serra, "Tilted Arc Hearing" in *Artforum* (Summer, 1985), p. 99.

[27]*Ibid.*, p. 99.

[28]Richard Serra, "St. John Rotary Arc" in *Artforum* (September, 1980), p. 53.

[29]Donald Kuspit, *Leon Golub: Existential/Activist Painter* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1985) p. 6.

[30]*Ibid.*, p. 26.

[31]Richard Lichtman, *The Production of Desire*, p. 223.

[32]*Ibid.*, p. 233.

[33]*Ibid.*, p. 223.

[34]*Ibid.*, p. 225.

[35]Sidney Tillim, "The View Past 50," p. 68.

[36]Henri Lefevbre, *Everyday Life in the Modern World*, p. 94.

The Road Now Taken

PHYLLIS TUCHMAN

If you haven't reckoned with the Zeitgeist of the 80s, you might find Bryan Hunt, Mel Kendrick, and Peter Reginato an unlikely trio of sculptors to band together. For several years Hunt has been modelling in plaster and then casting in bronze work which melds motifs from nature and allusions to Greek goddesses with the principles of abstraction. Kendrick has carved from all sorts of woods scores of dense, smallish forms which are non-representational and multifaceted and integrated them with equally unique, leggy pedestals. Reginato welds sprightly steel constructions with fanciful shapes of his invention and paints them with exuberant combinations of color. Although each artist employs a different technique, their concerns are related. An eclectic spirit and eccentric tone currently prevails in the art world. And process and procedure have become as idiosyncratic as the properties they are used to realize.

One-person shows Hunt, Kendrick, and Reginato held in Manhattan last season revealed that these three artists share a lot in common. This includes attitudes about size, surface, shape and color; the relationship of parts to the whole; and the influence of the

past on the future. Their imagery is personal as well as stylish. All rely on intuitive practices rather than the cerebral precepts canonized by the Minimalists two decades ago. Meaning neverthless is not attained at the expense of quality. And when they're considered together, it's apparent there's not a right way or a wrong way to execute a three-dimensional form. These three work as freely as the Early Modern masters who broke no rules because they were making them.

When you encounter a sculpture by Hunt, Kendrick, or Reginato, you're likely to draw close to it. A number of factors engender this response, and several reverse the way things have been since the mid-60s. Work by these artists entails the accumulation of parts. These elements, which are fashioned by hand and/or hand-held tools, can be interesting if isolated from the rest of the sculpture. Because everything can be handled by one person, what's executed tends to be smaller and less cumbersome than Minimalist structures shopped out to fabricators and not overwhelming and dislocating like room-sized installations.

You enjoy an intimate, less public relationship with a sculpture by Hunt, Kendrick, or Reginato. Although Robert Morris once partially accounted for how something like this can occur, your experience rises above theoretical premises to a more enchanting, purely visual realm. Seeking to justify the sensibility of the sixties in an article published in *Artforum* in October 1966, Morris pointed out that Egyptian glassware, Romanesque ivories, and such have "highly resolved surface incident" unlike larger, broader-planed objects. Hunt, Kendrick, and Reginato actually animate their sculptures with a variety of means. Hunt's surfaces are so detailed light and shadow become enticing, practically palpable substances and by retaining the natural tones of plaster, wood, and steel in his *Barcelona Series*, he underscored the individality of each section. Kendrick choreographs a corps of angles and enlivens his planes further by drilling holes, leaving pencilled guidelines visible, and adding patches of color. Reginato juggles an assortment of unusual, often biomorphic shapes and applies different hues so that drips, splashes, and splatters whet your curiosity.

For a number of years some critics have been predicting, a few have even been asserting, the demise of Modernism. During the early 70s, there were writers who were claiming that the finest talents were becoming filmmakers. Others were suggesting that performance art and photography were supplanting in importance and creative heights the traditional media of painting and sculpture. When I read these things, I could never understand whether the end of art as it had been known during the course of the 20th century was on a path where new objects were hurdling at great speeds toward an insurmountable brick wall, as if they were runaway planets in a Science Fiction movie which were about to crash into the sun and shroud the Earth in darkness. Or was another scenario being pro-

jected? Were artists merely inching along at a slower and slower pace until everyone would stall and entropy would set in?

The doomsayers were mistaken. The traditional arts are in a healthy state today. No one disputes that painting is thriving and Hunt, Kendrick, and Reginato's latest sulptures similarly confirm the vitality of the present moment. During the free-for-all 70s, the course of Modernism was somewhat stymied, but now a number of artists are replenishing its sapped coffers. They're taking an untravelled path, a road their immediate predecessors forgot existed. It's the one that was left "for another day" and which Robert Frost suspected in 1916, "knowing how way leads to way, I doubted if I should ever come back."

Aspects of Modernism are now encountered which weren't explored fully when they were introduced by previous generations. Consequently, the nature of both linear and horizontal histories is being redefined. At times it seems as if artists are going backwards and forwards simultaneously. Hunt's sensuous surfaces, for example, call to mind the kind of Rodinesque bumps and hollows rejected by Brancusi. At the same time they're the sculptural equivalents of the marks and strokes on painterly canvases by his contemporaries, Neil Jenney and Susan Rothenberg. When Kendrick creates compound angles and complex planes, he has one foot planted in a past populated by Boccioni's Futurism, Archipenko's Cubism, and German Expressionist sculputures while his other foot is striding toward a future shared with things as grandiose as skyscrapers from the firms of Helmut Jahn and Moshe Safdie. If Reginato was influence by David Smith early on, now he's developed more radically images and themes which once concerned Lipchitz and Gonzalez that Smith overlooked. And he's examining pictorial premises that have engaged Miro and Leger as well as Murray and Miami Vice.

Advanced technology has made it possible for Hunt, Kendrick, and Reginato to achieve qualities the Early Modern masters could only dream about. Because silicon is now used in the casting process, Hunt can exploit the mimetic capacities of bronze so that the inherent properties of the different materials of his *Barcelona Series* are still in evidence. The availability of electrical power equipment for cutting all kinds of odd, geometric configurations and drilling all manners of holes from wood has enhanced what Kendrick can realize. And the perfecting of heavy-duty industrial paints has let Reginato color his steel so that it will be practically maintenance-free out-of-doors.

High tech innovations partly explain what Hunt, Kendrick, and Reginato have been able to accomplish. For each artist has also mastered a host of traditional skills. Hunt's *Barcelona Series* is a lexicon of sculptural practices: he carved, modelled, and welded wood, plaster, and steel and the platform on which his parts are perched might once have been a Minimalist structure had it been blown up in size. To make his lively pieces Kendrick has not just harnessed the

forces of progress, he's also manipulated a variety of handtools as well as glue. When Reginato torch-cuts elaborate forms from sheets of steel, he's benefitting from the up-grading of welding equipment; however, he forges curves and bends the old-fashioned way, too.

You might expect better equipment, once dormant craft procedures, and a wealth of historical images and ideas upon which to draw to generate a jaded, know-it-all character. But Hunt, Kendrick, and Reginato's sculptures have an air of adventure about them. Their work is ebullient and at times downright zany. Theirs is a world of sinuous curves, not a spartan diet of hard-edges and hollow volumes. What they make seems haphazard even when you know it's not—you know their pieces would topple over if they weren't thought out or tested to their limits. Irony is conspicuously absent. Rather, a kind of bonhommie permeates their art. A jazz age raffishness seems to beckon us toward their forms.

Hunt, Kendrick, and Reginato haven't used the past the way Arnold Schoenberg did when he orchestrated several compositions by Bach during the twenties. Nevertheless you feel something comparable has ensued because a gallery filled with their three-dimensional images might resemble a sculptural version of Picasso's *Three Musicians* of 1921 in the collection of the Museum of Modern Art. Although that magical canvas, a synthetic interpretation of Cubism and a painted version of papier collees, is checkered with patterns, you know you're looking at a Pierrot who plays a clarinet or recorder, a Harlequin with a guitar, and a Monk or Domino who holds a sheet of music.

Hunt, Kendrick, and Reginato deal with similar complexities within a framework of clarity and cohesiveness. But they grapple with this blend of components from an opposite direction. They begin with abstraction as a given. These three sculptors, after all, belong to the first generation to inherit the legacy of the 60s. They still respect some of the principles expounded by Andre, Flavin, Judd, LeWitt, and Morris; they practiced them early on in their own careers. However, there are deep-seated qualities rather than the superficial look of Minimalism which survive in their sculpture. When you realize this, you recognize where they're taking us. Hunt, Kendrick, and Reginato are immersing us in a new chapter in the history of the plastic arts. They are enriching a vocabulary that had been reduced to its essentials. All three are freshly reinterpreting the original premises of Modernism. They have retrieved lost values from the first half of the century and combined them with the lessons of the more recent past. Hunt, Kendrick, and Reginato have restored to sculpture its heroic dimension.

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Psychoanalytic Perspectives on Art

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In 1952, Ernst Kris stated that "the time for a systematic [psychoanalytic psychology of art] has not come." Does psychoanalysis, in 1985, have anything to contribute to our understanding of art? I believe the answer is a highly qualified "yes." Before examining this proposition in more detail, it is necessary to say something about psychoanalytic theory, in this case Freudian or classical psychoanalysis. Although I am identifying these concepts as "Freudian," this body of thought has always been in flux. Freud's work is still the most powerful influence on contemporary psychoanalysis, but for some 45 years, not only did he himself make radical changes in his views, but well before his death those views began to be modified in several different directions by other analysts; that evolution continues to this day.

Psychoanalysis, a psychobiological view of human beings, posits an epigenetic developmental theory of normal and abnormal psychological processes. We suppose an infant at birth to be dominated by biologic imperatives: hunger, physical pain, sucking behavior, tactile

pleasure, and the like. The human body, and its functions, as Weston LaBarre noted, is a cross-cultural phenomenon; it is also relatively constant across considerable periods of time. Differences of course exist between the male and female bodies, but the full meaning of these differences, and their relationships to environmental influences, remains to be elucidated. The omnipresence of biology is not without bearing on aesthetics, and I will return to this later; at this point, suffice it to allude to the probability that a creative potential is, at least in part, hereditary; perhaps similar propensities for the experience of aesthetic pleasure also exist. These comments in no way negate the critical influence of culture/society on both artist and spectator.

Certain areas of the body are relatively more dominant, as sources of pleasure, at different maturational levels. The early oral and tegumental gratifications are transcended (but never extinguished) by subsequent anal, locomotor, and ultimately genital zones of excitement and desire. The human life cycle, though heavily charged in the earliest years, is hardly completed at age 6; but by analogy to embryologic processes, the evidence indicates that the earlier intrusion of an influence the more profound and lasting is its effect. Powerful influences, early in life, "fixate" aspects of that phase in an individual's psyche. Hence the reductionistic descriptions of individuals as "oral," "anal," etc. Are there events in the artist's early childhood that bends his or her creativity in some particular direction? Freud's paper on Leonardo (Freud, 1910) makes precisely this point.

The biologic infant evolves through time, progressively becoming a psychobiologic person in whom the underlying organic "givens" become enmeshed in a rich and complex psychosocial reality in which psyche and body interact continuously and dialectically. It should be understood that the "psyche," as used here, is not to be construed as an immaterial system, in a philosophically idealist sense; psyche is only arbitrarily and semantically isolated from body because in the main, its precise connections with underlying soma remain imprecise. Freud frequently referred to a "complementary series" between the constitutional and environmental influences on an individual.

Psychoanalysts regard human behavior, whether it consists of observable acts, feelings, fantasies, dreams, slips of the tongue, and so forth, as meaningful, even though the subject may regard the act as meaningless, accidental, adventitious, or even be totally unaware of it. This concept is referred to as "psychic determinism," and implies that free will exists, but only within the limits of the psychologically possible. The "dynamic unconscious" designates a functional psychological system in which feelings and ideas that can cause psychic pain (guilt, shame, anxiety, depression, etc.) are kept out of awareness; by the same token, however, these feelings and ideas may press for discharge and enter awareness disguised in relatively acceptable forms. The work of art is the result of another form of human be-

havior albeit a highly complex one; it is evident that, aside from any formal considerations, significant aspects of the artist's psychological makeup penetrate his work, whether he or she is aware of it or not. The observer also must look at art with "eyes" that are not only informed by his or her experience with art, education, etc., but by the most profound components of his psyche, elements reaching back to his or her earliest days.

A further leitmotif in human behavior can be discerned, which relates to the opposition to unbridled impulses by the watchfulness of one's standards and conscience on the one hand, and the realities of the social matrix in which one finds oneself on the other. What are these drives which lead to conflict? Typically, these relate to sexual and aggressive impulses. Optimally, these "instinctual drives" (which are not to be understood as biological instincts, but which are psychological phenomena whose quality is related to desires, meanings, and contexts) are neither snuffed out nor left rampant. The tension between the impulses and the "taming" functions is subsumed under the concepts of the pleasure principle and the reality principle. The channeling, or sublimation of those drives into socially acceptable behavior, plays a not yet clearly delineated role in the creative process. During the first phase of psychoanalytic applications to art, there was a tendency to conceptualize artistic work as a form of conflict resolution and the sublimation of instinctual drives-impulses. This phase was also dominated by the concept of libidinal or psychic energy.

Human beings live in society, in a world of other people or "objects"—so-called in psychoanalytic language because at times, as in infancy, only a part of the mother, for example, is perceived; however, it is taken for the whole; also, because inanimate objects can be experienced as human objects. This is characteristic of the small child's animistic view of the world. The infant's needs and wishes can only be gratified in and through the mothering object whose care of the infant is decisive for its literal survival. Unlike any other animal, the human infant has a far longer period of dependency on the external world; this extraordinary phase of dependency intimately links together mother and child in a symbiotic-like relationship. Physical needs become fused with affective developments in the child. This relationship is so powerful that some psychoanalysts, such as Fairbairn, have theorized that the "basic drive" of human beings is for object relatedness. Before the child has the experience of self, it must go through a series of differentiating steps through which it individuates itself from the mother object and progressively separates itself from it and other objects. This process necessarily entails the elaboration of a particular character of the self, and normally for the propensity to establish relatively enduring, positive, emotional investments in objects and in oneself (since one is also an object to oneself). The character of the self refers to the conscious and unconscious sense an individual has of himself or

herself: this includes one's body, one's "worth," one's effectiveness, one's ability to love, etc. A view of aesthetics, based on a particular school of psychoanalytic thinking, the British Object Relations school, has been discussed and advocated by Peter Fuller (1980). An earlier view, stemming from the Klein school of psychoanalysis, was elaborated by Hanna Segal (1957) and Adrian Stokes (1963).

Parallel with the foregoing processes, are equally profound developments in the formal nature of thinking. These are nominally characterized as primary and secondary process thinking; it should be noted that these are not dichotomous, but often overlap. Primary process thinking is chronologically archaic, non-logical, irrational, and dominated by wishes. It makes extensive use of such operations as condensation (two or more entities which are coalesced into one), displacement (the qualities of one object are experienced as if they belong to another), and symbol formation. In contrast, secondary process thinking is logical, linear, and objective. Although primary process thinking is characteristically associated with psychotic states, children, and primitive people, it is perfectly banal in normal adults when it appears in dream formation, ecstatic or orgastic states, some altered states of consciousness, falling asleep, and it surely plays some role in creativity. Kris' conceptualization of artistic creativity, epitomized in his idea of "regression in the service of the ego," inherently suggests a regressive movement into primary process thinking (inspiration? spontaneous upsurge of ideas?); the raw material of this phase would then be organized in art works through the work of the "ego," that is, this material undergoes far-reaching secondary process elaboration and construction.

Finally, psychoanalysis posits a system of functions, designated collectively as the ego, which I have just mentioned. This is an arbitrary convention denoting a system of functions which includes memory, perception, defenses against the instinctual drives, cognition, motor skills, empathy, introspection, and experiences of emotion. Most importantly, the ego (to reify it for the moment) optimally exercises a synthetic or executive role in such a way that the drives, their modulation, the demands of conscience, and the subject's standards, as well as those of society, optimally are brought into a more or less harmonious unity. It is through this "agency" that traditions, formal elements, socio-historical notions, etc., enter into the creative process as well as into the process of observation.

I have deliberately omitted a discussion of psychoanalytic ideas that bear on the development of psychopathology; clearly, all of the processes described above can go awry to varying degrees. It should further be understood that the foregoing developments occur along a spectrum of possibilities; they are optimal when they take place, to use H. Hartmann's phrase, in an "average expectable environment." Under less than optimal conditions, deficits and deficiencies in the psyche are apt to occur. Distortions in the perception, experience, and evaluation of the self and/or others may occur. Problems re-

lating to the control of impulses, the perception of reality, the nature of the defenses erected against the drives, the extent of sublimatory channels developed, the character of one's object relations, and so forth, may occur. But even when the psychic "apparatus" is well developed, profound conflicts related to the opposition between impulses and their prohibitions can occur. However, conflicts of this sort are generally more amenable to modification than are those that have a more "structural" quality, which have endured over decades, and have become encrusted, if not enshrined, in an individual's character.

What bearing do these concepts, too hastily reviewed, have on the psychoanalytic study of art beyond the few suggestions I have advanced? Most simply stated, one may postulate, in general terms, that the artist's work, like all human behavior, is *more or less* influenced by vicissitudes of the artist's development, by the development of his or her character, by the adoption of defenses that deal with these drives, and by influences from the external world. Having said this much, or this little, I must add that the relative influences of any or all of these elements on a work of art is highly variable.

It is hardly surprising that Freud and his early collaborators were interested in the arts—as well as the humanities in general. By their social class, education, and location, these individuals were cosmopolitan and well-educated. They had the classical education then dominant in the Gymnasium of Central Europe, and were at least on speaking terms with the literary and artistic classics of ancient Greece and Rome as well as of modern Europe. Given this background, it was almost inevitable that Freud himself would characterize a particular developmental phase as Oedipal: he had read his Sophocles, and Hamlet too, for that matter. The earliest analytic excursions into the humanities, were not, however, to explicate literary or artistic works in the light of psychoanalytic theory but to seek support for that theory in those works; this not only served to support psychoanalytic hypotheses, but also had the inevitable, if unsought-for effect of associating psychoanalysis with high art.

Freud, himself, contributed only two studies to art: the essay on Leonardo (Freud, 1910), and his study, 3 years later, on the *Moses* of Michelangelo (Freud, 1914). These two works, although methodologically dissimilar, are prototypical for much of the psychoanalytic literature on art that has followed, even down to the present time. The essay on Leonardo is essentially a psychobiography of the artist. Drawing on modern scholarly studies of Leonardo as well as from the contemporary writings of Vasari and others, Freud attempted to reconstruct the emotional life of the artist from his earliest years, and to support his contention that there was a conflict between Leonardo's artistic and scientific talents which led to a relative inhibition in his creative endeavors. Freud's study is supported by references to only two paintings; the *Mona Lisa* and the *Madonna and Child with St. Anne,* and one anatomical drawing. He makes a number of refer-

ences to the question of artistic creativity, a subject to which he was to return over the ensuing years, and which he once described as the "riddle of the miraculous gift that makes an artist" (Freud, 1930). The paintings he discussed in the Leonardo essay were not in themselves Freud's major concern; what intrigued him was the psychodynamic and psychogenetic history of the artist. What is remarkable about this essay is not the errors in it (of which much as been made) but the caution and perceptiveness which are present throughout. Freud was self-critical and generally prudent; his deductions are tempered by a certain skepticism of his own hypotheses. Consider the following: "In the preceding chapters I have shown what justification can be found for giving this picture of Leonardo's course of development... If in making these statements I have provoked the criticism, even from friends of psychoanalysis and from those who are expert in it, that I have merely written a psychoanalytic novel, I shall reply that I am far from overestimating the certainty of these results. Like others, I have succumbed to the attraction of this great and mysterious man, in whose nature one seems to detect powerful instinctual passions which can nevertheless only express themselves in so remarkedly a subdued manner.

"But whatever the truth about Leonardo's life may be, we cannot desist from our endeavor to find a psychoanalytic explanation for it until we have completed another task. We must stake out in a quite general way the limits which are set to what psychoanalysis can achieve in the field of biography: otherwise every explanation that is forthcoming will be held up to us as a failure. The material at the disposal of a psychoanalytic inquiry consists of the data of a person's life history: on the one hand the chance circumstances of events and background influences, and, on the other hand, the subject's reported reactions. Supported by its knowledge of physical mechanisms it then endeavors to establish a dynamic basis for his nature on the strength of his reactions, and to disclose the original motive of forces of his mind, as well as their later transformation and developments. If this is successful the behavior of a personality in a course of his life is explained in terms of the combined operation of constitution and fate, of internal force and external powers. Where such an undertaking does not provide any certain results—and this is perhaps so in Leonardo's case—the blame rests not with the faulty or inadequate methods of psychoanalysis, but with the uncertainty and fragmentary nature of the material relating to him which tradition makes available. It is therefore only the author who is to be held responsible for the failure, by having forced psychoanalysis to pronounce an expert opinion on the basis of such insufficient material (pp. 134-135)." Continuing, he points out that even if *all* the historical material were at our disposal, "there are 2 important points at which a psychoanalytic enquiry would not be able to make us understand how inevitable it was that the person concerned should have turned out the way he did and in no other way." The first point relates to the

accident of Leonardo's illegitimate birth, with which I shall not deal here. The second one however, is the extraordinary phenomenon that despite the early traumatic experiences in his life, Leonardo was able to "sublimate" these influences. "Since artistic talent and capacity are intimately related with sublimation we must admit that the nature of the artistic function is also inaccessible to us along psychoanalytic lines." This nihilistic, even pessimistic attitude regarding artistic creativity, has not inhibited later analysts from studying and speculating on these questions. The numerous psychoanalytic contributions on creativity attest to the fairly widespread belief that the mystery of creativity can be unlocked. Freud's unpromising attitude on this matter has been attributed to his "indifference" to such matters; perhaps it was less a matter of indifference than of theoretical priorities.

In contrast, the study on Michelangelo's *Moses* did deal concretely with a work of art. This is a curious study since it scarcely attempts to understand the work from what might be described as a psychoanalytic point of view. Instead of the associative, interpretive, free-wheeling quality of the Leonardo study, this essay attempts to be objective, scientific, and to interpret this statue's "meaning," in its narrative sense so to speak, with little or no concern for its aesthetic elements or for its psychobiographical relevance. At the outset of the essay Freud protests that he is "no connoisseur in art, but simply a layman. I have often observed that the subject-matter of works of art has a stronger attraction for me than their formal and technical qualities, though to the artist their value lies first and foremost in these latter. I am unable to rightly appreciate many of the methods used and the effects obtained in art" (Freud, 1914, p. 211). Parenthetically, such modest comments by Freud have been seized upon by authors over the years to pillory Freud not only for his indifference, but for his tin ear as regard to music, and his blindness in respect to painting and sculpture. In fact, it is probable that Freud was excessively self-depreciatory, being well aware of his limitations as an observer of art and a listener of music.

Willy-nilly, the essays on Leonardo and Michelangelo's *Moses* have become models for many subsequent studies, some of considerable subtlety and sophistication; others, unfortunately suffer from a dilletantism *qui s'ignore*. The biographical genre is necessarily limited by the availability of primary sources. Michelangelo and Van Gogh, for instance, because of the abundance of letters, accounts of contemporaries, diaries, journals, etc., have lent themselves, for better or for worse, to such studies. This route is clearly fraught with many difficulties: the reliability of the biographical "data," the reductionistic fallacy of interpreting the personal life of the artist simplistically from his work, and, equally egregious, mechanically interpreting the work of art from what is known about the artist. In literature, this is equivalent to hypotheses about the author based on material drawn from a character in a novel written by that author.

The issue is not about the self-evident intimate relationship that exists between the artist and his work; the question is how to tease out—if at all—the nature of that relationship without falling into reductionism.

The magnitude of this problem cannot be exaggerated. In psychoanalysis, the analysand is seen 4 or 5 times a week for several years, and, as Hann Sachs once said, even the deepest analysis can do no more than scratch the surface of a continent. The critical difficulty resides in the fact that every piece of human behavior is multiply determined. To "explain" the artist's creative behavior, no less than the products of that work, not "only" entails understanding the artist, but demands that one arrive at some appreciation of the influence of creative activity which in turn evolved in specific social and historical contexts.

Just as no psychoanalysis ever is or, in the wildest fantasies of analysand or analyst, ever could be complete, so I believe no "ultimate" understanding of a work of art is possible. Despite countless exigeses, the masterpieces all continue to embody a mysterious element that seems to defy analysis and yet exerts a critical influence on the enduring fascination these works hold for us. In a similar manner, despite the most articulate description we may give of our reaction to great art, there is always a sense of not having fully communicated our experience. That some part of art and aesthetic pleasure remains inchoate is not, I would argue, to be deplored.

An unfortunate tendency among some psychoanalytic writers (not dissimilar to views held by some individuals in the general public) has been to regard the artist as a specimen of psychopathology. To some extent this was abetted by Freud, but he possessed a profound respect and admiration for the artist, not always in evidence in some of his followers. For Freud, one aspect of artistic creativity could be conceptualized as a sublimation of the instinctual drives: that is, the channelization of sexual or aggressive impulses into socially useful or acceptable channels. This unobjectionable, but not very useful, concept led to the idea, advanced by many authors, that related artistic creativity to the resolution of psychological conflict. Freud's use of literary allusions to illustrate psychodynamic configurations set the stage for the "analysis" of artistic works, of characters in novels and plays, etc. This is plausible if not always convincing with works that possess a "programme" or narrative content. Consequently, the plastic arts and music have been infrequently studied by psychoanalysts. Accordingly, because of the greater analytic accessibility of content, form has been relatively neglected, and form and content have tended to be dichotomized.

The analysis of content contains a major methodological trap that has plagued much of the application of psychoanalysis to the arts, as well as to other domains, and which is abating: the assumption that one can truly "analyze" an individual, say an artist, through various texts as if he or she were in therapeutic psychoanalysis. Nothing

could be more remote from the truth. This point has been made repeatedly in recent years, and although it should have been laid to rest by now, it is worth repeating because it is applicable to many of the studies done over the past 40 or 50 years; furthermore, such a pleasant but highly dubious use of psychoanalysis refuses to die. In the actual analytic situation, a dialectical process is engendered in which the analysand's associations, reports of dreams, fantasies, and the like, lead the analyst to make hypotheses or conjectures about this material. These hypotheses are communicated to the analysand in interpretive statements—that is, comments that deepen the meaning of what the analysand has articulated. Typically, the style, syntax, and even the tone of the analysand's association to these interpretations, and the ensuing feelings, memories, and other associations may corroborate the interpretation. Conversely, a lack of such validation may diminish the credibility of the analyst's hypotheses. A dream that takes place during the night following an interpretation may similarly support, negate, or modify the interpretation. Many examples of this type of reciprocal situation could be mentioned. Thus, a reverbatory process is fostered, whose principle purpose is to enrich the analysand's self-understanding, and ultimately his or her autonomy. In biography, of course, this dialectical process is totally absent; the only corrective is in the criticism of other authors. Nevertheless, careful and valuable applied psychoanalysis has been carried out, especially in recent years; Liebert's studies of Michelangelo and Mary Gedo's of Picasso come to mind. In these works the focus may either be primarily on the artist, or the artist's work—whether this be a single painting, like Freud's study of Michelangelo's *Moses,* or may encompass the artist's entire *oeuvre.*

I have alluded to the second major area which has been of interest to psychoanalysts, namely the nature of creativity. Freud himself, as I pointed out, avowed that he could only throw up his hands in despair over the possibility of ever truly understanding creativity. Since his time, a number of thoughtful, if inconclusive studies have dealt with this subject. One area in which an analytic consideration of creativity is necessary and not infrequent, concerns the inhibition of creativity in formerly productive individuals. Various psychoanalytic schools have explored the problem of creativity from a variety of interesting points of view. These range from contributions from members of the Klein school, such as Melanie Klein herself and Hanna Segal, through Fairbairn, to studies by Noy, Niederland, and Rose. These are listed in the appended bibliography. The view that artistic creativity primarily represents a form of conflict resolution, has nearly disappeared.

It should be noted that although I have referred to psychoanalytic theory and psychoanalytic concepts, there is no monolithic psychoanalytic discipline, theoretic or technical/therapeutic. Several different theoretical persuasions, with consequent technical

differences exist. Not surprisingly, the concepts relating to creativity, aesthetic pleasure, etc., are intimately related to the school to which an author belongs. Furthermore, since it is evident that creativity is multiply determined, it suggests that the various points of view advanced to explicate it are not mutually exclusive. For example, the genetic endowment, or constitutional "givens" of the artist, to touch on the most fundamental element, are difficult to ascertain, but there is evidence to suggest that artistic talent, and certainly genius, may be inherited. Perhaps this is most striking in music, as compared to literature. Freud frequently hypothesized a "complimentary series," in which "constitutional" and environmental influences (nature and nurture) summated to give rise to a particular psychological behavior. In other words, the greater the constitutional endowment, the less the environmental influences need play a role to produce a given result; and the opposite is equally true.

The central areas of investigation, and as yet the least productive, are those of aesthetic value and the aesthetic response. Traditionally a secondary fiefdom in philosophy, aesthetics has too many obvious psychological implications and connections for psychoanalysts to abandon it to philosophy, despite its unyielding carapace. This is not to deny its perhaps "ultimate" home in philosophy; from Aristotle to Croce and Santayana, philosophers have toiled over the nature of the aesthetic experience, and if they have not brought final answers to the perplexing problems inherent in this domain, they have not done less well than psychoanalysts, art critics, or artists themselves. A prominent thread that runs throughout psychoanalytic discussion of aesthetics relates to the indentification of the observer with the artist *through* the work of art. Although such identifications certainly occur, they seem to be totally unnecessary for the pleasure of the observer (and aesthetics must fundamentally relate to some sort of pleasurable experience). What is extraordinary, and what every observer has noted, is how certain works of art transcend time, gender, social class, history, and race, even though all these and many other facets may exist in it. As I suggested earlier, this may—almost certainly must—be related at least in part, to man's more or less constant biologic condition, not overlooking the functions of hunger and eating, sexual behavior (in its broadest and narrowest senses), procreation, mothering, suckling, death, etc. Furthermore, despite their enormous cultural divergences, one can speak, at least in the Western world, of such relatively universal emotions as love, hatred, envy, jealousy, pride, humiliation and embarrassment, guilt, shame, sadness and joy—the list could be continued.

There is also that rather ineffable but nonetheless indisputable pleasure (aesthetic?) of viewing and holding something as nonemotional, in the ordinary sense of the word, as a masterful piece of ceramics whether that be from the fourth century B.C. or by Mr. Leach in our own times. It is precisely in these areas, where the biological and the emotional join, that the particular preview of

psychoanalysis may be useful, in that it takes the material of subjectivity and introspection as valid data for study.

Some discerning explanations of aesthetic pleasure have been developed by psychoanalysts. Generally, these studies deal more with the psychodynamics of the affective aesthetic experience than the related experiential/cognitive and affective elements. These studies are often widely at variance. Ehrenzweig, for example, hypothesized that aesthetic feeling results whenever a successful articulation has been attained between two distinct modes of perception: one composed of gestalten, the other gestalt-free. These modes follow developmental lines and interrelate. A formal perception, according to this author, is a relatively late achievement, not occurring before the ages of 6 to 8. At first, things are seen globally, without regard for their actual details; it is only later that the child is able to perceive details and can establish his or her gestalt; in this situation the early mode is subordinated to the later. Ehrenzweig suggested that the structure of art implies that the task of the artist is to invite his audience to complete the perceptional-cognitive task of "reading" his work, more or less as he intended; pleasure itself probably ensues from a mastery of this intellectual challenge.

The Kleinian views, to which I have alluded, depend on the unconscious reliving by the observer of the artist's experience of creation. This deals in some profound manner with a reparative-restorative process which re-creates inner images and objects which were destroyed in the unconscious fantasies of the child. Freud himself wrote that the artist "makes it possible for other people once more to derive consolation and alleviation from their own sources of pleasure in their unconscious which have become inaccessable to them" (Freud, 1917, p. 377). This reflects Goethe's remark that he believed he possessed the gift to articulate for other men what they suffer but are unable to give voice to.

Drawing from Roy Schafer's comments, I would suggest that a work of art, regardless of medium (literature, music, painting, etc.) might be considered as a metaphor, in that in some respects it strikes the observer much as one reacts to a literary metaphor. In literature, metaphor typically expresses something known or experienced before, but it articulates/communicates it in a radically new manner so that not only is the idea (in a narrative presentation) or perception different, but the affective experience is new. E.F. Sharpe (1937) noted that metaphor is derived from unconsciously elaborated wishful psychosocial events and fantasies. We know, and Sharpe has written to this point, how dreams may occur in metaphoric forms; in such circumstances the latent meaning of the dream, in its raw and overt shape, is hidden from the dreamer. The fearful, abhorent, or otherwise unpleasurable feelings associated with that latent content are not only veiled, but are given expression in and through the metaphor, now in a safe and non-threatening, indeed often pleasurable form. Art resembles a metaphor in its economy of means. Eve-

ryone knows the experience of the well-struck metaphor which so effectively captures the essence of what is being communicated.

Confronted with a "good" metaphor we say, in effect, that the imagery perfectly captures the idea or feeling. Schafer (1983) points out that one implicitly recognizes and announces "that one has found and accepted a new mode of experiencing one's own subjectivity. Something is now said to be true...and for the first time, nothing just like this has ever happened before—and never again, because the second time can never be the same as the first. A repeated metaphor may lose some of its force, or may gain in significance—but can't mobilize an experience identical with the first" (p. 128).

Although this view of art as metaphor bears on the aesthetic experience, it fails to take account of the impact of the total history of the formal elements in art as they inform and reorganize the current feelings and ideas of both the artist and of the spectator. It is all very well to talk about metaphors, but unless one can identify what makes a metaphor "good" or what establishes it as something which exactly captures a human experience, one still remains outside of the critical aesthetic process. The other large area to be explored is the nature of the *experience* of aesthetic pleasure—why the good metaphor/work of art, makes one feel as one does. Clearly, the experiences felt with an effective metaphor do not account for the range of feelings present in aesthetic pleasure, the iridescent amalgams of affectivity.

The psychoanalytic study of art has, as I have indicated, suffered on the one hand from the dilletantism of psychoanalysts who have been inadequately informed about art; and on the other hand some studies have suffered from those art historians and art critics who have seized upon psychoanalytic concepts and applied them in a mechanistic and reductionistic manner. It is one thing to grasp psychoanalytic concepts, but it is another to reach an appreciation of the extraordinary complexity, and ultimately the tentativeness of our theoretical constructions, except as these are understood as the best generalizations that can be made at this time, generalizations which are constantly evolving subsequent to fresh insight derived from clinical experience. Psychic reality is far richer and more intricate than we are able to articulate.

Nevertheless, there is no need to throw up *our* hands before the issues of creativity, aesthetic value and aesthetic pleasure, as Freud had suggested. One positive development is that many of the reductionistic shackles of earlier applied psychoanalysis are being broken. Such matters as psychic energy, psychological illness of the artist, explanations of art works on the basis of their narrative or programmatic content—these and other now threadbare concepts are disappearing. The loss of these theoretical anchors does not occur without causing some anxiety, but the way for more fruitful work is being cleared. Individual psychoanalysts knowledgeable about art, art historians and critics with psychoanalytic backgrounds, individually or

collaboratively, are widening our understanding of aesthetics. There are no grounds for nihilism even though only small progress has so far been achieved.

The following list of psychoanalytic writings on art is not meant to be comprehensive. Some of these contributions have been milestones; others are noteworthy because they advanced a particular point of view.

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Depressive Elementalism and Modernism: A Postmodernist Meditation

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> *If works of art are to survive in the context of extremity and darkness, which is social reality, and if they are to avoid being sold as mere comfort, they have to assimilate themselves to reality. (T.W. Adorno, "Black as an Ideal,"* Aesthetic Theory. *Quoted by the Editor of* AC *to explain the black cover of the last issue.)*

I. Depressive Elementalism

The assimilation of art to the social reality of darkness and extremity, noted by Adorno, underscores the theory of this essay: that what is called here "depressive elementalism" is the temperament of modernism. Dark tonalities are almost always found in the art of the clinically depressed, and though colors lighten as depression lifts, the habits of accommodating life to depression remain. In culture such habits become the style of art; in society they become a style of

response to authority. The elementalism of modernism's sensibility, the lack of psychic integration it implies, and the life strategies it demands, are deeply entwined in the cultural and social fabric of this century. It is the task of postmodernism to begin the difficult undoing of these inadequate psychic and political accommodations.

Opposites both fascinate and threaten. This is why the modernist sensibility, rooted as it is in psychological and cultural depressiveness, pays only lip service to the schizoid phenomena of surrealist and expressionist, while romanticizing the lives of such artists. Indeed, the reductive abstraction so favored by modernism, in its relentless analysis of natural phenomena (Manet, Monet, Cézanne, Picasso & Braque, Kandinsky & Mondrian, and their subsequent mannerists—to sketch the main line of modernist evolution), has often been mistaken as indicative of that "splitting" or "breaking down" associated in the popular mind with schizophrenia. It is, rather, something more interesting psychologically, if only because modernism could not put itself on the couch. Now postmodernism, fingering its collective beard while taking assiduous notes on the visual confessions and aesthetic dreams of the last century, can come to a more precise and revealing diagnosis: *depressive elementalism.*

In general a schizoid personality is characterized by aloofness and emotional distance caused by a basic mistrust of others deeply rooted in frustrating inconsistencies early in the nurturing process. Such personalities are profoundly insecure, given to fantasies of omnipotence due to the lack of any genuine early interaction with others, and are indifferent to the opinions of others. This leads to a defensive yet overweening introversion that finds the isolation, subjectivity, and specialness of creative endeavors compensatory for the apparent arbitrariness and meaninglessness of objective reality. Thus, the schizoid personality is often obsessed with creating an independent, private universe grounded within a comprehensive theoretical system. In this way the schizoid can indulge his tendency to isolated anti-authoritarianism, while obtaining a sense of control and power over the seeming capriciousness of being alive in an alien environment. In most cases the invented world becomes more real than actuality, and a "split," often of pathological proportions, occurs between reality and the schizoid's perceptions of it. But in a schizoid genius—a psychic mutant—this universe-inventing can often be proven to concur with reality, and provide important new insights into its nature.

The depressive personality, in sharp contrast, is more concerned with accommodating the circumstantialities of this world than in creating a new one. The depressive carefully nurtures all sources of self-esteem and craves approval—often at the cost of dependency. This can engender agonizing rage which is often turned against the self, and can lead to suicide. Creative activity can offer a practical avenue to self-esteem through the maintenance and assertion of individuality and the acquisition of recognition. It can also provide a

safe outlet for hostile feelings in that the resulting art objects become, in a sense, reparations for contradicting those authorities from whom constant approval is required. But the depressive's eternal quest for approval can lead to a certain disjunction of effort and viewpoint, so that the presumably certain fact becomes sacrosanct, while the uncertain theory is seen as dangerous, since it is not generally approved. Thus the depressive, unlike the schizoid (but very like the typical academic—or modernist critic) does not desire to create a new universe, but only to be loved for the careful administration of each separate detail pertaining to the one that is seemingly beyond challenge.[1]

Depression introduces into daily life a certain *elementalism* of perception and behaviour. Continuities are replaced by sequences; one acts in isolation by rote, not for reason in the flux of events. This is because life and action have become, by inner definition, meaningless; the outer world must be coped with day-by-day, minute-by-minute, detail-by-detail, if at all. The orally dependent depressive ruminates, masticates, chews over-and-over the devastating lode of reality that impinges upon ever-flagging energies. But the key metaphor here is not a superficial schizoid dissociation, but the depressive reduction of wholes to easily manipulated and digested elements.

The stylistic qualities of the pictorial expressions of depressives have not been extensively researched. Indeed, depression itself has not until very recently been a primary concern of the therapeutic community. Thus depressive phenomena in art remains virtually unstudied—apparently on the assumption that depressives are too demoralized to make art in the first place, and because the productions of schizophrenics are usually of greater visual interest. Indeed, there seems to be a certain bias for the schizoid in psychoanalytic literature—perhaps for the same reasons the depressive art world is so ambivalently fascinated. What literature there is has been summarized as follows.

> The graphic characteristics associated with increased depression are...less color, more empty space, less investment of effort or less complete, more depressive affect or less affect, more constricted and less meaningful (the latter two not statistically significant but indicating a trend). These characteristics, particularly in combination, are the result of a paucity of pictorial development. (A possible exception might be depressive affect.) This paucity in picture making is congruent with the total image presented by the severely depressed individual: psychomotor retardation, general inhibition of expressiveness (for example, flattened affect), lack of productivity, and impoverished interpersonal communication sometimes to the extent of being mute. The total impact of depressed patients' pictures is frequently one of pervading emptiness.[2]

An analysis of the work of endogenous (i.e. non-manic) depres-

sives reveals another characteristic implicit in this summary but, in my judgment, not adequately articulated. Depressed artists tend to show discrete, isolated images against either empty or lightly colored backgrounds. A similar preponderance of isolated images can be found in the work of the suicidally depressed, and depressed schizophrenics. These last images are not in any way similar to the schizophrenic's typically scattered, fragmented, explosive, or cosmically symbolic style; rather they are units unto themselves, simple and uncomplicated.

Art work by depressives also reinforce the conclusion that the two most typical images to be found in the art of deeply depressed persons are darkness and isolation. As depression lifts, colors brighten, but images remain for the most part alone in isolated environments. While other factors such as obsessiveness or paranoia can have a marked effect on stylistic characteristics, the underlying gestalt of each picture is of lowering bleakness and isolation—and the threat such an environment poses.

Another characteristic of the art of depressives which is universally evidenced is a surprising ability to organize the pictorial complex. It is clear that depression does not *inhibit* visual conceptualization and the kinesthetic ability to impose order upon imagery, but that it certainly does *limit* its range of reference and the energy required to achieve integration. It suggests that what energy is available has to be focused onto something that conveys a maximum of meaning with a minimum of effort. This economic concentration of energy (so like the conservative physical strategies of the elderly) is the salient characteristic of what is called here depressive elementalism.

At this point two things ought to be emphasized.

First, when the terms "depressive" and "schizoid" are used in this essay, they are not referring to rampant psychopathological conditions, but to general configurations of temperament which influence artistic and cultural behaviour. Just as all introverts do not assume the fetal position for life, or all extroverts spend every waking hour leading brass bands, artists who are depressive—and cultures which have idealized depression—do not necessarily display the inhibiting symptoms of depression as discussed above. If they did, they would hardly function. What they display are *strategies of accommodation* to depression, and these strategies are materially different from schizoid strategies.

Second, it is necessary to emphasize a distinction already alluded to concerning the fragmentation or "splitting" most often associated with the schizoid personality, and the elementalism of the depressive here adumbrated. This is necessary since it is common to make snap judgments about modernism (and even post-modernism[3]) being "schizophrenic" because of its tendency to reductive abstraction—which is superficially perceived as a distortion or breaking up of reality, rather than as an attempt, however limited, to uncover its deeper elements. (Notorious cases in point are C.G. Jung's attitudes

toward Joyce's prose and Picasso's paintings, and the implications of Teddy Roosevelt's famous mot that Cubism was an "explosion in a shingle factory.") So it is useful to see clearly that the schizoid tendency to contrive an idiosyncratic universe of meaning—to literally split off from conventional reality—is fundamentally different from the depressive's elementalism. For the schizoid, the contrived world takes precedence over the real world. The depressive, in contrast, is not interested in escaping to a separate, compensatory world, but in maintaining a dependent alliance with the one that can provide love and approval and escape from the self-hate and rage which distort behaviour and relationship. The schizoid syndrome is rooted at an earlier stage of development than that of the depressive. Love is foreign to the schizoid; it is not trusted. The depressive, in contrast, fears the absence of love (having presumably known it). The schizoid depends upon power to survive, and revels in contriving new worlds of imposing complexity; the depressive depends upon approval and hoards fundamental simplicities.

The essential difference between the art styles of the depressive and the schizoid personalities are best characterized by making a distinction between ambitions to *order* and to *unify*. Since these two concepts are often used synonymously, an example is needed.

A pile of coins can be *ordered* in many ways: arranged in a flat pattern, stacked, piled into an arch, stood on end in a row, etc. Each careful procedure creates a discrete image distinguishable from the others, while preserving the coins as separate elements. To *unify* the coins, however, requires the violation of their individuality. They can be pasted together, beaten into a single shape, or melted into an ingot. But to be one, they cannot remain many. Thus to engage in creating either order or unity is to employ two separate physical (and by extension psychic and ethical) strategies.

Now, as we have seen concerning the art of the depressive, this personality is given to the passive imposition of an objective order on visual elements. The schizoid, in contrast, is given to the more or less violent induction of a subjective unity upon the visual elements. Now this leads to an interesting paradox: the depressive's organization of simple elements is seen in superficial formal terms as achieving an impressive "unity," while the schizoid's erratic compositions of curiously juxtaposed elements are seen as disordered. But what these personalities are doing is quite the opposite if understood in terms of their psychic economies. The depressive ploddingly isolates discrete images in relatively empty pictorial environments, struggling to organize them enough to make a living keeping others unthreatened. And this isolation (similar, as we shall see later, to that of the dandy) has its seductive style. The schizoid invests images about helter-skelter, violently trying to contrive a whole new economy from which he imagines larger dividends. The visual paradox of the depressive's quest for order is to appear more unified than the schizoid's equally paradoxical chaotic grabbing at

the makings of a unique bonanza. But the schizoid economy is built upon overlapping debts, arbitrary linkages between fanciful, all-powerful market forces, and an on-going process of improvident wishfulness. The resulting wealth of personal vision does not, however, normally provide a living in the "real" world—where depressives sort and re-sort their hoard of coins, waiting the while on Charon.

Thus the art of the depressed displays a marked impulse toward physically ordering isolated and isolating visual elements which are often set in deadly but identifiable environments. In contrast, schizoids are obsessed with metaphysically unifying complex webs of often violently irrational juxtapositions and relationships situated most often in placeless voids.

Now if we look at the various early modernist styles in terms of these psychodynamic stylistic characteristics, Impressionism and Post Impressionism (and the Cubist and Constructivist offspring of the latter) are clearly depressive, while Symbolism, Surrealism, and the varieties of expressionism, are more or less schizoid. If one recalls that the greatest attention has been paid to the depressive styles (whose ordered elements can be formally analyzed, and whose ethical implications seemingly correspond to revolutionary tenets), and the least to the schizoid styles, whose "content" seeks new unities (and Lord knows what aesthetic and political anarchies), the conclusion that *modernist culture is guilty of the romantic idealization of depressive elementalism* is not as radical as it may sound to those die-hard modernists and neo-conservatives who would save us, at any cost, from the new visions of our postmodernist art and polis.

To sum up: the depressive is given to an almost obsessive engagement with facts, the underlying structures, the essentialities, of a situation. These command the depressive's attention for the simple reason that there is no energy available to create new worlds. (In manic-depressives, manic energy is put to expressing what has been achieved in the period of depressive rehearsal.) The depressive is therefore naturally given to abstraction, to a getting down to quiddities—to an *elementalism*—that is more in keeping with the basic philosophical outlook of modernism than the schizoid's splitting off into an idiosyncratic world of received myth and personal metaphor. There is thus nothing very revolutionary about modernism; psychologically it is extremely conservative.

II. Modernism

"Postmodernism," the term used to describe the manneristic present, begs the larger question of just how "today" ("modern" from *modo*, Latin for "the present," "now") lasted for nigh-on to a century and a half. The "modern" era in the visual arts is generally thought to have begun in France about 1850 with the stylistic innovations of the painters Delacroix, Courbet and Manet, and the critical

acumen of Charles Baudelaire. Yet many "nows" have passed since then, within not a few discrete Western national cultures, and the term "modernism" thus refers, as now utilized, more to a long-prevailing zeitgeist than to the pretensions of any specific generation of artists or patrons who perceived itself in the forefront of sensibility and taste.

Modernism thus refers to the almost eternal sense of being avant-garde which has persisted in the art worlds of the West since the mid-19th century. By definition, of course, it is now-oriented; the traditions of the past are felt as lost, ignored, or rejected. Modernism is thus a-historical if not anti-historical, though it presently suffers the supreme irony of having accumulated so complex a history that its future of accumulated "nows" has, in a very real sense, caught up with it. Postmodernist sensibility would return, uneasily, to older traditions. And this search for origins, once denied and now tolerated, along with the reasons the dandy-led avant-garde tends to ignore origins in the first place, are of the greatest psychodynamic interest.

Modernism was born of the romantic melancholy induced by the loss of a sense of certain origins—by mythlessness—by encroaching meaninglessness. The same melancholic depressiveness was endemic in the mannerism of the mid- and late-16th century.[4] Indeed, a broad analogy might be made between the periods ca. 1480 to 1600/ca. 1880 to the present. In each era there was first a period of stylistic coalescence: late cinquecento Florence/Post-Impressionist Paris. This was followed by an efflorescence of individual genius: the masters of the High Renaissance/School of Paris to ca. 1500/1920. Thereafter relentless manneristic variations on the new styles: Counter-Reformation art/post World War II art. And binding both historical evolutions together until their effective close, the presence of an over-riding personality of enormous creative prodigality and influence: Michelangelo/Picasso. (Implicit in this analogy, of course, is the question of the nature of our forthcoming Baroque, for which what is called postmodernism is but a prolegomena. For a prophetic glimpse, see below, section III.)

The challenge to theological and cosmological certainties during the 16th-century, and the psychic, moral and creative void it induced, is paralleled by the psychological impact of the ethical and scientific relativism that developed during the 19th century and dominates our era. Only now—i.e. effectively since the close of the 18th century—there is no longer a choice between testament and protest on a collective level. Only the individual's capacity for a "creative mythology" (to use Joseph Campbell's apt phrase) remains, and its first modern manifestation is to be found in the ethos of the dandy.

Today, the popular concept of dandy conjures an image of sartorial eccentricity. One thinks of a glib fop like Tom Wolfe—and that inevitable anti-dandy, Andy Warhol. Yet even these remnants of the

old tradition maintain a stance of social gad-fly—forcing insight either directly or indirectly into the foibles of fashion by means of the moral suasion of satire. Earlier dandies, such as Baudelaire, or modern ones such as the denizens of Bloomsbury, Duchamp, or Mishima, took themselves more seriously—if only because they lived in an age of revolution in which the elite felt itself a minority group. (And minority groups historically—one thinks today of Blacks, gays, and liberationist women—have particularized themselves by overdressing themselves, their morals, or their ideas.)

For Baudelaire and his successors in modernism, however, the dandy had a decidedly ethical character, whatever his or her plumage. Thus in his essay *The Painter of Modern Life,* he can say "Whether men name themselves exquisites, sceptics, beaux, lions, or dandies [we might add today aesthetes, mandarins, elitists, tricksters], all issue from the same origin, all share the same character of opposition and revolt, all represent that which is best in human pride—that need (rare among us today) to combat and exterminate triviality."[5] And while the poet might praise Constantin Guys' depictions of Parisian society in this same essay, and maintain as exceptional a sartorial elegance as his poverty permitted, his concept of the dandy was primarily that of a person who preserves the integrity of the individual in the face of his era's obsession with economic prudence and social conformity. In *My Heart Laid Bare* he states the dandy's ultimate credo: "To be a great man and a saint *by one's own standards,* that is all that matters."[6] And inevitably for Baudelaire "Woman is the opposite of the Dandy. Therefore she should inspire horror...Woman is *natural,* that is to say abominable. Thus she is always vulgar; the opposite, in fact, of the Dandy."[7]

The depressive dandy stylizes his emotions in the face of meaninglessness, and sees this as heroic, as well it might be within personal circumstances. *But his inevitable cultural failure lies where he is weakest psychodynamically: he cannot imagine a new, more meaningful world since he cannot afford to lose that admiration the seeming courage of his stance seduces from uncritical minds.* There is nothing prophetic about the dandy. His concern is surviving the here and now with a sense of dignity born of healthy snobbery. In waging war against the trivial, he ironically becomes an expert in ordering its strategies; his weapons are the pyrotechnics of style, relentless consistency of manner and strategic exclusivity. He is the genius of depressive elementalism, for whom the chthonic, the numenous, and above all the mythogenic, are profoundly foreign, for they engage the earth and its feminine mysteries—which he must abominate, since they are potentially more fruitful than himself.

Modernism was created, sustained, and discredited by the moral posturings of a race of brilliant dandy's from Baudelaire to Warhol. It engendered what might be called a "para-mythology," rooted in the elementalism of individualism, that effectively countered the depressive cultural atmosphere of our era (as certain drugs can allay

depressive symptoms without curing their cause), and which is now entrenched in countless institutional structures, the dismanteling of which will not be simple. Fortunately in the visual arts, one of the most insidious of these structures—formalist art criticism—has already begun to give way, and to be seen for the elaborate defense against, and application of, depressive elementalism that it was.

If one can cleanse the eye of the sectarian categories of the art historians, and just see the art of modernism from the mid-19th century to the present era as an endless cyclorama, two intertwining lines of depressive elementalism can be observed. The first is discerned in the evolution of the brushstroke; the second in ever more radical compositional discreteness. The planametrics of Manet's retinal vision, the atmospherics of Monet's discrete *taches* limned over textured grounds (so virtually every stroke is still visible), the scientistics of Seurat's obsessional *points*, the directionality of facture in Van Gogh and Cézanne, parallel to the infrastructures of sprung plane and cropped viewpoint in the designs of artists such as Degas and Gauguin, all, in their own way, crystalize in Cubism and Futurism, and are elaborated in the refined draughtsmanship of Matisse, the dynamic geometries of the Constructivists, and the gross reductionism of Mondrian (after which all is manneristic attenuation of facture and form). This entire developmental frieze is composed of numerous variations on the depressive's need to induce order. The wide-ranging mythic and ideological vision of the age of masterpieces is reduced to the particalized subject of the age of anxiety.

Those who would interpret and explain the art of this alienated age, faced with its emotional affectlessness, its abstractness, its ultimate non-figuration (not to mention its overall lack of decorum anent the public), found that only by talking about the art object objectively, in terms of its constituent elements, could its unconscious depressiveness be avoided. And even this process was primarily unconscious, since the salient motivating factor in an era's temperament is seldom consciously known to its participants. And the therapy of the unconscious, developed parallel to the events just described, was itself both a symptom and elaboration of depressive elementalism, subjecting every childhood event, every night's dream, and every quirk of behaviour to interminable analysis. Thus the historical ordering of things replaced the metaphysical experience of unity in the criteria of criticism. The evolution of neat layout was idealized, and virtually all distinction was lost between the "significant form" of the work of art and the "rightness of form" with which the industrial designers endowed technology's products.[8] Happily, this cultural syndrome, and the labors of its critical amanuenses, was the first to be discredited with the onset of postmodernism.

Alan Colquhoun, in his essay "Postmodern Critical Positions,"[9] argues that the term "postmodern" is often used to refer to opposed ideas, these being the Progressivists' notion that it marks an evolutionary transfiguration of modernism, and the Culturists' belief that it is a reaction against modernism in favor of tradition. It is not surprising psychologically that the term "postmodern" has come to contain its own opposite and thus seem self-contradictory; any analysand, cultures included, find cure in a matrix of ambivalence. The Progressivists recognize that the multifarious depressive elements of modernism are not going to vanish overnight, and that the intellectual class is not going to discard easily so useful a means of seemingly to survive as individuals. Gradualism here is the law of cultural change; collectivism the spectre of an unimaginable future. On the other hand, the schizoid impulse at the heart of the Culturists' differentiation of the postmodernist bias toward tradition from the modernist bias toward depressive solipsism, has the marked virtue of the therapeutic. By declaring modernism dead, the Culturists do for the nervous postmodernist what the first trip to the couch does for the analysand: it concentrates the unconscious on the possiblity of rebirth—of rising therefrom changed, a new person free from the biases of the now forgiven past. This schizoid impulse toward the ideal unity of a new tradition born of the old is thus potentially mythogenic. The possibility of integration and rebirth creates a void to be filled—though the process will be disconcertingly messy and time-consuming, and many will be wasted in the sifting.

This wasting, which we accept in nature (when noticed) fastidiously, we observe in culture timorously—and with very good reason. Depressives who would be dependent for love are easily administered by loveless schizoids bent on power (as our century's dictators have demonstrated). The opposite: loveless schizoids benevolently led by dependent depressives (the dream of the 1960s counter-culture), bodes chaos. *The social/cultural ideal of postmodernism, then, is an integration of depressive and schizoid temperaments—of dependency and power, of the impulse to order and the need for unity.* This has always been the ideal of the psychodynamic therapies. But born of modernism as they were, they have easily been sidetracked into pandering "reality [read: depressive] principles" or "universal [read: primitivism at its most misunderstood] principles," which, if exploited for power (order) rather than integrity (unity) can both lead to the corruption of the ethical basis of civilization. But this exploitation, having been so cruelly demonstrated so often in our modernist time by devotees of all ideological camps, need not be repeated if we can bring ourselves to learn from our personal and collective past. To even approach the beginnings of achieving this (and history up to now is not encouraging), our dandys of intellect and art must replace their all too carefully curried indi-

vidualities with a sense of psychic continuities—and to begin this virtually impossible task, they might just try substituting the intimacy of their endemically depressive scorn for the psychological distance of a creatively schizoid sense of humor.

To this noble end (i.e., the birth of a truly integrated postmodernist culture) let us drag our shuddering mandarins of high modernism back down to a prototype of their organic origins, down into a new experience of a more primordial elementalism. Let us visit a prophetic milieu where all postmodernism's historical ambivalence and rabid futurity are, as it were, *in utero*. Let us enter a precinct where all the art forms of our time—from School of Everywhere's abstraction, to P.S. Dumb's environments, to tradition-devouring architecture—conflate. Let us test that technological cutting edge where modernist intelligence teeters between the old fashioned dandy's pride in verbal "wit," and the media ideal of a hyped "image." Let us descend, in short, to the fast track where the pert soul of the Yuppie is forged in the crucible of both old and new orders—to the realm where our over-remunerated youth (who will administer the next—postmodernist?—century), are psychically birthed. *Let us, then, proceed to re-engender ourselves at the Palladium disco on New York's 14th Street!*[10]

No anvil at the mercy of Thor himself sustains such a relentless beat as the infrastructure of this cybernetic womb. The Palladium is a precinct of eternal rhythmic reverberation, where diety watches from on high through two vast, mobile, all-remembering video eyes, and ever-renewing grace descends in the form of dancing banks of multi-colored strobes and floods, tinting a vibrant mass of humanity which seemingly cavorts as one within a seething zygote of glare, color, motion, and relentless sound.

The Palladium is the shell of an old movie palace that must have been, when new, very like a souped-up Versailles. The old ceiling curves up from walls encrusted with enfoliated gee-gaws, leering hermes, and, spotlighted frescoes of seductive nymphs, into elaborately articulated pendentives surrounding elliptical domes. The old balconies have been integrated into vast, carpeted grandstands, so one can remove to the very "last row" and look down upon a truly spectacular sight. It is very like being inside one of those elaborate Easter eggs Czars gave Archduchesses. Only the mechanism inside is what you ultimately are there *to be* inside: a vast, multivalent, dance floor, surrounded by an open-work structure of square columns and arches (which light up on the sides facing the floor in rhythm to the sound-system) and which resembles the sanctuary of a great cathedral, with tiers of "triforium" and "clerestory" balconies, an "apse" of every-changing theatrical flats at one end, and a great arch facing out into the enormous "nave" of the old theatre.

This resonating square ovum of blazing hypersupermost ultralife (so curiously like a medieval choir), is thus nestled in a delapidated

pseudo-Baroque incubator surrounded by an environment of depressive murk: black, navy blue, the darkest reds and browns, with only enough light to show steps and turns. The structure supports the remarkably agile light-banks, and the ominously looming video displays. These consist of about twenty-five screens each (very like the multi-faceted eyes of a fly) which glide over the heads of the dancers displaying a wild assortment of both natural and historical images: swimming fish, Marylin Monroe, war scenes, metamorphic rainbow patterns, Josef Stalin, flying geometric solids, King Kong swatting bi-planes, and freshly laid eggs rolling directly out of cooped chickens!

Along with this elementalist overview of origins, there is an historicizing, pavilion-like "set" of "Olde Neue Yorke" which descends into the middle of the floor to surround half the dancers in a mirrored chamber insane with strobes. This structure is, of course, the inverse of the old mirrored orb which radiated constellations of glints and spangles across a ballroom's walls and ceilings in impoverished similacrum of a moon cum milky way. (This can still be found above the dance floors of glitzy suburban "wedding palaces.") But here its function is replaced by the computerized light banks, while its form is inverted so the dancers revel in a mirrored polygon in which the lights are reflected inward, not outward. This is microcosm to the Palladium's macrocosm: the new encapsulated within the old.

On the dance floor itself the manic transmogrifies into the schizoid. All is a trance-state; nothing moves in this futuristic universe but in thrall to the all-suffusing, throbbing, rhythm set up by banks of powerful speakers set just above ear-level in the surrounding frame of things. For those who feel cheated by the position of the speakers there are solid platforms set beneath the side banks so those in quest of perfect bliss can have the sound pour directly into their brains from its source. The noise never ceases, the rhythm changes but never flags, the dancers seemingly never stop, and as their numbers increase, the size of the dance floor subtly expands as, at one end of the floor, a background of metal geometric abstract panels rises to reveal, further back, a curved apse of flounced drapes, which vanish to reveal inky velvet awash in blood and gold, which ultimately part to reveal the ultimate sacrament: a neo-expressionist mural to add visual stimulation in a eye/ear-splitting near-finale of quaking, telluric pounding.

The dancers themselves, though packed together in a seething and seemingly unified mass, concentrate entirely upon their partners (though they make no body and little eye contact). A few, given their expressions of enraptured self-communion, seem to concentrate solely upon their inner sensations. Some, especially those on the platforms soaking in decibles, dance by themselves. But in a sense, everyone dances alone, even when partnered. Striking is the lack of any communal dances. Granted square-dancing, or grand polonaises, might well be beyond the prevailing imagination. But that this

culture does not dance together is symptomatic of the depressive elementalism to which they were born. But the architectural context in which they choose to dance, however isolated, bespeaks the future.

This must be emphasized. The Palladium's fantastically schizoid environment of new structure nested within old structure is the perfect postmodernist statement of our philosophical situation. We modernists who so grandly rejected the natural and historic pasts, would now unconsciously be maternally enclosed within them. We would, at very least, be touched and renewed by the inescapable, pre-natal vibration—the relentless, bone-disintegrating, all-penetrating, aural steambath of our potentially amniotic new culture from whose energized confluences creative mutants might yet be forced. And just as we crown our skyscrapers and condos with pediments, and contrive dancehalls as basilicas, the elements of which being cautiously borrowed from "the tradition," we shall, perhaps, come to fill them with old gods in new auras. Whatever: the meaninglessness the "hero of modern life" has for so long faced down, must now be faced by everyone without the masks of modernism.

And for now the ambiguous images of paired singularities (and just possibly fertilized eggs) imposed upon the Palladium's seemingly fused population holds out the hope that somehow the dependently depressive and anti-authoritarian schizoid opposites presiding here can be united to create a new matrix. These revelers are the servants of the binomial impulses which dance upon their floppy disks, physically unite their planet, explore their cosmos, and halo their heads with trance-inducing technology. Everything is almost in twos—a new world of incipiently transcendent individualism. It is, with its wasteful potential for inducing a new collective myth, one of the few hopes we have for a "postmodernist" future in the transitional present—as we proceed, ever so cautiously, to trip the light tropaic unto our new Baroque.

Notes

[1]The characteristics of depressive and schizoid temperaments as related to creativity are based on Anthony Storr, *The Dynamics of Creation*. New York: Atheneum, 1972, especially Chapters 5 and 7. Storr is very much influenced by the thinking of Melanie Klein and W.R.D. Fairbairn. For an elaboration of the cultural implications of Klein's theory of the "depressive position," as well as the terminology used in this essay, see my forthcoming "The Psychodynamics of Modernism: A Postmodernist View, Part I-Baudelaire and the Elementalism of Melancholy" in the second volume of *Psychoanalytic Perspectives on Art*.

[2]The summary of depressive stylistics is from Harriet Wadeson, *Art Psychotherapy*. New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1980, p. 66.

[3]See Steven Henry Madoff, "What is Postmodern about Painting: The Scandinavian Lectures, II," *Arts,* October 1985, pp. 59-64.

[4]For a discussion of melancholia in the 16th Century, see Rudolf & Margot Wittkower, *Born Under Saturn.* New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1963, pp. 102ff.

[5]Charles Baudelaire, *Oeuvres Complètes,* ed. Y.-G. Dantec. Paris: Gallimard, Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, p. 908. Author's translation.

[6]Charles Baudelaire, *Intimate Journals,* trans. Christopher Isherwood. New York: Howard Fertig, 1977, p. 42.

[7]*Ibid.,* p. 25.

[8]For a discussion of this evolution, see the author's "The Usable Future: The Role of Fantasy in the Promotion of a Consumer Society for Art," in *Dawn of a New Day: The New York World's Fair 1939/1940.* New York: The Queens Museum, 1980, pp. 57-71.

[9]*Art Criticism,* Vol., 2, No. 1, 1985, pp. 31-38.

[10]For a free ticket to the Palladium, I thank The Whitney Museum of American Art; for insights into its cultural potential, I am grateful to Joyce Portnoy, and the postmodernist sculptor China Marks.

Regression in the Service of...

SUZAAN BOETTGER

> *The collective effort away from the mind-forged manacles of materialism may be described most accurately as purposive regression ...From the point of view of the prevailing civilizational values, this transformation exemplifies a process of "degeneration," or the onset of decadence; it appears to be a regression to a more childlike form of expression. This regression can be considered purposive...because it prepared the perceptual ground for a new symbolic system...Jose Arguelles,* Transformative Vision, *1975.*

Ambivalence about the resurgence of painterly figuration over the past decade pivots on the issue of "regression." This term, with undertones ranging from the political to the psychoanalytic, has been applied variously as denunciation and justification for the recent dominance of so-called neo-expressionist imagery. Buffeted among structuralist, formalist, Marxist and humanist perspectives, regression has been attributed to all that is either puerile or heroic in the return to figurative painting. The disparity of attitudes toward the function of what are considered regressive practices in art focuses and encapsulates the territorial battle over the naming of the identity and func-

tion of current art—and indeed, of artists in society.

The most direct and negative assessment of regression as interpreted as the source of a stylistic tendency—albeit specifically that of the "return to traditional modes of representation around 1915" but with reference to the present "collapse of the modernist paradigm"—is Benjamin H.D. Buchloh's bold "Figures of Authority, Ciphers of Regression."[1] The article is exemplary for the nature of both Buchloh's criticisms and the assumptions from which they spring. The title's metaphoric duality indicates Buchloh's linkage of an "oppressive" State with artists' adoption of an "obsolete" form (classicized figuration). His view that the "rediscovery of history serves the authoritarian purpose of justifying the failure of modernism" suggests that artists served the will of the State. It also posits a false dichotomy between representational form (seen as a retreat to tradition) and modernist abstraction (with its corollary avant-garde, constantly and radically innovative). It is a conception of modernism as a "critical dismantling of the dominant ideology," involving a concomitant shock of the new. It is an identification of figuration with regressiveness based on an arbitrary opposition to the progressiveness (political and stylistic) of non-objective abstraction, or of non-object conceptual art. And in that respect Buchloh is correct; the inversion of this heirarchy—if not simply the repudiation of the duality—is fundamental to the new figuration, a "rejection of the concept of progress *per se*" noted by Marcia Tucker in an important early recognition of it, *"Bad" Painting.*[2]

Obviously, Buchloh does not recognize a critical figuration's potential challenges to a "dominant ideology." His anachronistic polarities of representation/abstraction, regressive/progressive overlook the broad areas in between. He does not consider how the regular reformulation of an abstracted figuration, an intrinsic aspect of 20th century imagery, has at times been positively generative, even progressive. He does not look beyond considerations of style to question what the "restorative phenomena" restores, what the "new conservatism" conserves. The reemergence of figuration "after the Readymade and the Black Square" is viewed solely as a manifestation of "resignation," "retardation" and "regression."

These are emotionally-loaded terms of denigration, and the stridency of his argument, as well as the fervor of other critics and advocates of the new expressionism[3] suggests that something more fundamental is at stake than an assessment of style. It indicates an identification with certain artistic procedures over others that amounts to a self-identity and a world view, and a view of the function of art and artists within it.

In Buchloh's linkage of repression with regression, the repression is political (of progressivism) and stylistic (of modernism). But the regression he evokes is not only stylistic—to "primitivist" idioms—but psychic, the "avant-garde artist, (realizing) his historical failure," (regresses) to a "melancholic infantilism." It is a poignant image.

"Infantilism" evokes not only emotional puerilism but intellectual immaturity—in nuce, unconsciousness. (Freud: "What is unconscious in mental life is also what is infantile."[4]) In this view, the artist is unconscious of the function of art, or of modernism, namely, to dismantle ideology through the ego's analytic functions. It is "melancholic" because that mood is "enforced by prohibition and repression," but also "melancholy is at the origin of the allegorical modes," and a climate of political oppression elicits "allegorical modes of internalized introspection.' This is another useful insight that in a different value system could be turned around and viewed positively. The response he describes sounds like a pretty sophisticated one; indeed, the ability to sublimate melancholia in allegory seems like a mature adaptation to circumstances, and a creative one.

Buchloh reveals his own ambivalence about the function of an artist's regresison by contradicting his model of "infantilism" in insisting early in the article that we assume an artist's stylstic decisions are "calculated." Thus we must ask the function of an artist's calculated infantilism. What is conserved, and preserved? It prompts the question of whether these infantile, melancholic, introspective allegories were solely (simply) a reaction to political and stylistic prohibitions, or perhaps a conscious ("calculated") response to a perception of a more personal, and therefore fundamental repression—that of the expressive, individual self. Buchloh supplies such a motivation by quoting Picabia's remark "I have come to realize that one cannot always make cubes express the thoughts of the brain and the feelings of the psyche."

> When art takes the form of criticism...(when) an artist seeks to reduce all art, not only his own, but that of others as well, to a critical discourse...this attitude is probably largely responsible for the traumatisms the avant-garde is undergoing today and their various regressive consequences. Thierry De Duve, "Who's Afraid of Red Yellow and Blue?" *Artforum*, September 1983.

As Buchloh's connection of regression with the pejorative term "infantilism" reveals, behind the devaluation of the function of regression in artistic creativity is a stratified conception of regression as a turn from a higher to a lower stage of development. By extension, the view rejects potential resources of growth in primal modes of mental activity utilizing the primary process, such as fantasy. It is only a step to a disavowal of unconscious forces themselves. More directly, it is a denial of the unconscious as one of the sources synthesized to generate a style, with a corresponding schematization of art practice as impersonally determined by social, political and economic factors. It suggests an exclusion of instinct, and a repudiation of the place of play—an early site of the projection of the unconscious upon objects and the sublimation of instincts—as a precursor to and component of mature art-making.

It is not surprising that those who do not value sources of knowl-

edge that, viewed dualistically, are considered "irrational" (and therefore ambiguous or indistinct)—from fleeting intuitions to dramatic dreams—would not appreciate figurative abstraction. If expressionist imagery can be correctly identified as having sources in emotional regression, the substantiation of that is the affinity it bears to dreams, which are also a regression to images. Freud continued the above statement by noting "(Dreams) carry us back every night to this infantile level."[5] Or as Paul Ricoeur more evocatively describes it, "(In dreams) it is our childhood" that rises to the surface, with its forgotten, checked, repressed impulses, and along with our childhood that of mankind, recapitulated in that of the individual.... In regression...this close connection between the archaic and the oneiric...the realm of dream-fantasy is the realm of desire."[6] And the vocabulary of dreams is images, "Dreams think essentially in images... replac(ing) thoughts by hallucination," whereas "what characterizes the waking state is the fact that thought activity takes place in concepts."[7] Freud noted that images are habitually associated with states of (mental) abstraction such as dreams, hallucinations, and fantasies; in turn, the two main mechanisms of image-formation in dreams—condensation and displacement—are also features of other symbolizations of mental activity: of metaphor and metonymy in language, according to Roman Jakobson, and of abbreviation and collage in visual abstractions.

The nature of the objections to this contemporary parallelism between dream work and expressionist imagery suggests that its critics want to see, on the contrary, art practice as the product of "waking state" consciousness, where "thought activity takes place in concepts," an endeavor in which "everything begins and ends in esthetic judgments,"[8] is "calculated," and "demonstrates interest in advancing formal concerns"[9] as well as "the oppositional stance of the modernist artist."[10] (Is it also opposed to the unconscious?) The artistic process thus is taken to be deliberate and rational, and it is deconstructed as though a language.[11]

The belief in the primacy of language in constituting consciousness has dominated the interpretation of literature, art, film, and cultural artifacts over at least the past two decades (longer in Europe). As a summary of the philosophy of the psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan puts it, "language reproduces reality. As there is no thought without language, knowledge of the world, of others and of self is determined by language."[12] Correspondingly in the sphere of visual art, the analogy of language as a model of understanding non-verbal communicative acts encouraged the production of art as metalanguage, intended as self-reflexive examinations of the language of style or visual perception, such as formalist art, and projects which directly utilize words, such as conceptual art. These "critical discourses," which predominated up until expressionist painting swept the field by the late 1970s, emphasize the analytical modes of thinking over the more "primary process" fantasizing ones. The po-

larization or schism between these two procedures is fundamental to the emergence of and divergent reactions to expressionist painting, much of which inverts their ranks in artistic practice.

Seen another way, Ferdinand de Saussure's duality of *langue* and *parole* provides an appropriate parallel for an understanding of the ambivalence over the new figuration. Central is the conflict between the conception of artmaking as entering into a *language* that has an autonomous and arbitrary internal structure, where "To be able to transmit a message at all, he or she must already be caught up in and constituted by language.... In the beginning was the Word"[13]; versus considering the artistic procedure as expressive *speech*, where language is inflected by psychic intentions (conscious or not) and social contexts.

The prevalence of the procedure of "appropriation" in the recent imagery acknowledges the historicity of styles, as well as what has been less favorably but aptly termed "the rhetoric of authenticity,"[14]—essentially, the conventions of artistic language that new art is inevitably "caught up in," and to some degree is "constituted by." In fact, to fail to enter into a dialogue on some level with art history would be attempting to make an art removed from the contingencies of time and place. Yet the very orientation of the newer art as "experssionistic" also underscores the affinity creative acts have to speech. As Freud noted,

> Speech must be understood not merely to mean the expression of thought in words but to include the speech of gesture and every method such, for instance, as writing, by which mental activity can be expressed.... (If) the means of representation in dreams are principally visual images and not words, we shall see that it is even more appropriate to compare dreams with a system of writing rather than a language. In fact, the interpretation of dreams is completely analogous to the decipherment of an ancient pictographic script such as Egyptian hieroglyphs.[15]

In this respect, speech, writing, dreams, hieroglyphs, and artistic images can be viewed as related acts of symbolization, all deriving from modes of thought that—to greater and lesser degrees—are prior to the more socially codified formal language. In Lacan's view, a child's development moves from an attachment to the mother, to one of a symbolic play object (in this particular analogy, a reel or a kind of yo-yo that in its extension and rewind replicates the mother's departure and return), to language acquisition. (The analogy derives from Freud's account of his grandson's "game.") Access to language, because of its abstract, pre-determined structure, is necessarily simultaneously repressive—it produces a disjunction between the lived experience and the sign that replaces it. Yet Lacan also suggests the degree to which use of language reveals the unconscious through subjectivity. "Reference to the self, to desire or to life, can only be made through language, through the symbolic register and is

never direct or immediate. Hence it is susceptible to every alienation or lie, willful or not, susceptible to all the distortions inscribed in the very principle of the 'symbolic,' conventional dimension of group life." That subjective reference to the self occurs at the intersection of language and speech. Within Lacan's belief that "Language is the precondition for the act of becoming aware of oneself as a distinct entity,"[16] the most direct act in which this occurs is that of the self-articulation in speech. Language is necessarily modified by its vehicle, the act of symbolization through praxis—the act or thought manifested in speech. This suggests a similar synthesizing activity in artistic praxis, also an act of symbolization or mediation with the world, one which lies at the intersection of aesthetic language and an artist's speech, or voice, or what we used to call "vision" when artists were (more grandiosely) referred to as "visionaries.

> ...feeling is being thawed out and wit and pleasure are surfacing...painting cannot be emblemized by the activity of brushing pigmented marks on a surface. It is, rather, exemplary as the most ubiquitous and fluent visual means devised to give an imaginative picture of the world or its energies. Max Kozloff, "Painting and Anti-Painting: A Family Quarrel," *Artform,* September 1975.

A related conception of artistic activity as an intermediary between the self and the world, between language and speech, and regression and growth, is evoked by D.W. Winnicott's model of the "transitional object." As a theorist within the "object-relations" orientation of psychoanalytic research, Winnicott—along with predecessors Henry Stack Sullivan, Erich Fromm, Melanie Klein and others—considers relations with others as a fundamental constituent of mental life. They replace Freud's instinctual drive discharge as the force motivating human behavior with that of the goal of generating or regenerating specific modes of relatedness with others. In Freud's "drive/structure" model, the object is the thing that is the target of the drive; in their "relational/structure" model, relations with objects (significant others) structure consciousness and behavior. For a developmentally early example, in infancy the transitional object facilitates the emotional transition from a perception of the self as the center of the world to an awareness of self as a person in relation to others. A "security blanket" functions in this way, as does Lacan's more symbolically mobile reel; in each the child experiences power and powerlessness in relation to a thing in the world as he or she does with a parent.

Lest this connection between art-making and transitional experience appear as another analogy to infantilism, it should be emphasized that:

> The transitional object is neither under magical control (like hallucinations and fantasies) nor outside control (like the real mother). Transitional experience lies somewhere between 'primary creativity and objective perception based on reality testing'.... Tran-

> sitional experiencing is not merely a developmental interlude, but remains a cherished and highly valuable realm within healthy adult experience. [It is here we can let our thoughts wander, concerned neither with their logic and validity in the real world nor with the threat that our musings will lead us into a totally subjective, solipsistic realm, causing us to lose the real world altogether. Transitional experience is rooted in the capacity of the child to play; in adult form it is expressed as a capacity to play with one's fantasies, ideas, and the world's possibilities in a way that continually allows for the surprising, the original and the new. In transitional experience, we maintain access to the most private wellspring of our thoughts and imagery, without being held accountable for them in the clear and harsh light of objective reality.[17]

This mediate state of mind draws from and merges the primary process's lifting of repression with a more conscious sense of discrimination, creating a safe mental milieu for an uninhibited symbolization of "object relations" in a free play of the imagination. Inherent is Winnicott's approval of the role of fantasy in mature consciousness. His perspective is in dramatic contrast to Freud's interpretation of "the half-way region of phantasy" as a substitute for gratification, where "everyone suffering from privation expects to derive alleviation and consolation from it."[18] Instead, Winnicott shares Melanie Klein's view of fantasy as central to a healthy mentality, not as a substitute for reality but as an accompaniment to gratification. But more particularly for Winnicott, as a component of transitional experience, it is prior to action or creation—a visualization or practice toward mastery.

With his articulation of the fertile sources for creativity discovered in transitional experience, it follows that Winnicott recognizes a developmental value in regressive experiences. The customary denunciation of regression, underlying Buchloh's and others' censure of recent expressionist figuration, derives from Freud's instinctual hierarchy where, simply put, "regression is pathological and dangerous in that it provides a surfeit of infantile gratification."[19] This presumes that the immediate satisfactions of that state would make one become fixated at that primary level of development. On the contrary, within Winnicott's model of the primacy of relations in determining behavior, regression is seen as a return to an earlier or more primal mode of consciousness in search of missing relational experiences. Here a desire for growth is assumed, and thus a tendency to regression is understood as "part of the capacity of the individual to bring about self-cure."[20] It is a reparative mechanism, seeking to reestablish relations initially through restorative fantasies.

So we note again that Buchloh offered a pseudo insightful characterization by terming the return to representational imagery as "restorative phenomena." For him it is "restoration" in the political sense of a reactionary regime. It has nothing to do with the search for emotional health. To the extent that the emotionalized images of

neo-expressionism display aspects of the condensation and displacement intrinsic to the abstract mental states of dreams and fantasies, like those two regressions to pre-verbal symbolizations, the new images focus on the human figure (as well as, to a lesser degree, on that traditional stand-in for our instinctual nature, animals). Considered in light of the function of regressive fantasies in object relations, the resurgence of figurative expressionism suggests a response to missing relational experiences. Most literally, the imagery repopulates contemporary painting and sculpture. For while there has been an on-going practice of ("realistic") figuration over the last couple of decades) from the deadpan suburbanites of Robert Bechtle to the depressed urbanites of George Segal—purveyors of realism worked as "outlaws" from the dominant non-object, conceptual modes of the 1960s and 70s,[20] even when an artist's intention, as for instance Philip Pearlstein's, is conceptually formalist.

The return of expressionist figuration to painting was not a sui generis spontaneous generation. That spirit of anxious self-examination was central to the earlier body art of, among others, Vito Acconci, Chris Burden, and Dennis Oppenheim. Jack Burnham's statement in an article about the latter that "it is precisely those artists involved in the most naked projections of their personalities who will contribute the most to society's comprehension of its self" could serve also as an appropriate justification of some neo-expressionist painting.[21] Likewise, the emotionalized performance narratives of Joan Jonas, Linda Montano and Mary Beth Edelson, as well as the whole women's art movement's focus on personal sources for art, fed the expressionist impulse in painting. The transition was marked—and, in effect, promoted—by exhibitions at two New York museums in 1978: "'Bad' Painting" at The New Museum (in January and February) and "New Image Painting" at the Whitney (in December and January 1979).[22] They acknowledged a reintegration of the human figure with contemporary abstraction, and a reincorporation of subjectivity and expressiveness. "New Image Painting," seen as a hybridization of (or fluctuation between) painterly abstraction and conceptualized realism, could also be viewed as a re-union of body and mind. Functionally, the work of art again became a material (canvas) body, an objectified or reified screen for the projections of a psyche; visually, the human body was depicted (or embodied) through means that were both cerebral and emotional. Thus Neil Jenney's 1969-70 dualistic images, a highlight of the later show, operate both stylistically as an adoption of Minimalism's reduction to a gestalt,[23] and thematically as an artist re-entering the world of inter- and intra-personal relations. Paintings such as *Man and Wife, Girl and Doll,* and *Girl and Vase* utilize a deliberately childlike-looking finger-painting-texture background and cartoonish drawing. The consciously infantile or primitive rendering style almost serves as an illustration of Winnicott's association of regression with a focus on object relations. But the images' effect is

subtle and sophisticated. As figural or figure-object oppositions lost on a field of strokes merging ground and sky, in *Man and Wife* the couple's expressions evoke at once the tense and comic qualities of interpersonal estrangement, whereas the latter two images' depiction of a broken alter ego (doll or vase) exude the sorrowful loss of a broken self. Also in the "New Image" exhibition, Susan Rothenberg's repeated images of horse circumscribed or measured by lines and bars can be read as an inner struggle between one's impulsive (perhaps sexual) urges and the desire to control and analyze those feelings. The poignancy of these images, rare to current painting, suggested that access to fantasy and the unconscious were being restored as sources of creativity.

Moreover, the expressionist demeanor of the new figuration restored the *artist* to a conspicuous presence. The hand of the creator was displayed through exaggerated brushwork, eclectic materials, or eccentric facture. These flamboyant effects (or evidence of affects) could be construed as "conservative," as in Buchloh's view, because they in effect conserve the tranformative touch of the artist. One of Meyer Shapiro's justifications for avant-garde paintings and sculptures is that they " are the last handmade, personal objects within our culture."[24] By extension, as in Shapiro's analysis, the work preserves the idea of the individual. Painting's inceasingly autobiographical subject matter over the past decade—from the more directly narcissistic self-portraits of Francesco Clemente to the obtuse allusions in Susan Rothenberg's later symbology—prominently assert what the preceding emphasis on language and esthetic ontology sought to repress: that all art is ultimately representational, and autobiographical. Among its many levels of meaning, art represents the self in interaction with (or in *relation to*) the world—whether this takes the form of figurative or non-objective abstractions. It can be read as a metaphor for being in the world, which in a period such as the recent one of emphatic expressionism, begins with the sensations of being in oneself. With its affinities to dreams and fantasies, the new figuration asserts the inner self in the face of the bureaucratization of contemporary life, the codification of non-objective forms into aridity, and the de-personalization of formalist or linguistic interpretations, which sought to purge art of the ambiguities of a complex self. Thus the "regression" to images functions progressively in the way Ricoeur speaks of dream-work functioning progressively, as "therapeutic action exercised by the self upon the self."[25]

Is art trivally "therapeutic," as some would say?[26] It is profoundly therapeutic, in the sense that all works of art are not only reparative projections of the imagination but introjections of the material generated. Transformative visions are a matter of personal catharsis and individuation first.[27] Or to switch metaphors, the creative spirit is a gift, and as such, a gift that comes back most to the giver; the gift is not used up in use.[28] As Ricoeur articulated it, more explicitly,

> Works of art are not only socially valuable;...they are also creations which, as such, are not simply projections of the artist's conflicts but the sketch of their solution. Dreams look backward, toward infancy, the past; the work of art goes ahead of the artist; it is a prospective symbol of his personal synthesis and of man's future, rather than a regressive symbol of his unresolved conflicts.[29]

Beyond their imagistic affinities, dreams and figurative expressionism must be distinguished in other respects. To dream is to formally and temporally regress, to a state of primary process and the wish-fulfillment of primal desires. Mature adults experience that primal level of thinking nightly as a necessary complement to waking state consciousness. But artists do not make art by dreaming it—at least they do not materialize it that way. The creative process could be described as adult play with infantile wishes. But the unconscious, reached through regression, is only one stimulant to the creative imagination. Its use in creative activity has more appropriately been termed by the psychoanalyst Ernst Kris as "controlled regression," or "regression in the service of the ego." ("Clinical experience demonstrates that art as an aesthetic—and therefore social—phenomenon is linked to the intactness of the ego.")[30] The concept bears a striking resemblance to another of Buchloh's "insights," his description—or denunciation—of the art he discussed as both "calculated" and "infantile." (It is worth noting that this echoes Baudelaire's description of the artist as synthesizing infantile vision and adult analysis.) Both are necessary: inspiration from a synthesizing, primal source, and its transformation into art via a more critical/analytical consciousness; their relative balance varies with each particular style.

More recently, that balance has seemed to tilt in the direction of an emphatic expressionism which suggests a mannered overreaction to the former separation of analysis and feeling promulgated by formalist analysis. The works appear to aggrandize individuality through grandiosely idiosyncratic imagery such as Julian Schnabel's conglomerations of crockery shards and antlers, the obsessively repeated inverted figures of Georg Baselitz (the inversion a graphic signal of distress at sea), the autistic disjunctions of David Salle, and the private effluvia of Jonathan Borofsky. Yet each dramatic gesture, in its exaggerated "originality," also resembles an act of overcompensation for doubts about an authentic individuality. In their ostensible egoism, they seem to have forgotten that "unfortunately," as Simone de Bouvoir put it, "spontaneity is not so simple to achieve as it would seem: the paradox of the commonplace, as explained by Poulhan in *Fleurs de Tarbes,* is that it is often confused with the direct presentation of the subjective impression."[31] It is this chaos of subjectivity which is beginning to be subdued by the return to order represented by renewed interest in geometric abstraction.

> At its most primary level, art is not a thing done but a dissolution of the ego; nor is anything "created." Whereas the materialistic view is that creation is an addition to reality, from the point of view of internal technology, creation is actually a dissolution of duality and a merging into a unitive state, producing a transformation of reality... Jose Arguelles, *Transformative Vision.*

Art that sustains interest over time both draws from deep sources within the self and transcends the self—in Freud's view, "works over" and if necessary "tones down" fantasy material and "makes it possible for other people to derive consolation and alleviation from their own sources of pleasure in the unconscious."[32] For isn't that very source of pleasure a major factor in the way neo-expressionism has dominated the field in the last decade? The excessive type that accompanied the marketing of this particular return to art as a hand-made expressive object, i.e., painting on discrete, portable canvas, does not explain what more substantial need these images fulfilled. It does not explain the enormous art audience, diverse and numerous exhibitions, and rapidly succeeding generations of figurative expressionism. They suggest that the regression to images may have been—for a period of time, at least—psychologically or spiritually progressive.

Yet the challenge of a stylistic transition is how it disguises—through a dramatic alteration in the "look" of art and the particular issues it emphasizes—the fact that all art both acts as an inquiry into its own nature and reveals the nature of the consciousness that produced it. Whether the work derives more from a scientistic or instinctual orientation, on a metaphoric level it offers a simultaneous evocation of the self in the world as well as the status of art in the art world. It is this layering and interplay of double identities—as a thing in itself and symbolic speech, as play and a "work," as regression and progression—that give art such rich and fluid powers of expression.

Notes

[1]Benjamin H.D. Buchloh, "Figures of Authority, Ciphers of Regression: Notes on the Return of Representation in European Painting," *October* no. 16 (Spring 1981): 39-68. Reprinted in *Art After Modernism: Rethinking Representation,* Brian Walls, ed., The New Museum of Contemporary Art and David R. Godine, Publisher, Inc., 1984.

[2]Marcia Tucker, *Bad Painting,* The New Museum, 1978, unpaginated.

[3]This is evident in two articles by Donald Kuspit: "Rejoinder—Tired Criticism, Tired Radicalism," *Art in America,* April 1983, pp. 11-17, and "Flak from the Radicals: The American Case Against Current German Painting" in *Expressions: New Art from Germany,* Jack Cowart, ed., The St. Louis Art Museum/Munich: Prestel: Verlag, 1983, pp. 43-55 (the latter reprinted in *Art After Modernism,* op. cit.).

[4]James Strachey, ed. and trans., *Introductory Lectures in Psychoanalysis,* W.W. Norton & Co., 1966, p. 210.

[5]*Ibid.*

[6]Paul Ricoeur, *Freud and Philosophy: An Essay on Interpretation,* 1970, p. 91.

[7]James Strachey, ed., *Standard Edition, Complete Works of Sigmund Freud,* Hogarth Press, 1953, v. 4, p. 49.

[8]Thierry de Duve, "Who's Afraid of Red, Yellow and Blue," *Artforum,* September 1983, p. 35.

[9]Douglas Huebler, "Sabotage or Trophy? Advance or Retreat?" *Artforum,* May 1982, p. 73.

[10]Craig Owens, "Honor, Power and the Love of Women," *Art in America,* January 1983, p. 138 (reprinted in *Theories of Contemporary Art,* Richard Hertz, ed., Prentice-Hall, 1985).

[11]Hal Foster, "The Expressionist Fallacy," *Art in America,* January 1983, p. 81.

[12]Anika Lemaire, *Jacques Lacan,* Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd., 1977, pp. 52-54.

[13]Terry Eagelton, on De Saussure and structuralism in *Literary Theory,* University of Minnesota Press, 1983, p. 113.

[14]Foster, *ibid.*

[15]Strachey, 1953, V. 13, p. 177.

[16]Both of these quotes are from Lemaire, op. cit., pp. 57 and 54.

[17]Jay R. Greenberg and Stephen A. Mitchell, *Object Relations in Psychoanalytic Theory,* Harvard University Press, 1983, pp. 195-96.

[18]Strachey, 1966, p. 376.

[19]Greenberg, op. cit., p. 200.

[20]Greenberg, op. cit., p. 201.

[21]Jack Burnham, "The Artist as Shaman," *Great Western Salt Works,* George Braziller, Inc., 1974, p. 140.

[22]Richard Marshall, *New Image Painting,* Whitney Museum of American Art, 1978.

[23]Mark Rosenthal, "From Primary Structures to Primary Imagery," *Arts,* October 1978, p. 106-7.

[24]Meyer Shapiro, "The Liberating Quality of Avant-garde Art," *Artnews,* Summer 1957, p. 38 (Reprinted in his *Modern Art* as "Recent Abstract Painting").

[25]Ricoeur, op. cit., p. 522.

[26]As Craig Owens suggested, critically, in "Honor, Power and the Love of Women," *Art in America,* January 1983, p. 13 (reprinted in Hertz, ibid.).

[27]Jose Arguelles, *Transformative Vision,* Shambhala, 1975, pp. 288-296.

[28]Lewis Hyde, *The Gift: Imagination and the Erotic Life of Property,* Vintage Books, 1979.

[29]Ricoeur, op. cit., p. 175.

[30]Ernst Kris, *Psychoanalytic Explorations in Art,* Schocken, 1964, pp. 167-69.

[31]Simone De Beauvoir, *The Second Sex,* Bantam, 1961, p. 664.

[32]Strachey, 1966, p. 376.

Formalism and American Art Criticism in the 1920s

SUSAN NOYES PLATT

Today, formalism is inextricably associated with the name and generation of Clement Greenberg. Scholars recognize that formalism, that method of art criticism that analyzes the abstract elements of form, color, line, space and composition, rather than story or content, has evolved from such late nineteenth century writers as Heinrich Wölfflin, through the early twentieth century English critics, Clive Bell and Roger Fry. Fry and Bell, in turn, are generally acknowledged as the primary source for Clement Greenberg's writings of the 1940s and later.

A fascinating, early chapter of formalism has been overlooked in this careful geneology. In the 1920s, a little studied generation of critics provide an important link between the first articulation of a developed formalist theory by Fry and Bell and the emergence of Greenberg's important writings. Writers such as Walter Pach, Forbes Watson, Guy Eglington and Henry McBride, all embraced the new theories of formalism and used them as fruitful, if controversial,

means for understanding and writing about the art of Paul Cézanne, Pablo Picasso, Henri Matisse, John Marin and Charles Sheeler, among many others. As these writers adopted the formalist method, they constantly analyzed its validity, recognized its shortcomings and discussed its strengths, in an extensive body of literature that has not heretofore been examined.

Before examining these writings, a brief summary of the theories of Bell and Fry themselves is helpful in clarifying their contributions to the introduction of formalism into America. While the two critics shared the idea of looking at a work of art in terms of form that led to an emotional response, they diverged significantly in their manner of presenting that idea. They will therefore be treated separately here.

Clive Bell

While Roger Fry had articulated a rudimentary approach to formalism in *The Burlington Magazine* as early as 1908,[1] Clive Bell's popularization of those ideas in his book *Art,* written in 1913, first introduced formalist ideas to the general public. Bell's theory as presented in *Art* is general and all encompassing. Two key phrases stand out: "aesthetic emotion" and "significant form." Bell's definition of these terms is most frequently circular, that is, the presence of one means the presence of the other, but careful examination of *Art* does reveal the specific context in which he used the terms, if not an exact definition.

Bell was reacting to Victorian esthetics in developing the idea of "aesthetic emotion" and "significant form." He opposed art that was descriptive, informational, historical, literary or scientific. He believed that art should be detached from the "concerns of life."[2] His model for good art was the painting of Paul Cézanne.[3] In response to that work he felt "aesthetic emotion", and found an example of "significant form." The "aesthetic emotion" was distinct from common emotion: it made the viewer ecstatic and even giddy, but it was a feeling "lifted above the stream of life."[4] Bell writes of Cezanne that he "carried me off my feet before ever I noticed that his strongest characteristic was an insistence on the supremacy of significant form."[5] That form has no associations with life; it can be representative, but that is irrelevant; it must have "lines and colors combined in a particular way"[6] that arouses "aesthetic emotion." "Significant form" is an "ultimate reality," an "end in itself."[7]

Bell goes on to suggest in subsequent chapters of *Art* that "significant form" and "aesthetic emotion" exist in selected examples of art throughout history. He sees art and religion as similar manifestations of spiritual universals.[8] On the other hand, although "significant form" is apparent in many stages of art, it disappears in the nineteenth century, until Cézanne, who is, according to Bell, "the Christopher Columbus of a new continent of form."[9]

Bell's book is a readable treatise on aesthetic theory. The energy and style with which he presents his terms led to a widespread and

positive response. During the late teens and early twenties, Bell wrote frequently for American magazines such as *The New Republic, Vogue,* and *Vanity Fair.*[10] These articles primarily elaborated on his original principles in various ways. They never superceded the general public's identification of Bell with his first book, or the identification of that book as the primary treatise on modern aesthetics.

The impact of *Art* was immediate. Shortly after its publication Elizabeth Luther Cary quoted passages in *The New York Times.*[11] By 1916 it was familiar to intellectuals. One excited response to Bell's book appears in an autobiography by Madge Jenison, owner of the Sunwise Turn Bookshop, an intellectual center in the late teens and early 1920s. She writes: "I began to think about Clive Bell's essay on art. I had often thought of it that winter. Mr. Arthur Davies had brought it back from England in the fall and we had passed it around and talked it up to midnight."[12] As a result of that experience, Jenison decided to open her bookshop in 1916 to make *Art,* in particular, available to the general public.

Another example of Bell's influence that is clearly acknowledged appears in the writings of Sheldon Cheney. Cheney had begun his career as a theatre critic, but in the late teens he read Clive Bell's book and began utilizing the terminology of "significant form." It became the basis for his explanation of modern art in his influential *Primer of Modern Art* published in 1924. In the introduction to the *Primer* he states: "the clearest elementary treatise about [form]...is to be found in an admirable little book titled *Art* by Clive Bell....Despite the dangers in such a catch phrase, it is so serviceable that I shall use it often."[13] The *Primer* remained in print for over forty years, with only minor editorial changes, and was read by generations of introductory classes in modern art. A clearer documentation of Bell's influence cannot be imagined.

A humorous glossary of art terms written in 1925 parodied Bell's terminology, particularly with respect to his accessibility and popularity. The "Complete Dictionary of Modern Art Terms for the Use of Aspiring Amateurs" commented on Bell near the end of the lengthy series of articles, although he is also mentioned at the beginning as one of the authorities consulted:

> Form—An ancient diety whose empire, however, only reached its widest sway in the year 1920, which saw the publication of Mr. Clive Bell's *Art.* True, He bore a brand new name, having been hailed by Mr. Bell by the title of Significant, but neither Mr. Bell, nor any of his followers were at all clear as to the meaning of this new distinction. Having prostrated themselves before the altar of an Unknown God, they merely hoped that the addition of a still more ineffable and, by the same token, indefinable, title, would render His throne for all time unassailable. Alas for their piety. They were born in an age of Unbelievers and Blasphemers, who subjected their God to so merciless a fire of criticism that after five years the greater part of His empire has been wrested from Him and His title even to that remains in question.[14]

This lengthy parody foreshadows the objections to formalism that began to surface around the middle of the 1920s. While in 1922 Bell was celebrated by *Vanity Fair* as a nomination for the "Hall of Fame" and described as a "bringer of enlightenment,"[15] by 1926 he was being attacked as too far removed from the real world.

One important article in *The Journal of the Barnes Foundation* provides the summary of the subtle arguments over formalism. The article admits the importance of Bell in the opening paragraph by saying that he "expressed a conviction and a standard widely influential in contemporary art criticism," that of the importance of form over subject. Bell is also credited with "driving home to the popular consciousness the truth that a picture is not good because it resembles the original." The objection was to the idea that a picture was "independent of its relationship to any real thing."[16] In other words, art that was not an illustration was acceptable, but art that was unrelated to life in any definable way was not acceptable. This subtle distinction would be the basis for the heated attack on formalism and abstract art in general in the 1930s.

The Nation reviewed a later book by Bell, *Landmarks in Nineteenth Century Painting,* by attacking his "inadequate notion of life which more than anything else has led Mr. Bell to alienate and esotericize art.... It is clear enough that Mr. Bell does really consider modern industrial and social life to consist in humdrummery. The ideal artist is removed from the forces of our age because art has nothing to do with our crass concerns."[17] Bell's intellectuality was an issue in a review of another book by Bell, *Civilization, An Essay.* The critic was even more adamant than the *Nation* reviewer had been: "Mr. Bell's reverence and Platonic adoration of the mind and understanding of man entangled him in a chain of conceits and abstractions from which all observations of experience are excluded.... Mr. Bell's civilized state mirrors only a conception of beauty, unreal and changeless.[18]

The reference to Bell's intellectuality relates to his formation as part of the Bloomsbury group, a brilliant group of thinkers that included Virginia Woolf, Maynard Keynes, Lytton Strachey, and Roger Fry. Yet, this sophisticated metaphysical aspect of his thinking was generally lost, in the interest of his catchwords, "significant form" and "aesthetic emotion." Bell's oversimplification of complex ideas made him an easy target for superficial understanding.

Roger Fry

While Bell was a successful popularizer, although with a solid intellectual foundation, Roger Fry was a systematic analyser. Initially, his ideas were the springboard for Bell's book.[19] In 1909 Fry's "Essay on Aesthetics," carefully identified what he calls the emotional elements of design: rhythm, mass, space, light and shade, color, order and variety. Even as Fry was more systematic and specific, he shared with Bell an emphasis on the emotional response to art. But that

emotional response was not identified by a cliche, rather it manifested itself throughout Fry's writings, in his very personal response to individual works of art. Fry builds and expands beyond his initial thesis in a rich series of essays and lectures that encompass his excited responses to a wide variety of art from many artistic traditions. Fry, trained as a painter, as well as a critic and intellectual, allows the formal analysis to become a method, as much as a theory.

Fry dwelt on "vision" more than Bell. Where Bell defined a particular feeling in response to the work of art, Fry defined a type of looking: "This is at once more intense and more detached from the passions of the instinctive life. Those who indulge in this vision are apprehending the relation of forms and colors."[20]

Fry then, like Bell, considers art and the art experience as a separate sphere from ordinary life. Yet, at the same time, in his discussion of particular work, he responds to art sensitively and specifically. He speaks of Mayan sculpture or the painting of Giotto equally eloquently using the language of form:

> Now with Giotto, beautiful as his line undoubtedly is, it is not the first quality...that impresses us.... It is in its significance for the expression of form with the utmost lucidity, the most logical interrelation of parts that his line is so impressive...we feel at once the relation of the shoulders to one another, the relation of the torso to the pelvis.[21]

Thus, Fry looks at art concretely. While Bell introduced the general ideas of formalism, Fry demonstrated how they could be used creatively and not poetically.

Fry was familiar to the major art critics, less familiar to the general public. For example, Arthur Dow, Professor of Art at Columbia University, cited Fry in his 1917 discussion of modernism. While he also mentions Bell, Dow's definitions of modernism read like an excerpt from Fry's "Essay in Aesthetics."[22]

The important philosopher-critic, Willard Huntington Wright, mentions the English critics as "the ablest and most discerning defenders of the modern spirit in England."[23] In Wright's 1916 essay, "The Aesthetic Struggle in America," he attacked American criticism, suggesting Fry and Bell as standards.[24] In his own book on art, *Modern Painting,* Wright differs from Fry and Bell by giving more emphasis to color and depth, as well as to the philosophy of Nietzsche. But he also adopted the language of formalism from the English critics. Wright was widely read by American critics, and reinforced the attention given to formalism in the 1920s.

Another reflection of the influence of Roger Fry in particular appears in reviews of his book *Vision and Design. The Arts,* a widely read and influential art magazine, carried two reviews of the book because the editor, Hamilton Easter Field, was a friend of Fry's. He saw Fry as a fellow Quaker and embraced the book as an example of tolerence. The first review, by Alan Burroughs, quoted extensively

from the text and contrasted Fry's broadmindedness with Bell's narrowness.[25] The second review, by Field himself, developed the issue of Fry's separation of "actual life and imaginative life." He took exception to Fry's attempt to separate them, although he otherwise celebrated the critic.[26] The reviews are significant, not only for their careful appraisal of Fry's ideas, but also for their lengthy quotations, which ensured direct transmission of Fry's ideas.

An even more detailed discussion of Fry's ideas was carried by *The Dial,* a magazine directed to the intellectual at large, rather than the art world specifically. Thomas Craven, a critic better known today for his Regionalist Criticism in the 1930s, stated that "*Vision and Design* is one of the few books written on art in the last decade that are worth reading."[27] He went on to state Fry's premise that "the meaning of art lies in its forms," but criticized him for failure to distinguish between meaning and representation. In subsequent issues of *The Dial,* Craven adopted Fry's principles of form in a lengthy examination called "The Progress of Painting," his own version of the history of art.[28]

The discussion of Fry's views continued in *The Dial* in 1924. Laurence Buermeyer, an associate of the Barnes Foundation, objected to Fry's failure to distinguish between the aesthetic imagination and mere daydreaming. He also found Fry's separation of the emotions and the senses erroneous. He went on to attack Craven's articles as well.[29] Craven rebutted with a third article that claimed he had identified the weakness in the English critic's ideas, particularly concerning the "indivisibility of form and content."[30]

By 1928, a review in *The Arts* stated more directly the central reservation about Fry's aesthetics and summed up the position of critics who were gradually rejecting formalism. The author, Virgil Barker, praised Fry for his brilliant writing and sensitive eye, but spoke of the "limitations of pure art." He saw Fry's purist aesthetic theories developing in a culture where "art itself has been reduced to a side issue out of touch with the main current of life."[31]

Even as a growing sentiment resisted the separation of art from life in the reviews of Fry's books, the methods of formalism were being increasingly adopted. One evidence of this approach appears in the theoretical treatises by artists published throughout the 1920s. Much like the watered down influence of Cezanne and Cubism on American painting, these treatises watered down formalism and combined it with individual artists' prejudices. Thomas Hart Benton's series of articles called "The Mechanics of Form Organization in Painting," is one example of this use of formalism. Benton combined ideas of Fry, Bell, Wright and other sources into a theory that formed the basis for his teaching at the Art Students League.[32]

Formalism and the Art Critics

A specific analysis of the writings of selected critics demonstrates how they used formal analysis. In very few cases did a critic of the

1920s adopt it as the only perspective. The nature of the art under review determined the appropriate use of the formal terminology. Naturally, it appeared most frequently in discussion of artists whose pictorial aims were more abstract.

Forbes Watson

Forbes Watson, a prominent critic of the 1920s, combined his duties as editor of *The Arts* with a regular column in the *New York World.* Watson had graduated from Harvard University and received a degree from Columbia Law School, but decided to pursue a career in art criticism instead. By the time of the Armory Show in 1913, he was already an established, if not particularly avant-garde, commentator on the art scene. In his newspaper column, written for a general audience, he utilized formal analysis to demonstrate that modern art was not illustration. Watson specifically praised Fry as "one of the best writers on art alive."[33]

For *The Arts,* by contrast, he wrote long monographic articles, a novelty for art critics in those years. They were on a range of artists from the Renoiresque William Glackens to the more up-to-date Charles Sheeler. His criticism of Sheeler most clearly demonstrates his use of a formal vocabulary combined with his own concern with the indigenous design tradition:

> What he evidently looks at and strives, successfully I believe, to put down, is its [the barn's] structural character—the relation of its planes, the inherent quality of its materials, the meaning of its forms. How do the planes move one against the other?...In his exquisite arrangement of space, in his complete destruction of the superfluous, Sheeler reaches the cool, refreshing heights of the best periods of American design and, most important of all, his work is imbued with the necessary element of life, that native tang and fragrance, that sense of inherent quality without which art cannot rise above logic.[34]

In the art of Sheeler, Watson found a combination of form consciousness and meaning that he felt necessary for the highest quality in art.

While in *The Arts* Watson increasingly bemoaned the theoretical aspects of modern art and formalism, in his newspaper column for a more general audience, he emphasized the absence of literalism and photographic qualities, using more formal language. About Picasso's work in 1923 he wrote: "The parts are welded together in a whole, the quality of the form and the quality of the color belong together."[35] Careful reading of Watson's criticism reveals that he rarely analyzed individual works of art, but most often used the art as a support for a political position with respect to his ideas on modernism or nativism. As the decade progressed he increasingly supported the latter view and supported the artists like Grant Wood and Thomas Hart Benton who emphasized subject matter reflecting American themes.

Henry McBride

Henry McBride was easily the best known critic of the 1920s. He began his career as a painter in New York City, created an art school for the Educational Alliance in the late years of the nineteenth century, then became director of the Trenton Industrial Art School. From 1900 to 1912 he travelled in the United States and Europe, reading extensively in American literature.[36] His career as an art critic began with *The New York Sun* in 1912; the Sunday art page of that newspaper remained his main affiliation until 1920, when he also joined *The Dial.*

McBride met Roger Fry as early as 1910, for he describes Fry showing him Matisse's bronze relief sculpture, at that time in London.[37] As a result of his early awareness of modern art and literature (he was also a close friend of Gertrude Stein), McBride's perspective was more sophisticated than that of many other critics. He could analyze work with magnificent sensitivity if he chose, although more frequently he enjoyed the gossip of the art world or more general issues.

In a 1924 review of the work of Abraham Walkowitz he admitted his bias toward formal components more than subjects. In speaking of Walkowitz's subjects he writes that it was "one of the rare instances in which I find myself as a critic thinking of the matter that an artist presents rather than the manner."[38]

On the other hand, his style of analysis was Whitmanesque, or perhaps influenced by the aesthete Walter Pater. Like them, he felt the energy of the work as much as of the form. About Charles Demuth he said evocatively: "The Demuth color is like light that has glanced through jewels on its way to the paper." On John Marin, McBride wrote: "The opposing currents of modern life beat in upon Marin's spirit relentlessly. He feels each jerky jazzlike force that comes along and, to the death, must translate into rhythms."[39] McBride believed that Nadelman had "a sure enough knowledge of form, but doesn't hesitate to sacrifice a muscle or two for the sake of the greater rhythms."[40]

Although McBride knew formalist aesthetics, his use of analysis was more impulsive and intuitive than systematic. He believed that people should learn about art by looking at it rather than by reading about it, and he was at heart an elitist. In a letter to Gertrude Stein, in which he remarked on a review of Stein's writing, he wrote: "It is fine—but I almost regret she did it, and I hated to see her help the mob so much."[41] He also had a low appraisel of American modern art, although he frequently editorialized about his desire to see a strong modern tradition develop in America. Again to Gertrude Stein, he commented: "I dare say that our modernists are all replicas of Paris originals, just as our impressionists were."[42] Thus, McBride's use of formalism was certainly part of a much larger position, based on his real understanding of modern art and modern aesthetics, but disdainful of derivative modernism.

Walter Pach

Walter Pach's criticism was also a peculiar blend of formalism and other theories. Pach was trained as a painter and lived for many years in Paris. Although he was more directly involved with French aesthetic theory than with English formalism, he acknowledged a specific and long term debt to Roger Fry in an article of 1922.[43] As one of the principal informed commentators on the Armory Show of 1913, Pach had written on modern art prominently since that time. In a 1913 magazine article he commented, for example, that Post-Impressionism was "the embodiment of living ideas in forms which respond to the sense of beauty in men...[It is] the conveying of the particular emotion which has seemed important to the producer.... [It is] an aesthetic equivalent of thought."[44] While Pach gave the "particular emotion" a more intellectual quality than did Fry or Bell, he shared with them a concern for separating responses to art from other types of experiences.

Pach was usually vague when he wrote about an artist's work, preferring to use sweeping generalities that implied an on-going development or evolution, rather than examining a piece in detail. For example, he identified Picasso's "investigation of pictorial structures."[45] When he looked at a painting by Matisse he interpreted it as an intellectual act: "[The] purity of design, the calm beauty of color...are guarantees that the image has passed through the alembic of his mind."[46] His wedding of an intellectual version of formalism with evolutionary determinism is clear in his comment on Diego Rivera: "The lines and colors of his frescoes are brought to a unity even severer, more organic than that which he could attain in the previous stage of his evolution."[47]

By the mid 1920s Pach's combination of formalism and evolutionary determinism was considered obsolete as a method of analysis of modern art by the more up-to-date commentators. The clearest statement on Pach's critical position as a promulgator of formal aesthetics was made by his colleague, Guy Eglington, in a review by Pach's 1924 book *The Masters of Modern Art*. He writes:

> [One] is grateful to Pach for reminding us that there are still a few people in the world capable of thinking clearly on art and presenting their conclusions logically and with concision.... [This book] gives such a definite expression to accepted modern esthetic theory, that one is tempted to wonder whether that theory has not seen its best days....
>
> It has long been growing evident that the greatness of these men is dependent on other things besides their mastery over light.... Likewise...the concept of *form* [emphasis Eglington] too is a useful illusion that has had its day.... Pach's book carries the theory almost to a point where further development is almost impossible.[48]

Guy Eglington

Guy Eglington, author of the review, was one of the most outspoken critics of the period. He is unknown today because his career was cut

short by accidental drowning at the age of thirty-two in June 1928.[49] An Englishman who had studied in Germany, Eglington came to the United States as editor of *The International Studio,* a post he held from November 1920 to March 1922. He later became co-editor of *The Art News.* While his signed articles in the latter publication are few, he probably played a significant part in the excellent reviews that *The Art News* carried during the middle years of the 1920s. Eglington's relationship to formalism is sophisticated. He used it as a means to analyze art, but never let it become a limitation in his interpretation of the object.

Eglington's real contribution to the art criticism of the 1920s was in his skeptical attitude to the overuse of the language of criticism: he is the author of the "Complete Dictionary of Modern Art Terms" already quoted above. Utilizing specific analysis of a painting was an unusual approach for him. In 1925 he writes in an article on Seurat's *Baignade*:

> [The *Baignade*] is the outcome of two preoccupations which he was later to subordinate, the preooccupation with light,...which grew out of his crayon drawings, and a preoccupation with mass, which he had been developing simultaneously in the drawings and in his early essays in paint. If he relies here as later on the horizontal, it is by instinct and not in response to any compositional theory, and the too logical corollary of the horizontal, the perpendicular, is conspicuously missing...he is not concerned with subtle distortions in the direction of compositional angles, but is content to let figures and trees keep their own shapes, only simplifying, rounding, rendering more and more palpable, dissolving in one breath in the brilliance of his *eclairage,* in the next throwing into relief by the sharpness of his contrasts.[50]

Eglington's analysis is underlaid by a subtle determinist or evolutionary strain that he shared with Walter Pach; he looked at an early work in relationship to what he knew would come next.[51] On the other hand, the freshness and accuracy of the analysis puts him in a separate class from the other critics concerned here. Unfortunately, he chose to use his sensitivity to mock the use of art critical terms rather than fully develop his own approach to art criticism.

Thomas Craven

The heavy debt that Thomas Craven owed to Roger Fry has been established earlier in this article by analysis of his reviews of Fry's *Vision and Design.* Craven taught English to support himself as a poet in the teens. He became affiliated with *The Dial* in 1920. Since McBride was the art critic for that publication, his writings for it were mainly book reviews. Occasionally he wrote longer articles, e.g., his "Progress of Painting," a rudimentary history of art.[52]

Craven's coverage of specific artists appeared in *Shadowland,* a theatre and movie publication. In a series of essays written between 1921 and 1923, Craven looked at the art of Thomas Hart Benton, John

Marin, Edwin Dickinson, Charles Demuth, Joseph Stella and Charles Sheeler. His articles usually opened with a theoretical discussion. In the Benton piece, for example, he treated the connection between modern and classic art in their dependence on the principles of form. Craven, like Pach and Watson, rarely treated specific works, but generalized about compositions and colors. For Craven, Benton's compositions were "still an exceedingly conscious process with him and his struggles to make a form obey a certain curve or fill a given amount of space are evinced in the finished work."[53] In an article on Marin, he primarily commented on Marin's own art theories, but finally commented about the recent painting that "his design is larger, more direct and strengthened in general effect by heavier masses and sharper, more assured drawing."[54]

Craven reveals his formalist approach most clearly in his analysis of Charles Sheeler's painting and photography:

> Compare his oil study of skyscrapers with his camera study of the same. In the painting I find a certain definite quality, a linear precision and a remarkable tonal range which suggest the photograph, but the beauty of the painting lies in its design, in the imaginative reconstruction of the basic planes to produce a new form stronger than the literal object of the negative.[55]

In the late twenties Craven took up the cause of Thomas Hart Benton, abandoning intellectual subtlety for a celebration of American subject matter and a denigration of modern theory. Craven abandons the carefully argued subtleties of his reviews of Fry's *Vision and Design* over the relationship of art and life, and adopts instead a harsh rhetoric in support of American art. Yet, even at the height of his success as celebrator of Regionalism, Craven maintained a clear respect for Bell and Fry. In a bibliographic note for his survey of art called *Men of Art,* published in 1931, he concludes:
Eglington's analysis is underlaid by a subtle determinist or evolutionary strain that he shared with Walter Pach; he looked at an early work in relationship to what he knew would come next.[51] On the other hand, the freshness and accuracy of the analysis puts him in a separate class from the other critics concerned here. Unfortunately, he chose to use his sensitivity to mock the use of art critical terms rather than fully develop his own approach to art criticism.

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> Fry *Vision and Design, Transformations.* Miscellaneous essays by one of the best living critics. Fry is an ardent champion of modernist art which he defends with the highest intelligence. Bell *Art, Since Cézanne,* art for art's sake applied to the Modernists.[56]

John Dewey

Perhaps the most surprizing analysis from the waning days of the first wave of formalism came from John Dewey, the inspiration of critics like Forbes Watson and Thomas Craven, who sought an alternative to the formal approach to art. In a 1931 lecture Dewey acknowledged the importance of Fry with lengthy quotations from the English critic about aesthetic vision. Dewey comments that Fry gives

> an excellent account of the sort of thing that takes place in artistic perception and construction. It makes clear two things: Represen-

> tation is not, if the vision has been artistic...of 'objects as such'.... It is *not* the *kind* of representation that a camera would report....[57]

However, in a crucial passage Dewey goes on to say that "one thing may be added.... The painter did not approach the scene with an empty mind, but with a background of experiences."[58] Thus, Dewey's philosophy of the importance of experience in art is basically an elaboration and response to Fry's formalist esthetics. Such a closely reasoned study of Fry by the man who most effectively offered an alternative to formalism suggests the profound importance of that aesthetic theory in yet another context.

Conclusion

The formalist criticism of the 1920s is, then, a crucial chapter in the history of American art criticism. While individual contributions are not heroic, the collective writings of American art critics of the 1920s form an important episode, particularly with respect to the assimilation of the theory of formalism articulated by Clive Bell and Roger Fry. That theory constituted a well-defined focal point for the understanding of modern art. British formalist theory was a rallying point that led American critics to assess their ideas and to formulate their positions. The American awareness of formalism can be documented so thoroughly that, even with the controversies that followed it and the alterations that were made to it, the debt that the American critics owed to their English colleagues cannot be obscured.

Even the episode of Regionalism in the 1930s, that style and criticism that celebrated subject matter in contradiction to formalism, can be seen as much as a reaction against formalist methods as a celebration of American scenes. Thomas Craven's writings are but one clear example of a critic who began with a belief in formalism, but subsequently embraced Regionalism. Other critics like Forbes Watson went through a similar philosophical shift that was reflected in their art criticism.

In the mid to late 1920s, while the critics treated in this article were still discussing the validity of the ideas of Clive Bell and Roger Fry, the next generation of critics, such as Clement Greenberg, Harold Rosenberg and Alfred Barr, already had their first contacts with the art community.[59] Their earliest exposure to contemporary art criticism would probably have included reading magazines such as *The Arts, The Dial* and *Vanity Fair,*[60] where articles on and by Clive Bell and Roger Fry were often prominently featured. Certainly, these later American writers were also subject to other influences. Yet, writings such as Barr's catalogs for the Museum of Modern Art in the 1930s[61] and the art criticism of Greenberg and Rosenberg of the 1940s and 1950s[62] can be regarded as a sophisticated development that builds on the complex, sometimes awkwardly self-conscious, occasionally incredibly informed British and American formalist art criticism of the 1920s.

Footnotes

[1]Roger Fry, "The Last Phase of Impressionism," *The Burlington Magazine*, March 1908, p. 375.

[2]Clive Bell, *Art* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1958), p. 54. All further references to *Art* are to this edition.

[3]Bell, *Art*, p. 36.

[4]Bell, *Art*, p. 27.

[5]Bell, *Art*, p. 27.

[6]Bell, *Art*, pp. 17-18.

[7]Bell, *Art*, p. 46.

[8]Bell, *Art*, p. 63.

[9]Bell, *Art*, p. 139.

[10]Clive Bell, "The Rise and Decline of Cubism," *Vanity Fair*, February 1923, p. 53; Clive Bell, "Modern Art and How To Look At It," *Vanity Fair*, April 1924, pp. 56, 58.

[11]Elizabeth Luther Cary *The New York Times*, January 26, 1913, sec. 7, p. 10.

[12]Madge Jenison, *Sunwise Turn, A Human Comedy of Book Selling* (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1923), pp. 2-3.

[13]Sheldon Cheney, *A Primer of Modern Art* (New York: Boni and Liveright, 1924), pp. 39-40.

[14]Guy Eglington, "Art and Other Things," *International Studio*, August 1925, p. 377; other installments of the "Dictionary" appeared in Eglington's column in *International Studio* throughout 1925.

[15]"We nominate for the Hall of Fame," *Vanity Fair*, September 1922.

[16]Laurence Buermeyer, "Pattern and Plastic Form," *The Journal of the Barnes Foundation*, January 1926, reprinted in John Dewey, *et. al., Art and Education* (Merion: Barnes Foundation Press, 1929), pp. 99-102.

[17]Henry Ladd, "Art: Since Clive Bell," *The Nation*, January 4, 1928, p. 28.

[18]Leo Gershoy, Review of *Civilization, An Essay, The Arts*, November 1928, p. 296.

[19]Frances Spalding, *Roger Fry, Art and Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980), p. 164.

[20]Roger Fry, *Vision and Design* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1925), p. 49. All further references are to this edition, unless otherwise indicated.

[21]Fry, *Vision and Design*, p. 175.

[22]Arthur Dow, "Modernism in Art," *American Magazine of Art*, January 1917, p. 116.

[23]Willard Huntington Wright, *Modern Painting Its Tendency and Meaning*, (New York: John Lane, 1915), p. 341.

[24]Willard Huntington Wright, "The Aesthetic Struggle in America," *The Forum*, February 1916, p. 208.

[25]Alan Burroughs, Review of *Vision and Design, The Arts*, May 1921, pp. 57-58.

[26]Hamilton Easter Field, Review of *Vision and Design, The Arts*, May 1921, pp. 57-58.

[27]Thomas Craven, "Mr. Roger Fry and The Artistic Vision," *The Dial*, July 1921, pp. 101-106.

[28]Thomas Craven, "The Progress of Painting," *The Dial,* April 1923, pp. 357-367 and June 1923, pp. 581-593.

[29]Laurence Buermeyer, "Some Popular Fallacies in Aesthetics," *The Dial,* February 1924, p. 116.

[30]Thomas Craven, "Psychology and Common Sense," *The Dial,* March 1924, p. 240.

[31]Virgil Barker, "Aesthetics and Scholarship," *The Arts,* January 1928, p. 64.

[32]Thomas Hart Benton," The Mechanics of Form Organization in Painting," *The Arts,* November 1926, pp. 285-289; December 1926, pp. 340-342; March 1927, pp. 145-148. For another discussion of Benton's aesthetics see my masters thesis "Thomas Hart Benton as Aesthetic Theoretician" (Brown University, 1972).

[33]Forbes Watson, clipping from *The World,* February 1, 1925, n.p. on microfilm D49, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.

[34]Forbes Watson, "Charles Sheeler," *The Arts,* May 1923, pp. 341, 344.

[35]Forbes Watson, "Pablo Picasso Knocks Loudly at the Doors," *The World,* November 25, 1923.

[36]Henry McBride Papers, microfilms NMcB 7, frames 350-648 (miscellaneous letters and journals).

[37]Henry McBride, *Matisse* (New York: Knopf, 1930), pp. 14-15.

[38]Henry McBride, "Walkowitz and the Parks," *International Studio,* November 1924, p. 156.

[39]Henry McBride, "Modern Art," *The Dial,* June 1926, p. 527.

[40]Henry McBride, "Modern Art," *The Dial,* April 1927, p. 353.

[41]Henry McBride, letter to Gertrude Stein, December 12, 1913. McBride Papers, Yale University, New Haven.

[42]Henry McBride, letter to Gertrude Stein, January 5, 1920, McBride Papers, Yale University, New Haven.

[43]Walter Pach, "An Artist's Criticism," *The Freeman,* October 25, 1922, p. 165.

[44]Walter Pach, "The Point of View of the Moderns," *International Studio,* April 1914, pp. 861-863.

[45]Walter Pach, *The Masters of Modern Art* (New York: B.W. Huebsch 1924), p. 94.

[46]Pach, *Masters,* p. 98.

[47]Pach, *Masters,* p. 99.

[48]Guy Eglington, "Art and Other Things," *International Studio,* January 1925, p. 341. Another review that criticized Pach was by Robert Allerton Parker in *The Arts,* January 1925, pp. 51-52.

[49]"Eglington Drowned," *The Art Digest,* July 1928, p. 4. The article mentions that Eglington had been in a German detention camp during World War I where "he had nothing to do but read and think, and ponder upon the meaning of things."

[50]Guy Eglington, "The Theory of Seurat," *International Studio,* July 1925, p. 290.

[51]The clearest statement of Eglington's interest in evolution as a method of criticism is in his "The American Painter," *The American Mercury,* February 1924, pp. 218-220.

[52]Craven, "Progress," see footnote 28.

[53]Thomas Craven, "Thomas Hart Benton," *Shadowland,* September 1921, p. 66.

[54]Thomas Craven, "John Marin," *Shadowland,* October 1921, p. 77.

[55]Thomas Craven, "Charles Sheeler," *Shadowland,* March 1923, p. 71.

[56]Thomas Craven, *Men of Art* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1940), p. 516.

[57]John Dewey, *Art as Experience* (New York: G.P. Putnum's, 1958), p. 87.

[58]Dewey, *Art as Experience,* p. 87.

[59]Clement Greenberg attended the Art Student's League in the mid 1920s. Harold Rosenberg published poetry in the "little" magazines toward the end of the decade.

[60]Alfred Barr has written "I read such American magazines as *The Arts.*" William S. Lieberman (ed.), "Introduction," *Art of the Twenties* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1980), p. 7.

[61]Alfred Barr's catalogs for the Museum of Modern Art in the 1930s reflect a sophisticated evolution within his critical awareness that is beyond the scope of this paper. Yet, such a seminal work as *Cubism and Abstract Art* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1936) reflect a complete understanding of the idea of formal anlaysis.

[62]The best known work by Clement Greenberg is *Art and Culture* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1961). Harold Rosenberg has written numerous books of art criticism including *The Anxious Object* (New York: Collier, 1966).

The Narcissistic Justification of Art Criticism

DONALD B. KUSPIT

What is called an art object is an object in the world. This statement is simplistic and truistic, but it makes clear that the way we relate to art objects is not any different in kind from the way we relate to objects in general. We invest a good deal of interest in them—in the last analysis, perhaps an even profounder interest than in ordinary objects, for socially we are led to have great unconscious expectations from art objects, which is one of the ways we privilege them. When we do engage them, it is with the same seriousness with which we relate to the significant others in our lives. We relate to art objects perhaps even more seriously, for the instinct we invest in them seems peculiarly concentrated—purified beyond contingency, as though the art objects we commit ourselves to were destined for us. We are drawn to them in a fatal attraction, relate to them in an elective affinity beyond all anxiety. If this is true, as I think it is, then the psychoanalytic understanding of object relations seems useful in understanding the critical character of our relationship to them. Art

critical discourse, at its best, is the disclosure of the depth of our relationship to art objects—the reasons for the intensity of our relationship.

The discourse of art criticism privileges the art object with a systematic kind of attention to it, which unfolds an intimate relationship with it. This critical discourse can seem so inseparable from the art object, that the discourse can come not only to represent it, but to function as its surrogate. When this happens, as it invariably does with the best art criticism, art criticism can be regarded as a kind of conceptual art. (The best art criticism is the narrative of a complex, intense conscious and unconscious involvement with the art object. It is a criticism whose concepts are transmuted passions, or stations on the way to the cross of an alchemical involvement with the art object.) The more public or assimilated the art object becomes—the more it seems like an irreplacable, readily comprehensible part of the social landscape—the more art critical discourse about it seems inseparable from it.

Art critical discourse comes to be not simply an avenue of approach to it, but the very place in which it is established, the public square in which it is the central monument. We may be unconscious of the critical space we are standing in when we consciously view the monument, but without that space there is in a sense no monument to see. That "conceptual" space concentrates in itself all our consciousness of the art monument. The conceptual space is the necessary condition which permits it to take a "stand"—permits it to make even the most elementary physical stand. Without that space the art monument has only the most minimum existence; it crawls on the ground like an infant rather than stands upright in the world like an adult. As much as a public monument is established by the mental as well as physical space it inhabits—it cannot really be said to establish itself—so the art object is established by (and in) the psychodynamic as well as historical/esthetic space created for it by art critical discourse about it. If there was no plaza of art critical consciousness marked out within the larger public realm or city of consciousness, the art object could not even be thought of as a "monument." It could not be known as either central or peripheral. It would simply be an art object barely differentiated from other art objects, and worse yet, from ordinary objects. That is, consciousness of and relationship with it would be "ordinary."

According to Baudelaire in the section on "What is the Good of Criticism?" in "The Salon of 1846," there are two modes of art criticism: the temperamental and the "mathematical." I regard this distinction—which I will explore later—as crucial and far from simple, if superficially obvious. It is a distinction between two basic modes of relating to the art object. Baudelaire regarded them as antithetical, and praised the former as much as he deplored the latter, indicating that he regarded them as discontinuous. I will argue, with the help of psychoanalytic object relations theory, that

the relationship between them is more complicated. They are distinct, but not unrelated stages—the mathematical in a sense grows out of and socializes the temperamental, with all the pruning and control that implies—in the development of a serious, intimate relationship with the art object. This development, just when it seems most mathematically complete—when it arrives at what seems like a full, "formal" clarification and exposition of the art object—unexpectedly points to a further, truly final stage of relationship to it. It is as though the temperamental relationship to it liberated it from enslavement in the Egypt of the everyday world, while the mathematical relationship to it was a kind of forty years of intellectual wandering in the desert with it—forty years of keeping it alive in the desert of its own esthetic purity and hypothetical self-sufficiency. It is only after this ascetic period of mathematical understanding of the art object that one realizes there is the promised land of another kind of relationship with it, another way of inhabiting it. The mathematical understanding at best permits one a glimpse of this promised land, but does not guarantee entry into it. The two modes Baudelaire describes are unwittingly propaedeutic to the final stage of revelatory relationship to the art object. They are experientially a leap of faith in a relationship to it that is difficult to realize, even unpredictable. They are a secondary discourse within this original relationship. Authentic art criticism involves a persistent drive, alternately impatient—temperamental—as well as patient—mathematical—to disclose this original relationship to the art object. The disclosure is itself the step in the development catalyzing the original relationship—seemingly bringing it into being. Yet the epiphanic, climatic disclosure of the originality of the relationship could not take place without the entire development of the relationship.

For Baudelaire, then, there is "cold, mathematical criticism which, on the pretext of explaining everything, has neither love nor hate, and voluntarily strips itself of every shred of temperament." And then there is the "amusing and poetic" art criticism Baudelaire prefers, the temperamental art criticism which, in the famous sentence, "should be partial, passionate and political, that is to say, written from an exclusive point of view, but a point of view that opens up the widest horizons."[1] The cold, mathematical relationship to the art object is essentially objective. It exists in terms of the ideal impersonality inseparable from austerely formal, rigorously rational analysis. The warm, temperamental relationship to the art object is essentially subjective. It is "precise" only in the sense that it offers one very particular existential perspective on the art object. It denies the possibility of explaining everything about the art object. Neither the personal nor the world-historical meanings of the art object can be exhaustively analyzed. Temperamental criticism thus implies the incompleteness—and ongoingness—of one's relationship to the art object, even its own incompleteness and lack of "integrity." It is just this strange "selflessness" which makes it temperamentally inter-

esting. That is, to relate to an art object temperamentally is to recognize its "need" to be invested with one's own sense of selfhood, as well as the inadequacy of conscious, mathematical understanding of it. Its existence as an open horizon makes it available as a talisman of one's "self"-development.

A useful way of understanding the temperamental and mathematical modes of relating to the art object is in terms of the psychoanalyst Harry Stack Sullivan's distinction between the *parataxic* and *syntactic* modes of experience. Temperamental criticism is parataxic, while mathematical criticism is syntactic. The former is essentially imagistic criticism, the latter is interpretative criticism. But the understanding of criticism does not stop with the distinction between these two modes of critical relationship to the art object. Neither of them truly arrives at the goal of art criticism: *prototaxic* experience of the art object, to use a Sullivanian term again. This involves an epiphany of it as "momentary" or immediate—a rare disclosure of it as unequivocally and integrally present—as eternally pure presence. The development of art critical discourse from the parataxic to the syntactic modes positions consciousness for a transient prototaxic prehension of the art object. It is extremely difficult to articulate, even acknowledge, the prototaxic prehension, in part because it reveals the original "reason" one related of the art object, found it critically significant—invested one's feelings (temperament) and ideas ("mathematical" understanding) in it. Moreover, this climactic stage of critical relationship to and of the revelation of the art object is paradoxical, not only because it discloses the art object to be in complete dialectical, narcissistic reciprocity with oneself—giving one a momentary sense of completely being oneself, of wanting for nothing but the art object to be oneself, which correlates with experience of it as adequate and complete in itself (proudly "immediate")—but, more crucially, because the prototaxic experience of the art object is possible only after an intense mathematical/syntactic relationship to it.

That is, prototaxic experience of the special presentness of the art object becomes possible not, as one might expect, as a consequence of a temperamental/parataxic grasp of it, but by exhausting the possibilities of mathematical/syntactic interpretation of it. The systematic/scientific character of the mathematical/syntactic transcends the unsystematic/poetic character of the temperamental/parataxic. Prototaxic experience of epiphanic immediacy transcends—if in a less stable and predictable way than the mathematical transcends the temperamental—the mediational character of both. In each case, the transcendence is dialectical, forfeiting none of the "concepts" of the previous stage while reordering and resocializing them. But prototaxic experience unifies in a kind of transcendental intuition the irrationality of the art object that parataxic experience discloses and the rationality of the art object that syntactic experience discloses. The key point is that the parataxic and syntactic modes of relating to

the art object regard it as never more than indirectly manifest—as necessarily mediated subjectively (temperamentally) or objectively (mathematically)—while the prototaxic mode assumes that it can be made immediately manifest, or directly experiencable.

Because prototaxic experience of the art object offers it with such absolute immediacy, prototaxic experience appears to be post-linguistic—from another point of view regressively pre-linguistic or essentially somatic. This, together with the fact that it is beyond both the temperamental and mathematical grasp of the art object, makes the prototaxic experience of its immediate givenness seem mythical or fictional, however undeniable. The art object seems to exist in a paradoxical state of doubt-free givenness, a state which, apart from what it offers, comes to be doubted as truly the case. Prototaxic experience comes to be regarded as a wonderful illusion—divinely spurious. The aura of unreality that surrounds prototaxic experience signals its reality as a way of revealing the art object itself as a primordial fantasy of primitive givenness. In any case, it is perverse to have to experience the art object prototaxically only by way of as complete a syntactic articulation of it as possible. One can finally accept the fact that the terms of cold, mathematical, syntactic criticism are rooted, as it were, in warm, temperamental, parataxic criticism, but it is harder to accept the fact that prototaxic experience of the art object is possible only by exhausting all the syntactic means of articulating it. For this means going from the most sophisticated to the most primitive modes of articulation—from logical rigor to the seeming slackness of the inarticulate. As Sullivan writes, "the prototaxic or primitive mode" of experience is "ordinarily incapable of any formulation."[2] The unformulatable is experienced only after overformulation, as it were. Moreover, one can only formulate what cannot be formulated as the annihilation of expected formulations, not as something in itself. This also seems to be the only way it can be experienced—as the negation of every other experience. Beyond discourse, it seems beyond experience. The nihilism of prototaxic experience of immediate presence seems clear—as clear as the experience seems an illusion. And yet the critical process aims at prototaxic experience of the art object. If it did not, it would not be "critical."

It is as though, in developing brilliant syntactic interpretations of the art object, one had created a magnificent critical divining rod—also adorned with beautiful temperamental images of the art object—to search for a treasure that did not necessarily exist, and was not necessarily a treasure. Criticism with such an ambition seems stupidly risky and absurd, yet if it did not have as its ambition an impossibly primitive, "fantastic" experience of the art object it would sell both itself and the art object short. It would neither realize its own temperamental and mathematical potential, nor disclose the vitality of the art object. Moreover, the possibility of prototaxic experience of the art object in a sense does no more than

acknowledge the failure of all systems of thinking about art. For to achieve their consensual accuracy they depend upon excluding the peculiar quality of the sheer givenness of the art object in contrast to other objects.

The prototaxic mode of experience is infantile. It is paradoxical that to establish an infantile mode of experience of the art object—immediate experience of it—requires such a heroic effort. But this is because only an infantile experience of the art object can disclose its extra-ordinary significance for us. Only the experience of it as "mothering" us with its "sensational" immediate givenness discloses the infantile character of our attachment to it. In a sense, the entire critical experience—all of critical discourse—exists to disclose the particular mothering experience that drew one into relationship with the art object—an experience of unconscious merger or profound intimacy with it that seemed to deny one's autonomy, yet was its root. The irony of art critical discourse is that all its analyses, whether poetic or mathematical, exist to discover the extra-analytic reason for the absurd intensity of one's relationship with and response to the art object.

Let us distinguish Sullivan's three modes of exprience more precisely. The prototaxic mode is the primary, most infantile one. It involves the experience of "momentary states" with no "before and after," that is, with no awareness of "serial connection between them." In the prototaxic mode, the infant has "no awareness of himself as an entity separate from the rest of the world...his felt experience is all of a piece, undifferentiated, without definite limits ...'cosmic.'" With maturation, "the original undifferentiated wholeness of experience"—the difficult aim of critical experience of the art object—"is broken. However, the 'parts,' the diverse aspects...are not related or connected in a logical fashion. They 'just happen' together, or they do not, depending on circumstances. They...are felt as concomitant, not recognized as connected in an orderly way." That is, they exist in "poetic correspondence." This is the parataxic or temperamental mode of art criticism; it takes the form of poetic discourse declaring the correspondence between different subjective partial apprehensions of the art object. Indeed, speaking from the temperamental point of view, Baudelaire remarks, in the same section of "The Salon of 1846" that I have already quoted from, that "a sonnet or an elegy" may indeed be the best critical account of an art object. Finally, the syntactic mode of experience is established. It involves the "'consensually validated' meaning of language—in the widest sense of language. These meanings have been acquired from group activities, interpersonal activities, social experience. Consensually validated symbol activity involves an appeal to principles which are accepted as true by the hearer."[3]

In a sense, parataxic, temperamental, poetic criticism is critic's criticism, in that it is a kind of shorthand "account" of critical experience of the art object. It is written critical poet/person to critical

poet/person. It is a subjective appeal from one heart to another, an affair between lovers of art. It is an appeal to unknown others to love art as one would love oneself—even more than oneself, for in so doing one becomes more than one's ordinary, everyday self. But the poet-critic does not really care if he has company in his love for art; he is happy to be alone with it, to have the beloved for his own embrace alone. Indeed, the poet-critic is infatuated with the art object, and wants to possess it in an exclusive relationship. In contrast, for the mathematical critic, the other is an indispensable presence, the legitimator of his experience—the legitimator of a relationship to the art object that is beyond the poetry of love or hate for it. This cool mathematical critic practices a public, prosaic criticism, a criticism which performs a public service—which integrates the art object into civil society by civilizing it. However, civilized, analytic interest in the art object is rarely durable, except—paradoxically—among a few temperamental aficionadoes. Few art objects enter the so-called "canon," in comparison to the many produced. The syntactic understanding of art is always slipping—regressing to the poetic level which sustains it, and which it organizes. Or else, as we have noted, the syntactic understanding of art is transcended for a different kind of "subjective" reason: it seems to mirror the self of the mathematical critic of art, who thought he left love of it behind for a cold understanding. How unexpected for him to see himself in the art object when he thought he was looking at it scientifically! And how difficult it is to accept the fact that the poet-critic is never in a position to have the same narcissistic experience of the art object, for he loved the art object for itself—not, however unexpectedly, because it reflected himself. In a sense, the mathematical critic intellectually polishes the dark mirror of the art object to a shine. No longer dark, it speaks to him of his fundamental self. The poet-critic accepted that darkness as the art object's gift to his own dark—irrational—soul. He had no comprehension that his, and its, irrationality, were not fundamental. The mathematical critic alone is in a position to experience—through the unexpectedly completely present art object—what Heinz Kohut calls archaic narcissistic grandeur. The irreducible presence of the art object confirms the irreducible presence of the self.

Art critical discourse has an ultimately narcissistic purpose, in the deepest sense. In object relational terms, art is the new mother who gives one the feeling of omnipotence and integration the old one never really gave one. It is only after it is known as a set of obsolete rules that it can be experienced "cosmically' as an undifferentiated whole with which one can merge. Prototaxic experience reveals what is most unpresentable or sublime about the art object: its capacity to love one for oneself. This is reversed, translated as lovableness of the art object in itself. But there is nothing lovable about the art object as such. It is lovable only because its immediacy, experienced with great difficulty, seems the mother of our own imme-

diacy. It is in prototaxic experience of the art object that one has a truly "creative" relationship with it—experiences it esemplastically, to use Coleridge's term. That is, one creates the illusion of its immediacy to create the illusion that one was created for one's own sweet self. One experiences it as though it was created especially for oneself, as though its creativity is one's own self-creation. More pointedly, the entire aim of art critical discourse is narcissistic justification of the art object.

Footnotes

[1]Charles Baudelaire, "The Salone of 1846," *The Mirror of Art*, Jonathan Mayne (ed.) (Garden City, NY, Doubleday & Co., 1956; Doubleday Anchor Books), p. 41.

[2]Harry Stack Sullivan, *The Interpersonal Theory of Psychiatry* (New York, W.W. Norton & Co., 1953), p. 29.

[3]Sullivan, pp. 28-29.

Rosalind E. Krauss, *The Originality of the Avant Garde and Other Modernist Myths*. Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 1984.

MICHAEL PEGLAU

The Originality of the Avant Garde and Other Modernist Myths, a selection of writings by Rosalind Krauss from the past eight years, contains several challenging essays, though none of these carries quite the intellectual excitement or sense of risk that one might hope for in a book which grafts a methodology developed in areas of study quite foreign to painting or sculpture onto their study. Photography may be another matter, but as I am not broadly familiar with the writing which surrounds it, I will write about Krauss's thinking on photography only in connection to works of painting and sculpture discussed in her "Note on the Index: Part 2."

The best essays in this book—I mention especially "In the Name of Picasso," "No More Play," and "Reading Jackson Pollock, Abstractly"—are well-constructed and fine models of historically based criticism. In these pieces, Krauss corrects what I agree are serious misrepresentations of certain works of Picasso, Giacometti,

and Pollock, by what in some instances is a 'school' of art historians. Remembering other and more substantial analyses in her *Passages in Modern Sculpture,* one might regret that here Krauss's emphasis is not on the relevant art works themselves, but rather on texts pertaining to the work—or on the work insofar as she subjects it to textual methods.

In some of the essays, for example, "Notes on the Index: Part 1" and "In the Name of Picasso," these textual methods provide significant insights. Duchamp's work certainly provides fertile ground for a semiological investigation and while "Notes on the Index: Part 1" possibly over-emphasizes the role of photography in Duchamp's work, its analysis of parallels between Roman Jacobsen's linguistic category of the shifter, Duchamp's work, and photographs is penetrating. "In the Name of Picasso" opens with a terse and finely turned critique of art history construed as biography, a critique which focuses on the related problems of the nature of reference in a proper name and the simple mimetic idea that an image of something refers solely to that thing. Krauss then undertakes an analysis of Picasso's cubist collages on a model adopted fom Saussure's structural linguistics. This analysis is at once extraordinarily interesting and skewed by its model in a way which effaces a basic region of meaning within the works. One example will have to suffice for a problem which needs a much fuller discussion. Krauss writes:

> This structural condition of absence is essential to the operation of the sign within Picasso's collage. As just one from among the myriad possible examples, we can think of the appearance of the two *f*-shaped violin soundholes that are inscribed on the surface of work after work from 1912-1914. The semantic interpretation of these *f*s is that they simply signify the presence of the musical instrument; that is, they label a given plane of the collage assembly with the term "violin." But there is almost no case from among these collages in which the two *f*s mirror each other across the plane surface. Time and again their inscription involves a vast disparity between the two letters, one being bigger and often thicker than the other. With this simple, but very emphatic, size difference, Picasso composes the sign, not of violin, but of foreshortening: of the differential size within a single surface due to its rotation into depth. And because the inscription of the *f*s takes place within the collage assembly and thus on the most rigidly flattened and frontalized of planes, "depth" is thus written on the very place from which it is—within the presence of the collage—most absent. It is *this* experience of inscription that guarantees these forms the status of signs.

By "this structural condition of absence" Krauss, following Saussure, means that a sign as a material and formal notation works by virtue of being an acknowledged proxy for a signified which is not present. The *f*s, however, are not purely signifiers in the sense that the word 'violin' is, or the word 'depth' is. First, it is probably not entirely correct to call these drawn or painted marks *f*s at all; they

can be said to resemble a script *f*, but they are not necessarily intended to stand for an *f*. Indeed, just in their resemblance to one possible script for *f* and in their equally present if not stronger resemblance to the soundholes on a violin, quite a different way of making reference to things than that of words and the symbols which constitute their written form or their phonetic elements is hinted. While it is correct to say that the images of the soundholes indicate depth—and one could say that they signal it—they do not do so by writing or speaking about depth. There is a fundamental error in the choice of these as metaphors. The soundholes in the violins of Picasso's cubist collages are drawn or painted, and typically they are much closer in that drawing or painting to the way the tuning pegs of the violin are drawn or painted than they are to an *f*—even allowing for the rigorous spareness of cubist drawing, a spareness which brings it to resemble the lean, individual graphic elements of certain forms of script, or better, of a dismembered script. Yet even considered as scripted *f*s, the soundholes are more than pictographs for they also participate in the deeper rhythmic and allusive structure of drawing within a work. For example, they often echo the fullness of some of the constituting forms of the violin's body; that is, they also incarnate something of the violin and its tiers of reference and allusion beyond the glyph they form for it. Similarly, they both signal space and depict its flux and ambiguity. For if their disparate sizes signal spatial depth, the pull and echo between their individual forms brings to the eye the sudden elasticities in space and in looking. Neither the cubist violin nor the collage which helps image it is truly fixed in virtual space; rather, both stand in a constantly shifting play formed of themselves and the cubist drawing. Cubism no less than any other way of painting is virtual, for all space in painting is virtual. So, like any piece of cubist drawing, the soundholes of the cubist violin divide spaces and yet conjoin them, and they enclose a figure and yet also open it. Even the larger lettering in a cubist work can be thought to imitate cubist drawing. The *J* of *JOURN* like the other letters is actually built of fragments, and when it is glued it is "touched" into the virtual space of the work. This is to say that the written symbols are subsumed into the graphic logic and rhythm of the cubist drawing, and because of this they are no longer signs in a purely linguistic sense. Like the *f*s which are soundholes, they are no longer arbitrary symbols, but are fraught with implied resemblances.

If this discussion has seemed a bit too long for a single issue within a book review, its length is a function of a fundamental problem, and a problem on which this book hinges. Baldly stated, what kind of fit is there between works of painting and sculpture and art critical methods derived from semiology or post-structuralist models deeply influenced by semiotics? Certainly structuralist and semiological methods at best carry a burden of procedure when they address even those works which attempt to incorporate concepts basic to

these methods. No less than other, less manifestly systematic and hyper-critical models, these methods shape, albeit more intentionally, the questions, the lines of approach and the language of any investigation they support. As yet no one has put forward an adequate theory of pictorial or sculptural images and their ordering of meanings, and as my discussion of an aspect of Picasso's collage indicates, I doubt that a theory based on a linguistic model would ever be equal to the complexities of the task. Krauss, of course, thinks otherwise. Her confidence in her method is nowhere more markedly on display than in her introduction, where she sets out a fundamental model of the art work as a structure accessible to semiological methods.

The book begins with a double-edged question which frames the introduction and stands for the combative attitude of several of the essays:

> Can it be argued that the interest of critical writing lies almost entirely in its method? Can it be held that the content of any given evaluative statement—"this is good, important," "this is bad, trivial"—is not what serious criticism is, seriously, read for? But rather, that such criticism is understood through the forms of its arguments, through the way that its method, in the process of constituting the objects of criticism, exposes to view those choices that precede and predetermine any act of judgment?

Art criticism which turned on no object other than its own method might be engrossing if written with the art of Barthes. Yet even if it were esteemed for its service to method and procedure like some twentieth-century art has been, it would have to confront the matter of seeming second-hand, and to no purpose other than that of devotion to a method. Krauss's double-edged question can be construed as freeing a critic from any close involvement with an art work. Admittedly, this is an extreme position, and one I do not think Krauss takes in these essays. But the questions she poses do invite the work under discussion to serve as an occasion, as an unwitting host whose hall is filled with an unknown, noisy throng and whose body is the banquet. A cannibalism of sorts, then, but the ramifications of the art work as the mere occasion for art criticism go beyond its accessibility as a form of delectation. Rather, they seem to augur a world in which a cannibalism of the symbolic becomes not simply an aspect of the obvious barbarity of the media and those in its train, but also of those "preservers" of culture whose ancillary relationship to works of art (still maintained in the adjectival qualifier "art" in "art criticism") could then be dispensed with.

Krauss is not one of these, but in these questions she seems bent on hastening a horizontal world in which symbolic exchanges will be unimpeded by value-bearing terms such as "good" or "trivial," a world where Sherrie Levine's work would supplant that of Kenny Scharf as the paradigm of camp. Levine's work is germane to these

questions in another way, not only because it fits the surfaces of such a world, but also because it is the very prototype of work that would not trouble such criticism. Krauss makes this evident in a graceful re-telling of a story that Barthes used to like. During its epic voyage, the ship Argo is entirely replaced in all of its fittings, riggings and hull, for it had been ordained by the goddesses and the gods that the Argonauts must complete their voyage in the same ship in which they embarked. As she quotes Barthes:

> It (the ship Argo) affords the allegory of an eminently structural object, created not by genius, inspiration, determination, evolution, but by two modest actions (which cannot be caught up in any mystique of creation): *substitution* (one part replaces another, as in a paradigm) and *nomination* (the name is in no way linked to the stability of the parts): by dint of combinations made within one and the same name, nothing is left of the origin: Argo is an object with no other cause than its name, with no other identity than its form.

Most readers of the tale of Jason, the Argo and the Argonauts might ask if it did not take determination as well as modest actions to keep the ship together, but Krauss's point is that an art work can be thought of as a structure, analogous to the mythic ship, where more or less adroit operations, as though upon a gaming board, configure the work. The flatness, the horizontality of a gaming board, is important to Krauss in another way, for it allows her to propose that the work is really a synchronous assemblage, a deployment of the configured system at a given moment. In a fundamental sense, then, a work is unmotivated, and the corollary of its flatness, of course, is its lack of depth, in any of depth's guises and darkness. So with the art work as a structure, we are presented with a transparent work in a world of operations, of games. To quote Krauss:

> By contrast the structuralist model of substitution and nomination does not call to mind the image of depth—substitution being able, after all, to take place by moving pieces about on a plane surface. Thus if Barthes cherishes the Argo-model, it is for its shallowness.

In none of the succeeding essays does Krauss assume so provocative a stance; likewise, she is unready to accept Aiete's challenge and sow the dragon teeth by working out at least a plausibly reasoned sketch of the art work as a transparent structure in its historical and critical consequences. Rather, even in the face of the critical issues she takes the position of commenting on given events, and while this commentary is informed by a detailed knowledge of structuralism and post-structuralism, in certain essays it is overburdened by this knowledge. For example, in "Notes on the Index: Part 2" she discusses work by four artists, Gordon Matta-Clark, Lucio Pozzi, Michelle Stuart, and Marcia Hafif, exhibited in "Rooms" at P.S. 1, in May, 1976. Krauss argues that their works were analogous to photographs in that they apparently removed themselves from an articu-

lated tradition of meaning in sculpture or painting, and aspired toward the kind of presence a photograph possesses as an indexical sign. (Indexical signs are that genus formed as a result of physical causes, like a foot print, or the broad class of traces so important to the physical sciences; photography is, so to speak, a species). Her intention in reading this small group of works as indexical is, I think, correct. So too is her general allusion to the indexical as a prevalent pattern of art making in the 1960s and 1970s. However, her assertion that photography is the *prima materia* of such work in the 1970s very much stretches the point. With the exception of Matta-Clark, whose work seems to have been, in general, conceived with a photographic image as an integral part of itself, none of the other works as she describes them and presents them through photographs echoes or deeply evokes what would appear to be photography's special indexical qualities. Rather, she seems to have invoked photography to compensate for the imagistic poverty of these works, for in none of them is there that balance of fragilely caged light, bluntly trapped moment, and unwitting bounty of documentary incident which are part of the ground of meaning in almost all photography. Krauss implies that these works make a special claim to photograph's veracity, but this too is overblown:

> This quality of transfer or race gives to photography its documentary status, its undeniable veracity. But at the same time this veracity is beyond the reach of those possible internal adjustments which are the necessary property of language. The connective tissue binding the objects contained by the photographs is that of the world itself, rather than that of a cultural system.

Krauss here violates what is certainly a central dictum of all structuralist thought: there is no "world itself" outside of a cultural sign system, not in photography, not in any record, no matter how presumably unmediated. But the deficiencies of these works are steeper than an infatuation with photography. None of them advances beyond the most casual indexical sign in veracity; they each depend on the indulgence of the onlooker for they utterly lack the photograph's ruthless precision, and especially its metaphors of "illumination." Similarly, the analogy she draws, with a fine paragraph quotation from Barthes, between these works and a photograph's retrospective quality, its paradoxical and delicate imaging of a present which is past, seems scarcely appropriate to these works. They lack sufficient internal incident, they lack photography's protean inclusiveness. Their retrospective quality is much more analogous to that of indexical signs *per se*, such as the footprint in the snow, or to some of the clues so important to archeology, for example. These works in fact barter the indisputability of their indexical givenness for the brevity of being current in 1976. They lack that transparency to terrain, that limpidity to a prior happening, which found an old photograph's fascination; they already depend on an

archaeology.

In other better essays in this book Krauss writes from a more complex position, one where her post-structuralism is steadied by her training as a historian and by the acumen of her eye, when she is willing to venture a visual analysis of a work. In fact, her historical scruples are such (her documentation is precise and in her best pieces the particulars of the work direct some probing interpretation), that in some essays she is forced to contradict the leading idea of this book—that an art work is a structure whose ordering of meaning transparently depends upon a system of conventional symbolic exchanges. Before considering one of these contradictions, I would like to present a longer quotation from her essay "the Originality of the Avant Garde" on the art work as a transparent structure:

> Within the discursive space of modernist art, the putative opacity of the pictorial field must be maintained as a fundamental concept. For it is the bedrock on which a whole structure of related terms can be built. All those terms—singularity, authenticity, uniqueness, originality, original—depend on the originary moment of which this surface is both the empirical and semiological instance. If modernism's domain of pleasure is the space of auto-referentiality, this pleasure dome is erected on the semiological possibility of the pictorial sign as nonrepresentational and nontransparent, so that the signified becomes the redundant condition of a reified signifier. But from our perspective, the one from which we see that the signifier cannot be reified; that its objecthood, its quiddity, is only a fiction; that every signifier is itself the transparent signified of an already-given decision to carve it out as the vehicle of a sign—from *this* perspective there is no opacity, but only a transparency that opens onto a dizzying fall into a bottomless system of reduplication.

Certainly, the concept of the opacity of the picture surface as both an end and as a sacrosanct condition is an enfeebled fiction, and a critique which exposes "originality's" dependence on the manipulation of a set of already given and familiar terms has been long overdue in art criticism. As Krauss recognizes, this critique also engages another myth, that of the invention of "new" experience for the work's public, and one hopes that she may write a thorough and extended piece on this shibboleth. What I question is the coupling of terms like "pictorial" with "sign," the notion that a work of painting or sculpture is discretely a signifier, that even within the solipsistic confines of some kinds of abstraction the work can be adequately discussed under the constraint of a terminology and of ideas whose precision depends on the working of verbal systems of meaning. It is one thing, then, for Krauss to expose the working of one basic structure within the modernist notion of originality; it is quite another for her to assert that this set of terms applies as neatly to the obdurate manifoldness of any art work. For while all art work is conventional—that is, any work is built from patterns of ordered elements which are understood as meaningful—neither individual works nor the pat-

terns of order upon which they depend can be reduced to the delimited and transparent status of verbal signifiers. The work is not a text. The square in the work, or the tree, or the cathedral are already what they are in a way which is utterly different than the words just uttered. Each stands there with a particularity and a corporeality, with an otherness which, say, underscore the injunction of the fourth commandment and legitimize Krauss's metaphor of the work as being "carved out" as a bearer of meaning. While a sign can be carved, or painted, and is inflected by just such making, even with this new and added weight it still functions differently from the cut square, the drawn tree, the built cathedral.

Krauss, of course, knows this, and her essay on Jackson Pollock depends upon it. Within a spare and excellent discussion of some of the cruder art historical notions of causality, she shows that Pollock's black and white paintings from 1951-52 cannot be reduced to iconographically explicit Christian images, or for that matter, to any other equally definable subject. This, however, is not to say that these works, or any of Pollock's work, lack a subject. Krauss points out that nothing could have been farther from Pollock's intention, even if his subject could never be expressed by any concrete noun, or possibly any noun. Krauss proposes that the subject of these works, and other works by Pollock, is an instinctively grasped and dialectical imaging of a unity made of opposites:

> The Great Pollocks, like the great Mondrians, operate through a structure of oppositions: line as opposed to color; contour as opposed to field; matter as opposed to the incorporeal. The subject that then emerges is the provisional unity of the identity of opposites: as line becomes color, contour becomes field, and matter becomes light. Pollock characterizes this as "energy and motion made visible"; Lee Krasner spoke of it as "unframed space." Pollock's most serious critics have described it with great care and eloquence.

It is simply incorrect to suggest that drawing in Pollock's drip paintings can be considered as indicating contour—to borrow a phrase from David Summers,[1] Pollock's drawing took on its own body and in this substantiation drawing sacrificed its limpidity of reference to edges, to contours, to all of the pictorial structures which support descriptive representation. Yet I think that the broad characterization Krauss arrives at, this "unity of the identity of opposites," is completely in the spirit of the works themselves. While it is true that in the black and white paintings of 1951-52 the drawing in certain regions of the works makes references to the human figure (or to fantasies of the figure), these regions never harden into some final given reference. Instead, the drawing in these works constantly moves both literally and metaphorically between figure and its absence. The drawing may summon a figure, a tree, a cathedral, or a square, but these are never gripped by it, for as they appear they are

also relinquished to the drawing's own course, to the fall of paint, its movement, its viscosities, its hermetic reach.

If the unity of opposites Krauss speaks of suggests a kind of *mysterium coniunctionis,* this is not at all in the sense which some Jungian-minded interpreters have made of it. There are no allegories or symbols in Pollock, the work will never be caught in such references. Just as the drawing never sits merely on the surface of the painting but is always within the space it generates, so any image which it figures exists only in the ceaseless stream of fantasy which the drawing also is. What the drawing figures rises up out of its own body, is subsumed by that body and transforms that body, ceaselessly. The important point to be made here is that such generative abundance can only be pointed to in the most general and amaurotic sense through sign theory: the work is not a transparent structure. "Energy and motion" become visible because paradoxically they are embodied, they have an incarnation in the substance of the painted/drawn marks. Everything which can be seen or felt of these works rises from these skeins, and thinking about them must be responsive to their utterly particular nature. Indeed, no art work which would sustain thought or feeling can be merely a transparent structure: we are not ghosts. Criticism must be alive to methods and issues which are greater than the art work, but it must also speak resonantly of art works themselves. In her best essays Krauss extends the reach of art criticism and writes tellingly of certain individual works. Yet while her book is serious criticism, and criticism to be respected, it is also profoundly limited—I almost want to say blinded—by the ruling conceit of these post-modern times: that everything can be read. The work of art is not a text.

Footnotes

[1]David Summers, "Greg Kwiatek's Painting" in *Greg Kwiatek: Bilder und Zeichnungen 1979-1985,* Kunstraum, Munich, 1985, p. 9.

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