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Schiele, Michelangelo, and the Allegory of the Cave

By Hafthor Yngvason

Schiele's *Self Portrait Screaming* of 1910 has often been related to Munch's famous painting *The Scream* of 1893.[1] Both show a wild cry of despair, yet there are striking differences. While Schiele confines the expression of his figure's inner life to his physique, Munch's emasculated figure is subsumed into the landscape, which echoes his anxiety in a complex network of expressive forms.

Where Schiele's picture differs from Munch's it resembles a drawing by Michelangelo of a demon's head.[2] The physiognomical representation of rage is remarkably similar. The strained neck muscles and cheeks, the tightly drawn lips, the flared nostrils and the frowning look give a sense of a terrible outburst. Bernard Berenson's remark about Michelangelo's drawing is relevant to Schiele's self-portrait also: "If not here, where else shall we see the image of mad rage become flesh?"[3]

Along with the stylistic divergence between Schiele and Munch goes a thematic difference between their figure's relation to the world. In Munch's painting the figure is attuned to the world, and the scream has a clear outlet as it surges in waves across the whole painting. In comparison, the seclusion of Schiele's figure is striking. He is isolated within the

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picture frame—his exclusiveness underscored by the exclusion of any trace of the "external world"—and his scream is suffocated in the void that surrounds him.

Isolation was a major theme in Schiele's art after 1909, but what that means is not obvious. It is easy enough to observe that the theme was common at the turn of the century, or to comment in passing on the capricious state of Viennese culture, as if the relevance to his works were clear. The rationale for the approach, if any is given by its exponents, is that Schiele was in a "perfect harmony" with the "distressing precariousness" and "impending emptiness" of his "existential climate," and therefore his works must denote "the loneliness and displacement of anguished man in degenerating culture."[4] But the modernist problem of how art is ever to reach outside itself is so self-consciously presented in Schiele's works that we should be warned not to take them, as Expressionist art is so often taken, as an immediate expression of the artist's reaction to social tension and disorganization.

Nor is it clear that the theme of isolation had the same meaning in Schiele's presentation as one could expect in the art of the 1890s. There is a distress always present in Schiele's depiction of his figures' seclusion that cannot be accounted for by the more ethereal vocabulary used to describe the art of the Secessionists. The isolation of his figures is not a lonely morbid reverie or a sweet solitude, and their enigmatic poses and trenchant gestures, and the jagged and angular effects of the drawing—so different from the gentle flow of line of his predecessors—calls for a different interpretation.

I will look for a key to Schiele's work in a comparison with the work of Michelangelo.[5] If Michelangelo's high subjects seem wholly disparate from Schiele's apparent preoccupation with his own pathology, then we must remember that Michelangelo has always been admired also for the urgency of his forms. His figures have been described in terms that could equally well fit Schiele's most Expressionistic figures: they show "brutal distortion, incongruous proportions and discordant composition."[6] And if the Italian High Renaissance is far removed from early twentieth-century Vienna, then we must look beyond a simple genealogy of influences for an understanding of what makes a comparison of these two artists possible. It is in the historical difference, pervading every level of the subject, that a comparison may start to open up for us the meaning of Schiele's art.

Schiele's *Male Nude (Self-Portrait)* II of 1912 is related to Michelangelo in a two-fold way. The protective gesture of the arms, the disturbed facial expression and the backward glance are remarkably similar to that of the Eve of the *Expulsion* from the Sistine Ceiling. The wavy outline of the right side of each figure and the powerfully muscular upper-right arm are also very close. But more importantly, the contortion of Schiele's figure, articulating tension, is "Michelangelesque." This kind of contortion is the underlying principle of organization in *St. Matthew* and the slaves, and many of the Sybils and Ignudi of the Sistine Ceiling. It is what Rodin referred to, in his conversation with Paul Gsell, as Michelangelo's "console

organization" of the figure: "there are only two [planes]: one for the upper part of the statuette and another, moving in opposition, for the lower part. This creates a gesture that is at once violent and constrained."[7]

The torsion of Schiele's figure has nothing in common with the decorative twist of the emasculated body in Munch's *Scream*, where it is not accompanied by effort and thus does not suggest struggle. It is closer to the violent twist of Michelangelo's figures. And what happens to Michelangelo's figures happen to Schiele's also: their tense physical effort is reduced to futility by the opposite direction of their own muscular forces. The figures are completely immobilized, not by outer forces, but by their own struggle. Their movement cancels itself out under the effect of its violence and abruptly achieves contradiction.

We see this principle of simultaneous withdrawal and restraint at work in many of Schiele's pictures of the period. It is found, for instance, in the pose of the *Young Mother* of 1914, which seems to be borrowed from the *Libian Sibyl* of the Sistine Ceiling. The plans of the upper and the lower parts of the body are not as contorted in Schiele's painting as in Michelangelo's, but the sense of tension is preserved masterfully in the torso. The upper part of the back is twisted forward and to the right, making the contrary turn of the head extremely forceful.

Rodin saw the figures' ambivalence, expressed by their paradoxical struggle, as "the spiritual meaning of the technique of Michelangelo": "We notice that his sculpture expresses the painful withdrawal of the being into himself, restless energy, that will to act without hope of success, and finally the martyrdom of the creature who is tormented by his unrealized aspiration."[8]

Rodin's account fits the frustration depicted in Schiele's portrait as well as it fits the work of Michelangelo. But the cause of the figures' frustration is a further question. It is one that may or may not be answered in the same way in the works of these two artists.

The torture suffered by so many of Michelangelo's figures has often been interpreted in the light of the Platonic doctrine of the innate tragedy of the Human Soul. This fascinated many writers around the turn of the century.[9] In 1898 Oscar Ollendorff proposed this reading for the *Slaves* for the Tomb of Julius II: "Michelangelo was an eager student of Plato; he was, as his poems show, rich with Platonic Ideas. According to Plato the human soul abides on earth as a prisoner. The soul, said the Greek Sage, must seek to free itself from the fetters of the body. It is isolated as if condemned to a cell. The human being lives on earth like a captive in a dark cave; with his body severally shackled, he sees only a dim shadow of the real world."[10]

We can turn to Panofsky's classic account of Michelangelo's Neoplatonism for a summary of how this philosophy is presented in his work: "And when Michelangelo speaks, as so many others had done and continue to do, of the human body as of the '*carcer terreno*', the 'earthly prison' of the immortal soul, he carried out this metaphor in tortured attitudes of struggle

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and defeat. His figures symbolize the fight waged by the soul to escape from the bondage of matter. But their plastic isolation denotes the impenetrability of their prison."[11]

There is no reason to believe, in the absence of any literary documentation, that Plato's tragic conception of the soul had a special meaning for Schiele. Still, the visual elements that invite such an interpretation in Michelangelo's works are present in Schiele's. They are, indeed, fundamental to his expressive vocabulary in the middle period.

Not only do his figures show the "tortured attitudes of struggle and defeat" and the "plastic isolation" so typical of Michelangelo's figures, but frequently they also share the sense that the soul is split from the body and imprisoned by it. This has been noted in a perceptive commentary by Erwin Mitch on Schiele's *Standing Male Nude* (Self-Portrait) of 1910: "The grayish shades of paint, mixed with 'syndetikon' glue and put on with broad brush strokes, and speckled...with brilliant red patches, gives the skin a hardened, crust-like appearance. It encloses the body like a suit of armor, behind which life appears to be beating and knocking against its curb. The body as a strait-jacket and prison for the soul and mind is a common theme of the expressionists."[12]

The comment that the theme was common in expressionist art is helpful to the extent that it identifies it as a genuine concern of Schiele's generation, but it does not venture an interpretation of what Schiele made of it in his work. If the Neoplatonic conception of the Soul, descending from Heaven into finitude, is not a likely theme for Schiele, what then could the soul's imprisonment signify?

It seems reasonable to assume that it has something to do with the modern version of the mind-body problem. Since Descartes and Locke the problem has been epistemological, that is, a part of the Skeptical problem about whether human knowing can ever be so certain that it can resist all skeptical questioning. Descartes concluded his *Meditations* with dualism: I can doubt that my own body exist; I cannot doubt that I exist; therefore my body is not essential to my existence. And if I cannot even be certain of the existence of my own body how can I be certain of anything else 'external,' i.e., outside of my own existence? How do I know the existence of external objects or other minds? These are the questions that have and continue to hound modern philosophy. Stanley Cavell has described well the allegorical structure of the problem when he identifies it as having "the format bequeathed by Kant, following Locke and Leibniz, according to which I am sealed within my circle of experience, never (under my own power) to know whether those experiences match an independent reality."[13] It is as if we were condemned for life to narrow cells, never to perceive more of the external world than the dim shadows that fall on our walls.

If this has started to look similar to the aspects of the Platonic doctrine that are supposed to have inspired Michelangelo, then we should not be surprised to find that Plato's simile of the cave, which Ollendorff referred to, has been used most appropriately to catch the spirit of Kant's doctrine. We find this description, for instance, in Heinrich Heine's essay on

"Religion and Philosophy in Germany": "Kant proves to us that we know nothing about things as they are in and by themselves, but that we have knowledge of them only in so far as they are reflected in our minds. We are therefore just like the prisoners of whose condition Plato draws such an afflicting picture in the seventh book of his Republic. These wretched beings, chained neck and thigh in such a manner that they cannot turn their heads about, are seated within a roofless prison."[14]

The Kantian and the Platonic discussions of the mind-body distinction are very different. Still it is significant, in our context, that the general structure of the theories should be rendered so similarly. It suggests that the allegorical images of dualism can be appropriated and given a new sense, no less than the precise terminology of the theoretical literature. The visual vocabulary associated with neo-platonic dualism could then also be appropriated and given a new meaning. The suggestion is that "the spiritual meaning of the technique" that Schiele shares with Michelangelo—of the figure's "plastic isolation" and their "tortured attitudes of struggle and defeat"—might appropriately be spelled out in the terms of the Skeptical problematic.

Schiele presents the limits that his figures confront as an essential condition of their (earthly) existence. They are either confined within the hard curb of their body or within an empty space coextensive with the picture space. The limits of the figure in the *Self-Portrait Screaming* are thus constituted by the very limits of the picture. This use of space was common in Schiele's works of the middle period. It is notably different from Klimt's space, as has been rightly emphasized by Frank Whitford in his discussion of Schiele's portraits: "In place of Klimt's rich, mosaic-like areas of decoration Schiele has set a void which threatens and occasionally overpowers the figure it envelopes. This void, present in all these portraits along with a growing sense of the picture-frame as a kind of prison, emphasize the sitters' isolation."[15]

Without maintaining that Schiele originally borrowed this use of picture-space from Michelangelo, I want to suggest that a comparison may throw a new light on it. The barren background so intensely expressive in Schiele's portraits functions in much the same way as it does in the *Expulsion*. Wölfflin has described well the dramatic effect it created: "The figures of the unfortunate sinners are driven to the extreme edge of the picture, creating between them and the tree an empty yawning gap, as nobly grandiose as one of Beethoven's pauses."[16]

Not only is the barren-background alike in, for example, Schiele's *Male Nude* II of 1912 and Michelangelo's *Expulsion,* but the picture frame in the first functions in the same way as the tree in the latter. Its function is not just to circumscribe the field of action contained on the picture plane but to set up an impassable barrier. It identifies the figure's aloneness as a separation *from* something, and thus it identifies the picture as being about exclusion, or should we say, to be an allegory of expulsion. According to the "Platonic" interpretation of the Sistine Ceiling, the *Expulsion* is an allegory of the Soul's descent into finitude. The emphasis is on the feeling of

separation—the feeling that we are removed from our true or better state of being.

According to the Skeptical problematic, our finiteness is also a kind of exclusion. Being human means we are deprived of God's Eye point of view. We are thus debarred from a knowledge of other minds or of the world as it is "in itself." Thus we may feel, in our skeptical moments, that we are alone, with nothing out there on which to base a knowledge of existence. It is in this sense, I suggest, that we are to take Schiele's theme of isolation. Taking his finiteness to heart, the figure seems torn between the desire to overcome it—to seek out something absolutely trustworthy—and the fear that this undertaking may demand too much, or that a success may be too commanding. The ambivalence in his stance, underscored by his simultaneous withdrawal and advance is, I take it, the one that Cavell has described as "the ambivalence in Kant's central idea of limitation," namely "that we simultaneously crave [the] comfort [of our limitation] and crave escape from its comfort, that we want unappeasably to be lawfully wedded to the world and at the same time illicitly intimate with it, as if the one stance produced the wish for the other, as if the proof of human existence were its power to yearn, as if for its better, or other existence."[17] Our ambivalence towards our limits is again presented in the *Self-Portrait Nude* of 1909. Comini has proposed that the helpless victim in Klimt's *Jurisprudence* is a prototype for the figure. There are certain formal resemblances between the two figures and their conditions, but the differences are telling. Both look helpless, but while the old man, with his head bent and his hands confined behind the back, quietly submits to his judges, Schiele's figure gazes out of the picture as if calling for our acknowledgment of his suffering. Their conditions are also pictured differently. In this respect Schiele's achievement may best be understood in terms of what Werner Hoffmann regards as missing from Klimt's achievement: "Experiences of formally unexplored emptiness, the fringe situation of total alienation, are almost completely missing from Klimt's work. Even the 'condemned criminal' dies beautifully, wrapped in the splendor of the death-dealing octopus."[18]

To understand better what goes on in Schiele's picture, I propose we turn to Michelangelo's *St. Matthew* of 1506. Schiele's self-portrait shares with *St. Matthew* the expressive effects of the side glance, the suspended arm, and the forward thrust of the shoulder. But more importantly, the syntax in which these gestures play their expressive roles functions in the same way in both works. I am not referring to the "console organization," so tense in *St. Matthew,* and lost in the side-view of Schiele's figure, but to the overbearing confinement created in both. We notice that Schiele's figure is as closely confined within the narrow space of the picture as *St. Matthew* is within the limits of the marble block. In each case the figure is immobilized, as if trapped within these limits. The claustrophobic feeling thus created is enhanced in *St. Matthew* by his paradoxical and pointless struggle, but it is not created by it alone. He is already imprisoned, yet there are no external forces that restrict him. We see no chains and the unchiselled stone does not hold him. We know that the sculpture is not finished.

I do not think it would significantly change our experience of it in this respect if it were. The fact that the figure is literally immured in the marble block helps us, on the other hand, to understand how Michelangelo achieved the claustrophobic effect, just as preparatory perspective lines still visible in a painting may help us understand its spatial construction. Michelangelo has carved the figure according to his principle that it should fill out the form of the block as far as possible. He does it here not only in consideration of the unity of the statue in space but because of its expressive effects. The figure seems uncomfortable within his compact space. He does not stretch freely but shrinks back from the invisible boundaries that close in on him. He pushes his right arm against them but this action is as futile as his struggle in general.

This is "an amazing concept for an apostle," as Charles De Tolnay has rightly stressed. His suggestion, taking note also of the resemblance of St. Matthew's facial expression to that of the *Rebellious Slave* in the Louvre, is that Michelangelo used for the former "the ideas he had in mind for the slaves which he was unable to execute."[19] Michelangelo himself called the "slaves" *prigioni*, captives of the body, supporting the Platonic interpretation.[20] On this understanding, the limits of the marble block, confining St. Matthew as closely as his own body, should be taken as the "earthly prison" of his immortal soul.

Schiele achieves the claustrophobic feeling in his self-portrait by much the same means as Michelangelo. He is imprisoned and immobilized within the narrow confines of the frame. He is not held captive, like Klimt's old man, by the slimey arms of the deep sea creature called Jurisprudence. It is the very limits of his own space that close in on him. His facial expression and the forward thrust of the shoulder convey a stubborn resistance to this threat. But the figure's resistance is as frustrated as the movement of Schiele's contorted figures, and his situation as ambiguous as theirs.

If it is not the figure's body that, in this case, fetters him, or his soul, it is still his own bounds that bind him. He is held captive by his incapacity or unwillingness to know, or better, to acknowledge.

"Acknowledgment" is a concept that Cavell has used in his writing on skepticism, to capture the sense that knowledge of others requires our response to them: "acknowledgment 'goes beyond' knowledge, not in order, or as a feat of cognition, but in the call upon me to express the knowledge at its core, to recognize what I know, to do something in the light of it, apart from which knowledge remains without expression, perhaps without possession. To avoid acknowledgment by refusing this call upon me would create 'the sense of the sense it makes to say that I cannot step outside' ('go beyond') my feat of cognition."[21]

It is in this sense that Schiele presents his figure's confinement. As St. Matthew's struggle against his limits is frustrated by its inner contradiction, so is Schiele's confinement an imprisonment only in so far as he is rendered incapable by his own unwillingness to go beyond it.

Schiele's picture of couples from the period, for example the *Cardinal and Nun* of 1912 and *Death and Maiden* of 1915, show similar tension

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and struggle in, and between, the figures. His *Lovers* of 1911 leads us once more to Michelangelo. In general the pose of the female figure is almost identical to that of Michelangelo's *Leda*.[22] And so is her relation to her lover, as far as that can be compared. Sensually raising her left leg and buttock, the woman turns slightly towards him and encloses his body between her thighs.

Schiele's achievement here, as so often, can best be evaluated through the difference and similarities he has with Klimt. Klimt also appropriated the sensual form of *Leda* in his *Danae* of 1907-8. The position of her head is closer than that of Schiele's woman to the original prototype, but her pose is more compact. *Danae's* refined sensuality is very different from the aggressive lust we sense in Schiele's picture. There is no tension in her muscles and her expression is peaceful. Carl Schorske has commented quite rightly that in his later phase Klimt "muted and even cosmeticised the agnostic element in his themes. Or, to state his accomplishment more positively, he neutralized their anguishing potential through aesthetic distancing."[23] Not so with Schiele. While there is no trace in Klimt's figure of the slight twisting found in Leda's body, Schiele has exaggerated the twist to achieve the "console" organization. In this respect Schiele's figure seems to be closer to Michelangelo's *Night* in the Medici Chapel than to *Leda*. *Night* follows the same antique model as *Leda*[24] but her double torsion converts "[t]he appearance of torpor, warmly oppressive in *Leda*...into one' of anguish," as Frederick Hartt has put it.[25] De Tolnay has commented similarly on *Night* that she "seems not to have attained peace even in sleep, but to be tossing from unfulfilled desire."[26]

Schorske, borrowing a phrase from Blake, has described well the significance of Klimt's depiction: "Rarely have the lineaments of gratified desire been more glowingly rendered than in *Danae*, her flesh suffused to honeyed hue by Zeus' golden stream of love. Klimt has found his peace— with woman no longer threatening in insatiability, but blissfully curled up in receptivity."[27]

If this is Klimt's achievement then we can locate Schiele's achievement as going directly against it, namely in the rendition of the lineaments of *unfulfilled* desire. We see in his figure's writhing body and her facial expression that her affair is frustrated. She may not be alone in the picture but she is as isolated as Schiele's other figures. If *Danae* is, as Hoffmann has suggested, "an allegory of perpetual responsiveness,"[28] Schiele's *Lovers* is an allegory of that in human relationship which hinders response, or acknowledgment, and renders individuals completely isolated.

Despite all their differences Klimt and Schiele have much in common. This we can best see if we compare their painting to still another modern version of *Leda*. Courbet's sensuous *Sleepers* of 1866 (also called the *Sleep*) shows two women asleep but embracing. One has the same general pose as Leda, and like her she rests her back against a pillow and sleeps relaxedly. The most notable difference in his handling of the erotic theme from that of Klimt and Schiele is his exclusive employment of naturalism, that is, to the exclusion of any metaphysical overtones. On the other hand, Klimt,

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as Schorske has noted, "contraposes two medias of expression. While he employs naturalism to present Danae's passive passion, Symbolism dominates the action."[29] Schiele similarly does employ a certain measure of naturalism to convey the carnality of the lover's affair, but at the same time he makes it clear that there is more in the theme than meets the eye. He seems to want, like Klimt and so many of their contemporaries in Vienna, to direct our thoughts beyond the physical pleasure of love to some deeper significance of human sexuality. But if he resembles Klimt in this respect, we again here discover their difference. While Klimt plays wishfully with the dream of Absolute recognition, achieved through Absolute subjunction, Schiele struggles with the disturbing threat that there may not be anything Absolutely trustworthy. Faced with the other's finiteness we are faced with our own limits. It is our ambivalence in the face of these limits that I take Schiele to present in his depiction of our isolation.

Notes

[1]Alessandra Comini, *Egon Schiele's Portraits* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974), p. 58; Helen Borowitz, "Youth as Metaphor and Image in Wedkind, Kokoschka, and Schiele," *Art Journal,* vol. 33 no. 3, (Spring 1974), pp. 222-223.

[2]The original drawing by Michelangelo is lost, but two copies of it exist, one at Windsor and the other at the Uffizi. Schiele may have seen the excellent reproduction of the Windsor copy, (which was believed to be the original by most scholars at the time), in the second volume of Ernst Steinmann's major publication *Die Sixinische Kapalle* (Munchen: E. Bruckmann, 1901-1905), fig. 79 (the reproduction is reversed). The Uffizi copy was reproduced in H.Knackfuss' book *Michelangelo* (Bielefeld and Leipzig: Velhagen und Klasing, 1907), fig. 30.

[3]Bernard Berenson, *The Drawings of the Florentine Painters* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1938), vol. I, p. 230.

[4]This is the way Achille Bonito Oliva argues in "The Theater of Mortal Remains," in *Egon Schiele,* ed. Serge Sabarsky (New York: Rizzoli, 1985). The argument is that "Middle European culture was suffering from a type of vertigo at the moment that psychoanalysis appeared, rendering all reason as relative and all doubt as absolute. Vienna turned into a theater where the absolute positivism of the Old World was systematically undone" (p. 21). The vitality of the Vienna Circle in the early 1920s should, however, be enough to show that even then, after a world war, the positivist belief in the logical structure of the world was not only still possible in Vienna but in a most happy state.

[5]In comparing Schiele to Michelangelo it is the visual evidence that counts. Schiele never went to Italy and Michelangelo is not mentioned anywhere in his published letters. But then again, he very rarely mentioned any artist in these letters. We know from Comini's extensive research, however, that Schiele was greatly interested in Italian Renaissance Art, most notably the art of Mantegna and Signorelli, and that he even borrowed quite specifically from the latter. (Comini has indisputably traced the action of the man in *Death and Maiden* of 1915, to a "demon snatching and sucking at a woman's hair" in Signorelli's great cycle at Orvieto. See Comini, p. 138). There is no doubt that Schiele, like any student of the Art Academy, would have known the works of Michelangelo. There was a general fascination with

Michelangelo's art in the first decade of the century, and a stream of major well-illustrated works on his life and art was published. In 1910 Georg Gronau commented on this vitality in Michelangelo studies in a review of eight new German books on the master: "Just as a Dürer-period has followed the Holbein-period in the field of German art-historical writing, so has Michelangelo taken the place that Raphael kept undisputably in writing on Italian art. Several of the best German scholars have this decade made the life and creative work of this great Italian genius the center of their scholarly studies, and series of volumes testify to the eminence of the result." Georg Gronau, "Literaturberricht," *Reportorium fur Kunstwissenschaft,* vol. 33 (1910), pp. 166-167.

It is more than likely that Schiele saw some of these publications, either in one of Vienna's art libraries, or in the study of his friend and mentor Arthur Roessler, who, as Comini tells us, "filled Schiele's ears with anecdotes about great artists past and present" and whose library "was crammed with the latest books and periodicals" (Comini, pp. 67 and 66.)

We can mark the accessibility of books on Michelangelo in Vienna at the time by the fact that when Freud, who was by his own admition "no connoisseur of art, but simply a layman," wrote his essay on Michelangelo in 1914, he cited thirteen important authors. Sigmund Freud, "The Moses of Michelangelo" in Standard Edition (London: The Hogarth Press), vol. 13.

[6]C.R. Morey, quoted in E. Panofsky, *Studies in Iconology* (1939; rpt. New York: Harper & Row, 1972), p. 177.

[7]August Rodin, *Art, Conversations With Paul Gsell* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), p. 90.

[8]*Ibid*, pp. 91-92.

[9]Herman Hettner made the first attempt to look at the Sistine Ceiling in the light of this theory in 1879. A Platonic interpretation of the Medici Chapel was first suggested by V. Kaiser in 1884 and 1886, and again by J. Oeri in 1905 and then elaborated by Karl Borinski in 1908. H. Hettner, *Italieniche Studien Zur Geschichte der Reanaissance* (Braunschweig: F. Vieweg und Sohn, 1879); V. Kaiser, "Der Platonismus Michelangelos," *Zeitschrift fur Volkerpsychologie und Sprechwissenschaft,* vol. 15 (1884), pp. 209-238, vol.16 (1886), pp. 138-187, 209-249; J. Oeri, "Hellenishes der Mediceercapelle," *Basler Nachrichten,* vol. 61 (July 3, 1905); K. Borinski, *Die Rätsel Michelangelos* (Munchen: G. Muller, 1908).

[10]O. Ollendorff, "Michelangelo's Gefangene im Louvre," *Zietschrift fur Bildende Kunst,* vol. 9 (1889).

[11]E. Panofsky, p. 181. This interpretation is in no way antagonistic to the other most popular interpretation of Michelangelo's works at the turn of the century, namely, that they express the artist's tragic personality. What was emphasized in this interpretation was Michelangelo's violence of temper (*térribilita*), his eccentricity and melancholy bordering on madness, and his solitary habits. Henry Thode's portrait of his personality is typical: "It is as if he himself were a wrenching *Slave,* in fetters stricken, tormented by the tyranny of the all-prevailing blind selfishness [of the human race] and his cry of despair fades away uncomprehended." Henry Thode, *Michelangelo und der Ende des Renanissence,* vol. 1 (Berlin: G. Grote, 1902), p. 47.

What was agreed on in the two interpretations was the notion that the leitmotif, or the essential emotion, of Michelangelo's works was his sense of tormenting futility of a fight put up against the human limitation. What the 'Platonic' interpretation

added to this picture was the idea that he expressed this sense (of himself) in the terms of the Neoplatonic philosophy he knew so well, or, in Panofsky's words, that he "adopted Neoplatonism...as a metaphysical justification of his own self." Panofsky, p. 180.

[12]Erwin Mitsch, *The Art of Egon Schiele* (New York: Praeger, 1975), p. 28.

[13]Stanley Cavell, *The Claim of Reason* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979), p. 382.

[14]Henrich Heine, *Religion and Philosophy in Germany,* trans. J. Snodgrass (1834; rpt. Boston: Beacon Press, 1959), p. 113.

[15]Frank Whitford, *Egon Schiele* (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1981), p. 76.

[16]Henrich Wölfflin, *Classic Art* (1899; rpt. New York: Phaidon Publishers Inc., 1952), p. 56.

[17]Stanley Cavell, "Genteel Responses to Kant? In Emerson's "Fate" and in Coleridge's *Biographia Literaria,*" *Raritan Review,* (Fall 1983), p. 40.

[18]Werner Hoffmann, *Gustav Klimt,* (London: Studio Vista, 1971), p. 16.

[19]Charles de Tolnay, *Michelangelo,* vol. 3, *The Medici Chapel* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1958), p. 168.

[20]Johannes Wilde, *Michelangelo* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978), p. 96.

[21]Cavell, p. 428.

[22]The original painting of *Leda* is lost but it is known to us through various copies. The London cartoon (National Gallery) was probably painted before 1531 by Rosso Fiorentino. It was thought to be the original by early scholars. See De Tolnay, pp. 137-138.

[23]Carle E. Schorske, *Fin-de-siècle Vienna, Politics and Culture* (New York: Random House, 1980), p. 271.

[24]De Tolnay, pp. 137-138.

[25]Friedrich Hartt, *Michelangelo, The Complete Sculpture* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1968), p. 207.

[26]De Tolnay, pp. 137-138.

[27]Schorske, p. 272.

[28]Hofmann, p. 16.

[29]Schorske, p. 272.

Suspicious "Unheimlich" and Ambivalence in the Appropriation Strategy of Anselm Kiefer

By Michèle Cone

It is nothing new to suggest that Anselm Kiefer's agenda has had to do with the destiny of being German and Aryan after the Hitler episode. Curiously, his paintings have plumbed German myths, quoted German monuments and other icons of nationalistic identity (the sacred hill, hall, flame, torch, tree, bird), as if their use during the Third Reich had not forever tainted them. Yet the reception of his art—even in quarters that would have reasons to be suspicious, namely among Jews—has been positive. His art has been collected and written about by Jews and non Jews alike. Personally, I remember both my excitement with his first New York show at Marian Goodman's gallery and my surprise when, in a drawing which—as I recall—included a window, I thought I saw hiding the infamous swastika emblem.

Now that a clearer sense of Kiefer's motifs is available thanks to the recent retrospective of his art and the accompanying catalogue by Mark Rosenthal, the problematic nature of his appropriations can be confronted.

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Furthermore, thanks to a recent interview with Donald Kuspit,[1] the German artist's philosophical affinities to Heidegger have become known. The timing of his avowal could not be worse as revelations concerning Heidegger's Nazi past have tainted the philosopher's reputation. (See Victor Farias, *Heidegger and Nazism* [Philadelphia: Temple University, 1989].)

I

In an analysis of the kind of "psychic rape" that goes on in countries manipulated by State propaganda, Serge Tchakhotine, a Pavlovian sociologist trained in Russia, has proposed that there is only one efficient way to combat propaganda, namely "through equivalent actions on the psyche of the masses without relying on what is nefarious from a moral point of view: lying."[2] He shows that the opponents to Hitler did not look hard enough at the future Chancellor's strategies. The author, who helped the anti-Nazi *Eiserne Front* with their propaganda efforts during the last gasp of German democracy prior to Hitler, observes with deep regret:

> Hitler's adversaries let him go ahead for they were not inspired by the same methods and the same principles, and they lost everything because, as he himself put it, 'propaganda is a tremendous weapon in the hands of those who know how to use it.'[3]

In an anti-Hitler poster of the *Front,* some of the shortcomings of those principles are detectable: the cartoonish presentation of the opponent (an anthropomorphized Swastika symbolizing Hitler running in fear) presumes too much of the efficacy of an all-too-light-hearted satire; the opposition symbol, three parallel arrows occupying an area hardly larger than that of the Swastika, is a meek and overly abstract visualization of the combat being waged. One need only recall the viciousness of Third Reich propaganda posters against Jews to grasp the difference.

What has been learned since this early Russian dissident first proposed honest means to combat media psychic rape is evinced by the now all-too-well-known "appropriation" strategies used by 80s American artists involved in the critique of media images and objects.

I would venture that Kiefer's recycling of images loved by Nazi ideologists may well be motivated by irony. However, the art also reveals what I cannot help but read as a loving relationship to the ideology hiding in the appropriated materials.

It requires simple detective work to track down the origin of two major themes of Kiefer's in images from the Third Reich: neo-classical buildings with immense ceilings on the one hand, fields with deep parallel furrows and a flat high horizon line on the other.

Innenraum of 1981, now at the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam, an interior with a peculiar skylighted ceiling, has been said to be quoting an Albert Speer design. A book album of Speer projects for Hitler, published in 1940, shows a photo of it.[4] An identical skylighted ceiling appears in Leonhard Gall's design for the entrance hall to the Munich *Haus der Deutschen*

Kunst, reproduced in a book on German architecture and art between 1933 and 1945 by Robert Scholz.[5] It is becoming common knowledge that Kiefer borrowed not from the architecture of the Third Reich (few of the commissioned buildings ever went up), but from highly manipulative photographs of room-size maquettes. Wide angle lens effects embellish the perspective, and the view is taken from an uncanny vantage—close to the floor—that sucks viewers into the space. They are seemingly held almost hypnotized in dead center and dwarfed with a feeling of awe, admiration and fear.

A highly manipulative photograph becomes in Kiefer's rendering a riveting although formally reactionary painting. The limitations of a small black and white photograph are transcended in the painting's large scale, which tends to envelop the viewer almost literally if the perspectival lines of the painting are imagined to continue into real space. The utilization of a particularly moody wintery palette of whites, blacks and grays, heightens its melancholy seductiveness, the way the strange lighting in Romantic landscape seduces.

The Stairs, 1981-82, is probably inspired by another view of the Gall building (or by a memorial to the dead by Speer). Here, however, the uncannily diminutive steps in front of the immense classical building may be Kiefer's way of neutralizing and ridiculing Hitler's allegedly favorite intimidating device, the monumental staircase. Speaking of the immense staircase leading up to the Fuhrer's house in Munich, the cultural sociologist George Mosse observes: "One can well imagine the intimidating effect when Hitler stood at the top and Neville Chamberlain had to ascend it, during the Munich conference of 1938."[6] Even deprived of its fear-inducing steps, Kiefer's rendering of the crushing structure shown rising steeply as it approaches the viewer tries to dwarf and ensnare its onlooker.

The subject of tilled fields is a common one in Third Reich iconography. One example is a painting by Werner Peiner entitled *German Earth.*[7] Although I have only seen the Peiner in reproduction, I think it fair to propose that it is a contrived genre painting (even the lighting is contrived), suggesting the harmonious relation of a farmer to his beloved German earth, still being tilled in the ancestral manner. The wide angle, the simultaneous illusion of a bird's eye view downward and worm's eye perspective upward toward a high horizon line, are uncanny elements in an otherwise conventional (by the rules of one point perspective) rendering. (Riefenstahl's 1932 film, *The Blue Light,* abounds in exaggerated downward and upward shots of landscape that, in the words of Susan Sontag, evoke "vertigo before power."[8])

In all but his most recent landscape paintings, Kiefer has appropriated the furrowed field image and its perspectival distortions. In *Nuremberg,* 1982, the high horizon line is even higher than in the Peiner, but the view downward is that of a low-flying bird hovering close to the muddy mess of straw and mixed materials. With the scale now tailored to human size, the visual

manipulation is more intense and the experience more immediate. Not only is human presence dwarfed, but each viewer and whoever the viewer places in his or her stead is imaginatively about to fall into this muddy, messy stretch of manure-like land.

Just as, in order to exacerbate and reveal the manipulative effect of mediatized objects and images, some American appropriators have caricatured the signs of their desirability and, by heightening those signs, they have also rendered the resulting images and objects more seductive, Kiefer has also profited from his understanding of Nazi visual strategies.

Given that the Nazis did not invent a style of their own but had recourse to all the historical forms that could serve National Socialist ideology, the appropriated forms had a single purpose: "to impress and intimidate men."[9] True, Kiefer's paintings do not "present /reality/ in such a way that it paralyzes consciousness," to use Berthold Hinz's succinct description of Nazi type painting;[10] allusions to tragedy—scorched surfaces, cheerless colors, traces of burn, of ash, of blood—are permitted. So are non-conventional materials, lead, straw, tar, paper collage, etc.. But the relation to Nazi strategy is unequivocal. Kiefer has reappropriated the forms the Nazis shamelessly borrowed, and in particular those conveying a sense of the "unheimlich," that is, uncanny lighting, uncanny vistas and perspectives.[11]

Why was the concept of the "uncanny" of use to Nazi ideologists? Why would Kiefer rehabilitate it? In his essay on "The Uncanny" (1919) Freud (whose absence from Kiefer's Pantheon has yet to be noted) explains its meaning as something that "arouses dread and creeping horror."[12] Vertigo, strange perspectives and vistas might well induce that. But, says Freud, "One is curious to know what this peculiar quality is which allows us to distinguish as 'uncanny' certain things within the boundaries of what is 'fearful'."[13] And he decides: "The quality of uncanniness can only come from the circumstance of the 'double' being a creation dating back to a very early mental stage, long since left behind, and one, no doubt, in which it wore a more friendly aspect."[14] There is no doubt that the double of the art celebrated by Nazi ideologists had worn a friendlier face in the hands of the nineteenth-century Romantics. But what of the double of Kiefer's art? It would be perverse to propose that it wore a friendly aspect under Nazism unless...unless one longed for its return.

II

Kiefer has denied familiarity with the books of Martin Heidegger, and yet he knows enough about the German philosopher to tell Kuspit: "I want to show the ambivalence of his (Heidegger's) thinking—the ambivalence of all thinking. Ambivalence is the central theme of all my work."[15]

Long before Jean Baudrillard envisaged human destiny as being inextricably ruled by the media, Heidegger was bemoaning the state of the modern world and pointing an accusatory finger at technology. In a text entitled *The Question Concerning Technology* (first German editions, 1954,1962), Heidegger thus described the inexorable mechanism that rules the modern world:

> The forester who, in the wood, measures the felled timber and to all appearances walks the same forest path in the same way as did his grandfather is today commanded by profit-making in the lumber industry, whether he knows it or not. He is made subordinate to the orderability of cellulose, which for its part is challenged for by the need for paper, which is then delivered to newspapers and illustrated magazines. The latter, in their turn, set public opinion to swallowing what is printed, so that a set configuration of opinion becomes available on demand.[16]

According to this view, "profit making," "the orderability of cellulose," "the need for paper,"—but also what we would call today media manipulation, namely "the swallowing of what is printed," the availability of "a set configuration of opinion"—are equal oppressors.

Under these conditions, nature, man and man-made objects present themselves always as if "on call," ready for use.

> The hydroelectric plant is set into the current of the Rhine. It sets the Rhine to supplying its hydraulic pressure, which then sets the turbines turning. This turning sets those machines in motion whose thrust sets going the electric current for which the long-distance power station and its network of cables are set up to dispatch electricity....The hydroelectric plant is not built into the Rhine river as was the old wooden bridge that joined bank with bank for hundreds of years. Rather the river is dammed up into the power plant. What the river is now, namely, a water power supplier, derives from out of the essence of the power station.... But, it will be replied, the Rhine is still a river in the landscape, is it not? Perhaps. But how? In no other way than as an object on call for inspection by a tour group ordered there by the vacation industry.[17]

Heidegger's pessimistic reading of the modern world as a vast arsenal of technological and bureaucratic networks provides the context in which ambivalence manifests itself, individual judgment is no longer operative, hierarchies of guilt and of evil can no longer be made, the role of killer collapses into that of victim, and cynicism is the modus operandi.

Kiefer's ambivalence starts with his artistic persona. He has presented himself in two dress codes, so to speak. In early performances (*The Occupations*), Kiefer adopts the sign by which the greatest manipulator of all times, Hitler, and his submissive people communicated, namely the Nazi salute. In other images, the artist shows himself in a night shirt, vulnerable, a somewhat comical figure. He stands Druid-like among the trees (*Gilgamesh in the Cedar Forest*, 1980, *Chuwawa Gilgamesh*, 1980, *Man in The Forest*, 1971), or lies down passive and with his eyes closed (*Broken Flowers and Grass*, 1980). As an artist, Kiefer sees himself as embodying the one who inspires and who is inspired.

Ambivalent are his mournful interiors, which address themselves equally to German pride in its dead intellectual heroes and to German shame at the sight of funerary witnesses of recent somber German acts. The bathtub image may well connect with Hitler's ambitious preparations for the invasion of Britain allegedly staged in a tub. It also is a reminder of the sinister use made of the tub by the Gestapo to torture resisters of Nazism.

But it is in his landscapes that a visual politics of ambivalence becomes alarming. The contemplation of Kiefer's devastated burnt landscapes might lead some viewers to identify with the German sorrow at having lost World War II—and in the process German territory to the East, other viewers to associate the sight with the fate of Jews turned to ash in the gas chambers of Auschwitz. In essence, the visual attributes of the "agricultural" paintings make an amalgam of the hellish place where one went only because Hitler sent you there and of the sentimental attachment to one's land that Hitler promoted.

If ambivalence means presenting the viewer with the possibility of antithetical political referents, it cynically conceals a highly tendentious attitude. It is a normalizing approach which debunks the uniqueness of the Hitler phenomenon and renders it "banal," so to speak. Far from ambivalent, this viewpoint serves the cause of Revisionism against those who continue to feel that Hitler's monstrosity was unique. It becomes propaganda for a political point of view, the very one apparently being promoted by the extreme right in Germany today. In a recent issue of *New German Critique*, Hans-Georg Betz explains:

> The extreme right has consistently argued that Germany could regain neither national culture nor historical consciousness as long as history was reduced to the period of the Third Reich, as long as German history remained 'criminalized.' Their favorite strategy has been to deny the singularity of the Nazi crimes by comparing them with the expulsion of the Germans from the eastern provinces, from Poland and Czechoslovakia, or to the bombing of Hiroshima, Nagasaki and Dresden.[18]

Revisionism is Heidegger proclaiming, as he did in a speech in 1949, "Agriculture is now an industrialized food industry. As for its essence, it is the same thing as the fabrication of cadavers in concentration camps and gas ovens...as the fabrication of hydrogen bombs."[19] Revisionism is at stake in images that make an amalgam of the Holocaust and of the German tragedy. Betz explains why:

> Comparison is legitimate as long as it remains a tool of scholarship. The historians in this debate, however, had political objectives; and 'politically motivated analogy always aims at equating that which is compared, whereas scholarly comparison aim at finding the differences.'...Historical comparisons as a political tool is one way to 'decriminalize' German history.[20]

Heidegger, it has now been established, was a card carrying member of the Nazi party throughout the Nazi years. Where does this leave Anselm Kiefer, who was born in 1945?

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I would simply hypothesize that Kiefer sees the world as Heidegger does. Not only is Kiefer's fascination with the pre-industrial world akin to Heidegger's, not only are the German forest, the Rhine, the nuclear-threat motifs shared by Kiefer and by Heidegger (depicted by the artist with a "mushroom-like" tumor growing out of his brain), but Kiefer's book *The Flooding of Heidelberg* also seems to explore ad absurdum Heidegger's own ambivalence expressed in the words "in essence this is the same thing as this and as that."

In *The Flooding of Heidelberg*, a series of outwardly disconnected images are readable as follows: The damming of the river Neckar (view of the river from a high point) which can cause the flooding of the city is of the same order in essence as Nazism (the interior of a Third Reich building, an Arno Breker sculpture) which had the potential of flooding Germany, is the same thing as war (toy soldiers) which could destroy the Western World, is the same thing as the ready-for-use ocean which can drown the entire world (view of the sea with artist).

As for the photograph of the artist's studio in this group, what could it be saying in such a context? Here again, Heidegger comes in handy. In his *Discourse on Thinking* Heidegger proposes that in the atomic age even thinking threatens to become exclusively functional, or in his word, "calculative":

> The approaching tide of technological revolution in the atomic age could so captivate, bewitch, dazzle, and beguile man that calculative thinking may someday come to be accepted and practiced *as the only* way of thinking.[21]

The threat posed by the modern world to what Heidegger calls "meditative" thinking has serious implications for the arts. It implies that they too might become functional. The potential functionalism of art making seems to have occurred to Kiefer when, in *The Flooding of Heidelberg*, he included the image of the artist's studio among phenomena that are in essence "the same" as Fascism.

To sum up and conclude. In her 1975 essay on Leni Riefenstahl, Susan Sontag wondered why Fascist esthetics continue to fascinate:

> Nazi art is reactionary, defiantly outside the century's mainstream of achievement in the arts. But just for this reason it has been gaining a place in contemporary taste...
>
> To an unsophisticated public in Germany, the appeal of Nazi art may have been that it was simple, figurative, emotional; not intellectual; a relief from the demanding complexities of modernist art. To a more sophisticated public, the appeal is partly to that avidity which is now bent on retrieving all the styles of the past, especially the most pilloried.[22]

I hope to have shown that the enthusiastic reception of Kiefer's paintings appropriated from Nazi sources may be due to the presence of a specific use of "unheimlich" that had already proved serviceable under Hitler. The subliminal message imbedded in these paintings, plus a politics of visual

ambivalence inspired by Heidegger, amount to art that is also propaganda for nationalistically-inclined German Revisionism.

Notes

[1]Jeanne Siegel, *Artwords 2: Discourse on The Early 1980s* (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1988).

[2]Serge Tchakhotine, *Le viol des foules par la propagande politique* (Paris: Gallimard, first edition, 1939, 1952), p. 559. Translation by the author.

[3]*Ibid.*

[4]Photos from this album were shown by Rainer Crone at a Columbia symposium on Kiefer, November 15, 1988.

[5]*Architektur und Bildende Kunst 1933-1945* (Munich: Verlag K.W. Schutz KG, 1977).

[6]George Mosse, *The Nationalization of the Masses. Political Symbolism in Germany from the Napoleonic Wars through the Third Reich* (New York: Howard Fertig, 1975), p. 188.

[7]It is reproduced in Berthold Hinz's *Art in the Third Reich* (New York: Pantheon, 1979), p. 87.

[8]Susan Sontag, "Fascinating Fascism," *Under The Sign of Saturn* (New York: Farrar Straus Giroux, 1972), p. 87.

[9]J. Patsch and W. Schache, "L'architecture du fascisme alleman" in *Les Realismes 1919-1939* (Paris: Centre G. Pompidou, December 1980-April 1981), p. 398.

[10]Hinz, p. 76.

[11]See Jean Clair, "L'Etat National-Socialiste comme 'oeuvre d'art totale' dans l'Occident perverti" in *Nazisme et Antinazisme dans la litterature et l'Art allemands* (Lille: Presses Universitaires, 1986), p. 17, on the "disquieting uncanny" of the art produced under Nazism.

[12]Sigmund Freud, "The Uncanny" in *Complete Writings,* Volume IV (New York: Basic Books, 1959), p. 368.

[13]*Ibid.*, p. 369.

[14]*Ibid.*, p. 389.

[15]Siegel, p. 86.

[16]Martin Heidegger, *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays* (New York: Harper & Row, 1977), p. 18.

[17]*Ibid.*, p. 16.

[18]Hans-Georg Betz, "Deutschlandpolitik on the Margins: On the Evolution of Contemporary New Right Nationalism in the Federal Republic" in *New German Critique* no. 44 (Spring-Summer 1988), p. 144.

[19]The speech has never been printed. See Thomas Sheehan, "Heidegger et le nazisme," a review of the book by Victor Farias in *The New York Review of Books,* June 16, 1988.

[20]Betz, p. 145.

[21]Martin Heidegger, *Discourse on Thinking* (New York: Harper & Row, 1966), p. 56.

[22]Sontag, pp. 93-94.

Abject of My Desire

By Ann Wiens

WRITE reminds me of when I was learning letters and calligraphy, how to WRITE well. WRITE is different from talk and talk is different from think, writing is putting a mirror to the place where words are recalled in the brain. I can scold myself, my word-self. It is also like a snapshot. Looking over writings of many years, that's one of the few things I have left to tell me how or what I thought. If it's difficult to know who I am, it's triply difficult to know who I was.... To WRITE is like to put money in the bank. People should be taught to describe themselves in words. How different words feel for illiterates. They do not superimpose the letters of a word on the sound of the word when they speak. I do. My voice is domesticated.[1]

Lucas Samaras

Indeed, writing causes the subject who ventures in it to confront an archaic authority, on the nether side of the proper Name.[2]

Julia Kristeva

Highly acclaimed and widely recognized for his sculpture, paintings, drawings, and photographs, Lucas Samaras and his work in the visual arts have been the subject of extensive discussion and numerous books, articles and essays. His writing, however, has been met with a complete and striking silence. This may not be surprising, if the single volume of which I am aware, the aptly titled *Crude Delights,* is a representative collection of his works. The stories contained therein gush obscenity and filth, shocking and confronting the reader with thoughts and images normally relegated to the most private regions of the psyche. Disturbing and discomforting, they are at the same time funny and strangely beautiful, and are an essential element of an understanding of the whole of this complex and bewildering artist's oeuvre, and may illuminate some of the darker corners of his visual work as well.

Samaras's subject matter is the crude, the filthy, the horrible, that on the outside, the fringes; the abject. He takes the taboo: murder, incest, blood, shit, vomit, sex, decay, death; and delights in stretching it, expanding it, pulling it inside-out, over and around itself, sheathing it with poetry and a flash of genuine humor, and spitting it onto the page. Although he claims "[His] voice is domesticated," it is less so than most, and the boundaries he erects between thinking, talking, and writing are perilously thin. The text is not structured like conventional writing; the dialogue is not structured like common speech. The language of thought permeates throughout, and Samaras plays with his acquired language as if the words were still merely flashes in his mind. A sentence may test several verb forms and word combinations, connecting them as much by sound and appearance as by meaning, and end up containing them all, as though the editing process that usually occurs between thought and speech or writing has not yet taken place. "Dickman," the story on which this discussion shall focus, begins with a striking example of this approach to writing:

> there was boxie BOXIE who was cutie who was sweety who was blondie who was creamy who was pootsy who was lumpy who had breasts as big as heads and a squeekie gate voice but she puckered when she talked. 'Blow fish flow Harriet, O a coming for to look at her talk'.[3]

This style of writing infuses the story with an abstract quality; illogical, poetic, and non-linear, it moves in and around events as does a dream, viewing things from many points and blurring the identities of all involved. The characters are amorphous and the narrative, while superficially chronicling the sexual exploits of the title character, Dickman, is really just a barely coherent hub which serves to support the many spokes of imagery, symbolism, relentless punning and word-play, and poetic digression which comprise the bulk of the story. The symbolism, largely sexual, is so obvious and so frequent that nearly every image, every phrase, very quickly becomes a stand-in for something else, and takes on a double or even triple meaning. "Puckered," "Blow-fish," and "O a coming" are by no means

innocent or purely literal words and phrases, neither is the line's reference to "Swing Low Sweet Chariot," and accordingly to Christianity. The line between symbolic and literal, between allusion and actuality within the text is often so obscure as to be indiscernible. The story continues in this way: "And Boxie went by a wide deep cool flat chopped-mountains desert dug herself a grave size hole, cupshaped a pyramid in the center of the dirt floor and sat on it, the sand cone getting coming entering her box...and a worm climbed up the middle of the mound and entered her trapbox and she said 'peanuts.' Then the pyramid bepimpled became a volcano and erupted."[4]

The blurred boundary between real and unreal within the context of the story provides a strong parallel to the proximity of fiction to phantasy pointed out by Freud. The thought-like structure of the text, the haphazard chronology of the story, and the extreme, relentless obscenity of the language all push against the borders separating fiction from phantasy, and if transposed to the minds of the masses, would place the story firmly in the realm of usually secret phantasy, to which Freud refers when he writes, "The adult...is ashamed of his phantasies and hides them from other people. He cherishes his phantasies as his most intimate possessions, and as a rule he would rather confess his misdeeds than tell anyone his phantasies."[5] Samaras is writing stories that most people would not dare, he is exposing a part of himself that most would keep hidden at any expense. He thereby forces his readers to in turn drag this part out of themselves, and face it as the story is read. As he establishes the closeness of fiction to phantasy, Freud does the same for phantasy and its close relationship to child's play, the latter being an acting-out of the former, engaged in before the shields of maturity and morality have solidified. Samaras's stories may be likened to child's play as well; the boldness and delight with which he tells his lurid tales immediately recall the stories children conceive and tell each other when they are still at an age when filth fascinates a bit more than it repulses. They build these stories one upon the other, each attempting to be naughtier, more disgusting, more obscene than the previous one. The stories are designed by the children to repulse each other, or, more accurately, to "gross each other out."

As Samaras's reader enters into the story, he or she becomes both fascinated and repulsed, and as the distinctions between fiction, phantasy, and play are blurred, cracks develop in the wall separating that which is fantasized and that which is read. As this occurs, every boundary, every borderline in the story is weakened; it becomes wavering, transparent, and unsure. Ultimately the whole thing comes down to a desperate struggle for identity.

II

'I' stands for what I am, what others think I am, or what we think I am. It is an autobiographical symbol...I associate an awareness of a verbal ego with my acquiring the English language about the age of twelve...I had

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an aversion to using I. It had an aggressive adult identification and I didn't want to mimic anything adult if I could I help it. Not only was my I a small i but it was spiderishly entangled with my family.[6]

Lucas Samaras

Nausea makes me balk at that milk cream, separates me from the mother and father who proffer it. "I" want none of that element, sign of their desire; "I" do not want to listen, "I" do not assimilate it; "I" expel it.... During that course in which "I" become, I give birth to myself amid the violence of sobs, of vomit.[7]

Julia Kristeva

The violent struggle for identity, the birth of an "I," a self that stands apart from the other, is a battle hesitantly fought and ultimately lost by Dickman in Samaras's story. Dickman is cast out completely as he struggles along, grasping at his dissolving identity. He is outside morality, outside the law, outside society, nature, and the immense vacuum that is his mother. His adventures represent a journey through a veritable inventory of corporeal wastes and fluids, and his story becomes a story of the abject in every sense of the word as it is explored by Julia Kristeva in her essay on the subject, *Powers of Horror*. One chapter of the book in particular, "From Filth to Defilement," may prove especially useful in laying the foundation for a certain interpretation of Samaras's story.

Kristeva presents an alluring discussion of the abject; that which is neither self nor other. She begins: "Not me. Not that. But not nothing, either. A 'something' that I do not recognize as a thing."[8] "Abject. It is something rejected from which one does not part."[9] "From Filth to Defilement" brings into focus rites of defilement and purification, the nuances of difference between filth and defilement, abject and sacred, and the power they contain. She expounds the importance of these rites and differences to our conceptions of boundary and identity, a precarious identity determined by the strength of the boundaries between body and waste, life and death, self and other, feminine and masculine, mother and child. We find "abjection bordering the frail identity of the speaking being."[10] This frail identity is achieved only at the expense of separating self from other, a process the violence and difficulty of which is described in the above epigraphs by Samaras and Kristeva.

There is a consensus that the child, at whatever tender age, begins to assume this identity, this sense of self, as a direct result of the recognition of the other, that which is outside the self. The first other that the child is most likely to recognize is the mother, and accordingly, the first authority to be experienced is maternal. Kristeva recognizes this maternal, or prelinguistic authority as the source from which the concept of defilement, and thus by implication the chance for purification and salvation, stems. It is from this maternal authority, the first authority one ever experiences, that "the differentiation of proper-clean and improper-dirty, possible-impossible, is impressed and exerted."[11] It is here, therefore, before

language and within the semiotic order, that the concepts of maintaining "the self's clean and proper body," of excluding filth and pollution, is encountered. Kristeva prefaces her introduction of these concepts with a discussion of the variety of bodily wastes, substances which cross the border of the body and make the extremely significant transition from inside to outside, some polluting and classifiable as filth, others non-polluting but still important, caught in a transitory realm between the body and the world, the self and the other. This non-polluting, but still notable group, includes substances such as tears and sperm. The other categories are the filthy ones, those that do pollute, menstrual blood and excrement, about which Kristeva writes the following: "Excrement and its equivalents (decay, infection, disease, corpse, etc.) stand for the danger to identity that comes from without: the ego threatened by the non-ego, society threatened by its outside, life by death. Menstrual blood, on the contrary, stands for the danger issuing from within the identity (social or sexual): it threatens the relationship between the sexes within a social aggregate and, through internalization, the identity of each sex in the face of sexual difference."[12]

An essential aspect of this theory is Kristeva's determination that both types of filth may be seen to stem from the maternal order. The reasons for this are obvious in the case of menstrual blood; and Kristeva explains the application of this belief to excrement as follows: "It will be remembered that the anal penis is also the phallus with which infantile imagination provides the feminine sex and that...maternal authority is experienced first and above all, after the first essentially oral frustrations, as sphincteral training."[13]

The maternal/feminine order is an important power in Samaras's story, omnipotent and cruel, source of much fear and little comfort. Dickman's mother is responsible not only for his existence and unsafe identity, but for that of the entire world, and it is this reliance upon her that fosters the fear and hatred of her, and of all women in the story. Dickman's mother in named, as are all the characters, according to her most conspicuous characteristic, her most important aspect of self. She is therefore named "Boxie," and opens the story prior to Dickman's existence in an appropriately titled chapter, "Before Dickman." Boxie's sexual appetite is insatiable to an extreme, and in an effort to satisfy it she literally consumes the entire universe, in a stark reversal of the traditional image of "mother" as non-sexual, giving, nurturing, and creating.

> And so he whose name was SUICIDASS activated her box so that it had a terrific insucsion and so she or her or it that is her box began to suck in all sorts of surrounding things and flowers and rocks and shrubbery and she vacuum went to a highway near by sat in the middle of the road and sucked all sorts of cars and buses and motorcycles and then she began to suck in the road and air and stuff and very pretty quickly soon the whole earth was gobgloglubed and more and more oxygen and nitrogen and hydrogen and interstellar gas and moons and space and galaxies and pretty snappy fast all time was in her box and consequently simultaneously she sucked erased HIM whose name was GONE roof right out of existence.[14]

Throughout the story the mother, whether real (literal) or symbolic, is consistently feared rather than loved; she takes things back into her body, consumes them, rather than giving birth to them, creating them. The one notable exception is the birth of Dickman himself, a less than blessed occasion: "And she became electrignated [she is impregnated by a thunderbolt] and after the customary healing up and waiting her box brain released pushed ejected fling flung jerk-jerked discharged, 'Get out you nine month parasite and stay out, Dickman'."[15]

This incident sets the tone for the rest of the story as far as the maternal/feminine is concerned. Women are feared and they are powerful; they possess the ultimate power of both giving and taking back life. In a rare example of the paternal/masculine order overriding the maternal/feminine, however, Boxie meets with an interesting fate as the result of her unmotherly actions: "Well to make the story Christian she couldn't possibly for the love of those bloodthirsty prophets she couldn't go unpunished for rejecting her own flesh and blood and shit, otherwise the whole structure would collapse. So she was condemned that is her box was condemned to have terrific insucksion."[16]

It is this "terrific insucksion" that results in the aforementioned consumption of the universe.

As Kristeva designates maternal authority the keeper of the body, the order that precedes language, she in turn specifies the symbolic order, that which is built upon language and is the law and the letter of religion, as belonging to the realm of the paternal/masculine. She confirms Samaras's assertion that the whole structure of society would indeed collapse should this order fail to develop or the balance between the two, uneven as it is, become upset. The rites associated with the maternal order, and thus with the rituals of defilement and purification, are the strongest in societies where the paternal order is the weakest, and therefore the most threatened by the feminine. This is surely the case in Dickman's world.

Dickman is able to make his way through this world meeting only males, and his myriad of lovers are all male, with a single exception, an encounter with a group of nuns in a convent. Nuns, however, are seldom associated with feminine sexuality, their leader in this case is endowed with a "boy-face," and the encounter is by far the most horrific and frightening of all Dickman's adventures, with the threat of consumption by the feminine close at hand. "The book clap ate my face, and a deep odor drowned my brain. I saw wine-soaked scenes of hell and harems and heard felt frightening deep chantings, screams from life-full darknesses. There was no empty air. The book opened and in place of the baby boy mirror face was an ugly old man-woman, Zoe, the female king of the cuntventry. She squinted and gave me three dizzy slaps that made me tearize."[17]

Aside from this terrifying experience, and the continuous threat of the all-powerful mother, the feminine element is all but absent from the story. Despite this, or perhaps because of it, the masculine/paternal control of this world is negligible. Dickman has no father, he is in effect immaculately conceived, the result of a union between his mother and a thunderbolt.

The law, which Kristeva's theory places within the masculine order, is entirely ineffectual. Dickman must twice contend with elements of the law, a restroom attendant and a policeman, both of whom attempt to obstruct a sexual encounter and both of whom are ultimately seduced; the inevitable triumph of the feminine. Religion, another area of paternal authority, meets a similar fate at the convent, where "Christ" and "cross" become nothing more than code words for Dickman's penis, and religion is all brought into the realm of the body; Christianity becomes genitalia.

The nuns become frenzied, swarming in a frantic orgy around Dickman, the sole male, the center of the chaos. Dickman manages to escape by ejaculating: "It spurt forth holy ghost milk showering the mob with manna."[18] Dickman is saved by the abject, he is protected by his own excretions. This is an idea stressed often by Kristeva, who points out the protective factor of "secular filth" raised to the level of "sacred defilement," and hence to rites of purification. This is especially true in the case of threats concerning sexual difference. Kristeva speaks specifically of the protective qualities of vomit: "Loathing an item of food, a piece of filth, waste, or dung. The spasms and vomiting that protect me. The repugnance, the retching that thrusts me to the side and turns me away from defilement, sewage, muck."[19]

Although in some instances vomit might remain filth, in others it becomes protective, sacred purification. It reaches this status in at least one instance in the story, when Boxie, Dickman's mother, relates a scene in which a man has come to see her (or rather to see "it," her "box"). It is during her period, and when the man sees her tampon, he vomits. Although Kristeva discounts the connection between menstrual blood and the fear of castration, she does mention it, implying at least a consideration of the possibility. I believe in this case that connection is undoubtedly valid, considering the circumstances. When Boxie shows the man what he came to see, "He saw the piece of string hanging out and asked what was that was I coming apart?"[20] When she demonstrates the function of the string this seems to be the case indeed, and given the shape, placement, and condition of the tampon, castration is implicit. The man's fears are confirmed, this woman has certainly been castrated, and in the face of sexual difference he protects himself: he vomits.

Castration is linked to the fear of women elsewhere in the story as well. Upon first encountering circumcision (itself a purification rite), Dickman postulates that it is an evil scheme, a mini-castration which may be attributed to women: "These sadistic shrewd females, in revenge for their own underdeveloped itsy-bitsy lost dicks, cut off the skin so that whoosh whoosh the precious boy's white love shoots out all over the place and maybe even hits his face and well the whole beauty meaning is lost."[21]

In addition to its role as signifier of sexual difference (in the form of menstrual blood) blood, as a fluid that crosses the boundary of the body, makes several other important appearances in the story. Its importance lies in its relationship to the characters' identities, and it may carry distinctly different implications in its various forms. Besides menstrual blood, there

is the blood from the heart, that which pulses through the veins. As long as it remains there it may be seen as a symbol of love, loyalty, kinship and attachment. When it crosses that all-important border of the body, however, it becomes the abject, another type of waste which threatens the identity, often to a fatal extent.

It is in this context that it may be regarded in a significant scene between Dickman (whose shifting identity has transformed him at this point to "Hungryman") and his lover of the moment, Blueblack. Blueblack feels a "tremendous love" for Dickman, a love they consummate by taking off their chest skins, (which cover the heart, the organ associated with love) and grafting onto each other, becoming one, merging not only their identities but their bodies as well. The boundary of the body is dissolved, the border between self and other vanishes. They are treading on dangerous ground here, however, and this merger proves too much for Blueblack and his weaker identity. Dickman's blood is a pollutant after all, and it poisons Blueblack. Blueblack becomes a sacrifice, a stepping stone which Dickman uses in his attempt to reach salvation, transcendence, identity. His purification rite, the customary washing of the hands after the killing, consists of having "twenty dicks...piss on him. And they pissed on him and the bloodstain over his body slinked down the drain with the piss."[22] What might generally be perceived as defilement becomes its opposite, purification, in this unbalanced, disintegrating world.

This imbalance, this crumbling of the structure, is evident as well in the remarkable dissolution of the masculine, hence Dickman's self. With an ability that would dazzle Zelig, Dickman expertly assumes the identity of whomever he seduces. He "forgets" himself—the term is used again and again—and becomes another, even to the extent that his name changes from one sexual relationship to the next. When he is with Writerdick, who has a predilection for dressing up in his wife's clothing, Dickman becomes Girlman. When he is with Blueblack, named for his blue eyes and black skin, he becomes Chalkman, named for his color as well. When Blueblack waxes poetic, singing softly about the night, Dickman is Songman. In an acrobatic encounter between Onedick and Twodick he is Middleman. With a German in Jersey, Dickman is called Travelinman.

His name, however, is but one of many evidences of Dickman's crumbling identity. In some cases Dickman's image is superimposed onto the bodies of his partners, their identities coincide in a very physical sense. Blueblond (the German) forms a mirror of sweat that covers his body entirely; a mirror to perfectly reflect the image of Dickman. Another lover, Jew Jewelled Boy, becomes a momentary simulation of Dickman, amidst an excess of transformations: "his body was had a tattoo of me."[23] In another instance, Dickman creates a dummy of himself, then fights tooth and nail with it for his identity, to no avail:

> Then I went to the rooms below, to the sewing room and made a dummy my size. I clothed the dummy and attached the dummy's feet to my shoes so that it was dragging behind me. A person shadow. I came up on the stage and sang-danced 'Me and my shadow walking by the whole life

through' and I had the feeling that the shadow moved without my moving him. I screamed and all fast the shadow got up and started running dragging me behind. And out the door running in the empty lightless streets. I grabbed the pavement or the gutters or I'd sink my hand in a hole to try to hold myself but no use.[24]

Dickman even crosses the boundary of sexual differences on occasion, becoming in ways the feminine, even the mother. He becomes the other sex without actually naming it so, the sex he has disavowed and so fears. The first example of this is of course his relationship with Writerdick, when Dickman becomes Girlman. Dickman's transformation into Girlman is physical as well as semantic; an actual transformation of the sex organ itself. Dickman rejects this opportunity to make a child, a desire expressed by Writerdick, but in several other cases he does give birth, or create another. These creations teeter precariously on the lines dividing self, mother, and child; between self and other; sometimes they are both, sometimes they are neither. In an addendum to the story, taking on a common characteristic of the mother/female, Dickman consumes Greekboy, literally eats him. He then recreates him, heaves him up as an old, nude, dead man. He then burns the corpse; it is a ritual of sacrifice and of purification. In another addendum, Dickman creates the cream-filled man, a being with no identity whatsoever made entirely of the abject, entirely of sperm. "Dickman filled his man with cream and he'd embrace him, squeeze him kiss him. He made a little hole in the mouth to draw-swallow some of the milky world. But Dickman pumped more than he sucked and the man balloon enlarged, deformed, biggered and biggered."[25]

The indiscriminate boundary crossing of the sperm, from inside to outside to inside again is once more fatal for Dickman's companion, however. The cream-filled man eventually explodes; the sperm rains down upon and is consumed by the earth, much like the "manna" in the convent.

Dickman's most prized possession, the very nature of his character, his namesake, is even referred to as if were not self, but other; a part of himself that floats between the two. He introduces his "dick" to those of his friends exactly as proud parents display their children, reveling in those identities that are not their own, but that have been created by them. "So that's your dick, my, he's grown. And that's your dick, he sure is cute. And let me see his head, and let me see his neck. And my, and wowee, and dick meet dick."[26] Dickman is mother, father, and child; the whole family. He is himself, his "dick" is the other, but they are also the same. "'Dick and I,'he used to say instead of just plain I."[27]

The story is shot through with various other motifs and symbols, all connected with the fragile and deteriorating boundary between self and other. Central is the role assumed by waste and nourishment, a key theme of Kristeva's theory as well. Both nourishment and waste, of course, have the common ability to cross the border of the body, and despite their intrinsic opposition, the division between the two is but a hairline, as thin as the line dividing the poles of love and hate, and in this story at least, self and other. It is a deceptively simple line to cross, and one may easily become

the other. Kristeva discusses the ways in which, during rites of purification, what would ordinarily be considered filth becomes instead nourishment, especially in the case of sacrifice: "consuming the leavings of a sacrifice can also be the cause of a series of good rebirths and can even lead to finding salvation."[28] Dickman does this exactly in drinking the ashes of the burned body of Greekboy, ingesting a part of the ultimate, complete abjection: corpse. This leads immediately to rebirth in the form of the cream-filled man.

Food, ostensively nourishment, has imminent potential for abjection as well, as it inherently infiltrates the boundary of the "clean and proper body." The food on Dickman's menu usually realizes this potential, and is always wrought with double meanings as well, giving it yet another layer of symbolic power. Whenever Dickman eats for the sole purpose of nourishment, or because he is hungry, he eats the same two things: hot dogs and/or beans. The resemblance these two foods bear to certain body parts and bodily wastes is obvious, and it is undoubtedly Samaras's intention that the connection be made.

In other cases where substances are ingested by Dickman, nourishment, the maintenance of the body, is not the motive. Rather they are attempts to acquire a self, often through consumption of the other, and they have a polluting effect. When Dickman devours Greekboy, for example, the effect is disastrous: "Dickman felt uncomfortable. He massaged his belly, tried to think pleasant thoughts, but he felt like heaving....He felt there were monsters in his belly. He was a container. Nausea, he had to heave and retch the living things in his insides. He double bent and heaved but couldn't evict his monsters."[29]

Earlier, as Dickman is strolling through Times Square, all the people, buildings, and the street are transformed into "gooey gushy colored candy,"[30] and all the space in between becomes jello. If the idea of all Times Square being candy and jello, much of which Dickman is eating, is not nauseating enough, he then happens upon "a lying rotting man with crumpled wings and a half eaten face,"[31] who subsequently turns into candy as well. Dickman naturally eats him. Moments later he is suffering the fate of all those who eat too much candy, especially of this sort: he is sick, in pain. He goes to an outhouse, attempting to defecate the pain away: "I couldn't eject my pain partly because somewhere in a compartment in my mind I had the feeling that if I really let go, things more precious than wastes would leave my body. I felt the walls of the outhouse were mother."[32]

Maternal authority, Kristeva reminds us, is first experienced as "sphincteral training." In toilet training, the mother is always there, lurking nearby to take away that first production, that excrement which is created by and of the self. Whatever waste leaves the body, no matter how foul, is in a way precious for this reason. It is the abject, far different from the ordinary object. While the object is entirely the other, the abject is partially the self. It is cast out, to be sure, but not without expense. In the act of defecating, or any other passage or loss of wastes or fluids, a part of the self, repulsive as it may be, is lost. It is abjected, it crosses the border of

the body. Kristeva writes: "These body fluids, this defilement, this shit are what life withstands, hardly and with difficulty, on the part of death. There, I am at the border of my condition as a living being. My body extricates itself, as being alive, from that border. Such wastes drop so that I might live, until, from loss to loss, nothing remains in me and my entire body falls beyond the limit—cadere, cadaver."[33]

Dickman's mother, as the story's sole example of maternal authority, is perhaps responsible for the overwhelming presence of the abject in his world. It must be remembered that due to her "terrific insucksion" the entire universe has effectively crossed the border of the body at least once. Condemned to this insucksion, she gobbles all of man and nature. "To her, nature was masculine."[34] As she seduces and devours her lovers/victims, her "box," as much abject as Dickman's "dick," closely resembles what Kristeva terms "the utmost abjection," the corpse, death. "Imaginary uncanniness and real threat, it beckons to us and ends up engulfing us."[35] After being beckoned to (seduced) and literally engulfed, Boxie's men become the abject themselves; waste, excrement. "Then she's shit the man out and he wouldn't be the wiser for it. He'd leave without remembering what happened. Let me explain. When a man entered Boxie's box he'd enter the world of Boxie. That is he was not aware of any change but if you could dissect a box man and a non box man you could see immediately a gigantic difference."[36]

This "gigantic difference" is abjection run out of control in a world where maternal authority has overthrown paternal law, where the whole structure has indeed collapsed. Dickman's struggles to attain and maintain his selfhood are therefore futile, and he crosses border after border wandering deeper and deeper into abjection in a hopeless search for his identity. From the day his mother spits him out to the night he looks back on her from so far away, he is both fleeing from and searching for the womb, confusing his self and the other in a world inside out, a world inside Boxie. It is a world where filth purifies, and the abject is desired.

Notes

[1]Lucas Samaras, "I Want to Write a Story," from *Crude Delights* (New York: Pace Gallery Publications, 1980), pp. 86-87.

[2]Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), p. 75.

[3]Samaras, "Dickman," from *Crude Delights*, p. 27.

[4]*Ibid*.

[5]Sigmund Freud, "Creative Writers and Daydreaming" in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud* (London: Hogarth Press, 1959), vol. 9, p. 145.

[6]Samaras, "I Want to Write a Story," p. 85.

[7]Kristeva, p. 3.

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

[9]*Ibid.*, p. 4.

[10]*Ibid.*, p. 67.

[11]*Ibid.*, p. 72.

[12]*Ibid.*, p. 71.

[13]*Ibid.*

[14]Samaras, pp. 27-28.

[15]*Ibid.*

[16]*Ibid.*

[17]*Ibid.*, p. 42.

[18]*Ibid.*, p. 43.

[19]Kristeva, p. 2.

[20]Samaras, p. 29.

[21]*Ibid.*, p. 31.

[22]*Ibid.*, p. 37.

[23]*Ibid.*, p. 45.

[24]*Ibid.*

[25]*Ibid.*, p. 45.

[26]*Ibid.*, p. 31.

[27]*Ibid.*

[28]Kristeva, p. 76.

[29]Samaras, p. 49.

[30]*Ibid.*, p. 44.

[31]*Ibid.*

[32]*Ibid.*

[33]Kristeva, p. 3.

[34]Samaras, p. 28.

[35]Kristeva, p. 4.

[36]Samaras, p. 29.

Art Criticism and Deconstruction: Rosalind Krauss and Jacques Derrida

By Matthew Biro

A Hegemonic Model of Meaning

Has there ever been a "deconstructive" art criticism—that is, an art criticism which does more than simply hide its own agenda beneath this popular and all-too-little-examined theoretical label? For the past ten years, the term "deconstruction" has become increasingly used in a wide variety of aesthetic contexts, for a number of different purposes, by critics, curators, and artists alike. It has gained a certain currency in artistic circles— a sort of "official" status as it were—which suggests its user's familiarity with notions of meaning and signification currently in vogue in both America and Europe. Unfortunately, deconstruction's emerging popularity as a term to be rather loosely bandied about in art critical writings has far outstripped research on the part of art critics into its meaning. As even a brief survey of the field reveals, art critics have a poor understanding of deconstruction. Content to receive their information from secondary sources and an occasional, hastily excised essay-fragment, many an art critic has sold short Derrida's insights into the nature of "writing" (*l'écriture*) and the production of meaning.[1] As this paper shall reveal, too often do

we discover in art critical writings a point of view which claims deconstruction for its own and yet is entirely antithetical to deconstructive practice. This point of view entails a theory of meaning too fully subordinate to categories of stasis, taxonomy, and structure; as well as an "unconscious" yet seemingly overwhelming compulsion to separate the meaning it structurally dominates into a good type which it valorizes and a bad type which it suppresses. As we shall see, this critical position is radically at odds with the theory of meaning as movement or play—a hallmark of Derrida's work.[2]

A case in point is Rosalind Krauss, professor of art history at Hunter College and curator of major shows at the Guggenheim, the Whitney, the Corcoran, and the Museum of Modern Art. Krauss is perhaps the most powerful and well-known advocate of structuralism and post-structuralism in art criticism today, and, hence, a powerful authority on Derrida's behalf in the field. In addition to being a founder and editor of *October,* a leading art journal associated with the writings of this loose collection of thinkers,[3] Krauss has actively promulgated their theories in her own widely-read and influential publications. Thus, for someone interested in the possible applications of deconstruction to works of art, Krauss's power as a (willing or unwilling) representative of Derrida's thought cannot be underestimated. Still less, however, can it be trusted. As an examination of Krauss's book, *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths* (1985), will show, Krauss is in places a truly deconstructive art critic. Yet the essays in Krauss's book also reveal a theory of meaning radically different than that of Derrida. To anticipate, this model of signification implies that Krauss is ultimately *not* a deconstructive art critic. By interpreting art according to an understanding of the sign which suppresses notions of objective reference and of the development of a sign's meaning over time, Krauss radically limits the range of meaning that a work of art may potentially possess, thereby falling into a trap that Derrida's model of meaning easily avoids. Although Derrida, too, attacks traditional notions of objective reference, he does this not to deny that it exists, but to show that this type of reference is far more complex and perplexing than traditional theories supposed.

Krauss, Deconstruction, and Signification

Krauss's 1981 essay, "In the Name of Picasso," presents a good example of the deconstructive aspects of her methodology as well as her restricted notion of signification. The essay falls into two parts. In the first, Krauss attacks a critical viewpoint she finds prevalent in contemporary Picasso scholarship—a viewpoint she calls "the art history of the proper name," and which she attributes to William Rubin, John Richardson, Mary Mathews Gedo, Linda Nochlin, Robert Rosenblum and Pierre Daix.[4] In the second part, Krauss elaborates her own theory of pictorial representation and makes a case for its being explicitly thematized in Picasso's collage. Krauss's essay thus seems similar in structure to Derrida's deconstructive writings, which also articulate a "positive doctrine" *via* a conceptual overturning of a

strategically selected group of texts.[5] Like Derrida, Krauss works parasitical-ly, developing her own thought by showing what another paradigm excludes.

Another affinity Krauss's essay shares with those of Derrida is that her "deconstruction" is of a theory of the sign. According to Krauss, the art historians of the proper name embrace a theory of the sign which assumes that all reference is to single objects in the real world. In other words, signs serve only as "proper names;" they refer to one and only one referent and thereby use themselves up in the act of signification. The critics Krauss attacks allegedly operate with the underlying belief that a work by Picasso is "about" the real world objects that it represents. Thus for William Rubin, Picasso's *Seated Bather* (1930) and *Bather with Beach Ball* (1932) evince two different universes because "behind each picture there lay a real-world model, each model with a different name: Olga Picasso; Marie-Therese Walter."[6] Similarly, in an analysis of Picasso's cubist collages, Robert Rosenblum "proposes to read the names printed on the labels introduced into cubist collage, and thus to identify the objects so labeled."[7] These many printed JOUs JOURs, and URNALS serve primarily to label a newspaper, *Le Journal,* in Rosenblum's scheme. The complex jokes that the word fragments perform are radically de-emphasized by Rosenblum who interprets them simply as working in the service of indicating a real world object.[8]

In contrast to this "extensional" theory, Krauss suggests that there is an "intensional or sense view" theory of the sign which is nearer to the one she will use in her own reading of Picasso's collage.[9] This model assumes that all reference is to sense or meaning. The sign, in other words, refers to other signs and does not "name" or indicate objects in the real world. According to this view, "Moses" indicates not the man but a set of descrip-tions: the leader of the Israelites, the child who was taken out of the Nile by Pharaoh's daughter, and so on.[10]

In order to apply this "intensional" theory of signification to Picasso's collage, Krauss draws explicitly on a model of the linguistic sign borrowed from Ferdinand de Saussure's *Course in General Linguistics* (1915). This choice of the Saussurian model for the theoretical basis of her analysis is highly ironic, because by so choosing, Krauss both embodies and radical-ly undermines the deconstructive side of her criticism. For, at the same time as she makes a classically deconstructive move, namely the concep-tual overturning of a traditional opposition, intension-extension, Krauss reap-plies a theory of the sign to Picasso, which Derrida, in his deconstructions of structuralist theory, has explicitly set out to overcome.

However, before turning to an analysis of the deconstructive theory of signification which subtends Derrida's critical writings, it is first necessary to briefly characterize the Saussurian theory of meaning and its function-ing in Krauss's analysis of Picasso's collage. Saussure's notions of significa-tion and language rely on two primary oppositions: the distinction between synchronic and diachronic and the distinction between *langue* and *parole.* The first of these distinctions provides Saussure with his critical approach

to language. Radically limiting the historical, or diachronic, model which determined the treatment of language in his early writing where he studied the development of words, Saussure came to assert that linguistics could most profitably approach its subject by treating it synchronically—that is, as an atemporal structure.[11] Instead of tracing the development of isolated elements over time, the linguist would attempt to disclose a system or code which he postulates to underlie and determine his empirical data.[12] Saussure calls this atemporal system which the linguist seeks to reveal *langue*.

Langue is the product of a people—a social construct. It is the intersubjective system of correlations between words and meanings which every speaker uses when he or she communicates a particular message. *Parole*, on the other hand, is an individual speech act. Unlike *langue*, which is communal and abstract, *parole* is actual and, hence, context-specific. *Parole* is contingent, whereas *langue*, for Saussure, is necessary. For this reason, the focus of the structural linguist is *langue* and not *parole*, the system rather than the message. The speech act is secondary, a mere means of getting at the larger whole.[13]

Every instance of *parole* consists of one or more signs. Saussure divides the sign into a signifier (a material element such as a sound or a mark on paper) and a signified (an immaterial idea or concept to which the signifier refers).[14] The relationship between the signifier and the signified is "arbitrary."[15] This means that there is only a conventional bond between the sign's material element and its meaning or content. In addition, the signified is not understood to be real object as it is in the "extensional" model which Krauss attacks. Rather, according to Saussure's structural model, the signified is simply the sign's place in the network of differences which constitutes the language as a whole.[16] The sign, in other words, refers to other signs so that the meaning of a word, say, "ocean," is constituted by its relation to, as well as difference from, a host of possible alternatives or substitutions, such as "sea," "pond," "bay," "strait," "lake," and "stream." The Saussurian model of the sign implies that meaning is a function of the interplay of presence and absence. As Saussure notes, "in language there are only differences *without positive terms*."[17] The material signifier thus signifies not some presence but, rather, an absence: a position in a network of oppositions.[18]

Krauss applies the "intensional" Saussurian model of the sign to Picasso's cubist collages, revealing how much more richly significant Picasso's collages become when interpreted structurally. Relating the Saussurian notion of the sign as a function of the interplay of presence and absence to the various, partially analogous presence-absence pairings which occur in Picasso's collage, Krauss suggests that the "extraordinary contribution of [Picasso's] collage is that it is the first instance within the pictorial arts of anything like a systematic exploration of the conditions of representability entailed by the sign."[19]

The examples that Krauss gives to support her contention that Picasso explicitly thematizes the signifying processes of his art (i.e., its processes of representation) are convincing. For example, Krauss plausibly interprets

the "f" shaped violin frets in some of Picasso's 1912-1914 works as signifiers of 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.[20]

Furthermore, as Krauss notes, with his wine bottles made out of cut newsprint, Picasso juxtaposes cues which imply a spatial reading with cues which negate depth. Here again Picasso seems to emphasize the interplay of presence and absence in connection with the representation of everyday objects, giving further support to Krauss's thesis that Picasso comments self-reflexively on his medium. Thus, *contra* Rosenblum, the work fragment "JOUR" does not represent a real world referent but rather marks "the name itself with that condition of incompleteness or absence which secures for the sign its status as *re*presentation.[21]

Picasso's collages also problematize the reference of the individual collage elements. As Krauss notes, a "single collage element can function simultaneously to compose a sign of atmosphere or luminosity or of closure or edge."[22] As such, Picasso's art seems to present the viewer with a second structural similarity to Saussure's theory of signification. For Saussure, as we saw, meaning is the sign's position in a system. Thus Saussure's sign is always related to a multitude of other meanings, other positions in the system not chosen. For this reason, signs are often polysemic; that is, they possess two or more distinct, sometimes even contradictory meanings. In a similar fashion, Krauss's Picasso makes his collage elements semantically multivalent by suggesting that each element could signify differently in a different context, and draws the viewer's attention away from the particular forms of the collage elements to the *langue* or system of forms which subtends them. As Krauss puts it,

> In the great, complex cubist collages, each element is fully diacritical instantiating both line and color, closure and openness, plane and recession. Each signifier thus yields a matched pair of formal signifieds. Thus if the elements of cubist collage do establish sets of predicates, these are not limited to the properties of objects. They extend to the differential calculus at the very heart of the formal code of painting. What is systematized in collage is not so much the forms of a set of studio paraphernalia, but the very system of form.[23]

As Krauss concludes, it is intrinsic to the very nature of collage that Picasso's collages should be about—or represent—representation. According to Krauss, every glued collage element "represents" (in the sense that it *re*presents) the picture field as a whole. Thus, every collage element literally both occludes and indicates the ground which allows it to function as a representation. Picasso thereby shows representation, on its most basic level in his collage, to once again be a function of both presence (figure) and absence (occluded ground). The collage element represents the collage as a whole—but only by making part of it absent.[24] Picasso's collage thus reveals,

a metalanguage of the visual. It can talk about space without employing it; it can figure the figure through the constant superimposition of grounds; it can speak in turn of light and shade through the subterfuge of a written text. This capacity of 'speaking about' depends on the ability of each collage element to function as the material signifier for a signified that is its opposite: a presence whose referent is an absent meaning, meaningful only in its absence. As a system, collage inaugurates a play of differences which is both about and sustained by an absent origin: the forced absence of the original plane by the superimposition of another plane, effacing the first in order to represent it. Collage's very fullness of form is grounded in this forced impoverishment of the ground—a ground both supplemented and supplanted.'[25]

Krauss's interpretation of Picasso's collage as giving us "a metalanguage of the visual" is both provocative and compelling. Picasso's collage does seem reflexive, it does seem to problematize and bring to the viewers attention conventions of visual representation. However—and despite Krauss's tendency to read them this way—Picasso's collages do not simply exemplify the *langue* which subtends them. What is often richest about a work of art is the way it breaks with rather than follows the code. For this reason, art criticism cannot leave the realm of *parole* for the realm of *langue* as easily as structural linguistics.

To treat works of art as *parole* is to recognize them as particular messages, communicated by particular individuals and influenced by particular historical situations. As such, Picasso's collages refer not only to the formal system and to the interplay of presence and absence which allows them to function as representations, but also to objects in the world, particular social and historical situations, real people, and the like. They refer back not only to a system of form but to Picasso's biography, as well as the cultural tradition out of which he springs. Because Krauss ignores these various "extensional," psychoanalytic, and context-specific references of the visual sign, her interpretation of Picasso becomes almost as reductive as the so-called "art history of the proper name" which she denigrates. She deserves both praise and censure for her findings. By arguing for Picasso's reflexivitiy, his concern with problems of pictorial representation, Krauss sets out a conceptual framework in which we can productively think Picasso's art. But by ignoring all interpretive paradigms other than her own linguistic one, Krauss radically restricts the range of meaning of Picasso's collage. Moreover, Krauss does more than simply ignore other interpretive frameworks. Her models of both the verbal and the visual sign positively preclude them. The acceptance of Krauss's model of signification, therefore, commits the art critic to the predetermined and clearly untenable position that there are whole areas of meaning which works of art, by definition, cannot represent.

There are further difficulties to Krauss's approach. First, Krauss's emphasis on the formal code at the expense of the particular work of art obscures a work's new or transgressive elements. The structural critic's object is always what is conventional, and not what is innovative, in a sign's meaning. Thus, by employing a purely structural approach, Krauss obscures many of the more innovative and idiosyncratic levels of meaning which surround the

work of art. Second, Krauss's denial of objective reference—her denial that art can be "about" objects and people in the world—keeps critics from seeking to disclose a psychological or existential meaning surrounding the work of art.[26] Third, and perhaps most damaging to the semantic fullness of the work of art, is Krauss's total suppression of time in her model of meaning. For Krauss, meaning can be fully described according to a purely synchronic or structural model. All historical interpretations—of which the "profoundly historicist" formalism of her teacher Clement Greenberg is the prime example—are to be rejected from the start.[27] Krauss's model can thus provide no idea of how the meaning of a work of art can change over time. Nor can it explain how a work of art can reconfigure the system—alter the formal code which makes its meaning possible. For Krauss, works of art are always constructed out of previously existing, culturally-coded meanings— meanings which Krauss, following Barthes, calls the "always already-known, already-experienced, already-given-within-a-culture."[28] All force, all possibility of change and development of meaning, is drained from the picture.

What makes Krauss's failure to do justice to the semantic richness of the art object all the more ironic is the fact that the shifts in her criticism, first to phenomenology in the late sixties and then to structuralism and post-structuralism in the early seventies, were motivated by the need to throw off the set of concepts she inherited from Greenberg[29]—concepts which were unable to explain, or rather'which devalued, certain newer styles of artistic production: namely, Pop and Minimalism. Krauss's recourse to structuralist and post-structuralist theory was thus intended to counter the notion that there is a single, institutionalized critical discourse within which all works of art can be profitably discussed—a move to open up the field of art to a multitude of new interpretive frameworks.[30] Unfortunately, because of her violent antipathy toward what she calls Greenberg's "historicism," his method of interpreting the work of art as embedded in a socio-cultural and, later, in a formal history, Krauss denies the validity of all diachronic models.[31] Because of her complete rejection of "depth" models as well as her very restricted notions of meaning and reference, Krauss ends up being just as doctrinaire as Greenberg. Krauss is therefore *not* a truly deconstructive art critic. Despite certain deconstructive aspects, the methodology Krauss adopts to break open critical concepts ends up being the means by which she institutes a new orthodoxy. Past critical positions are "deconstructed" solely to show the greater applicability of Krauss's own critical concepts; that Krauss's concepts should themselves be deconstructed is an issue that is never raised in her writings.[32]

Derrida's Theory of Signification

As practiced by Jacques Derrida, deconstruction avoids the errors which result from Krauss's critical methodology. First and foremost, deconstruction constantly problematizes its own status. Derrida's "concepts" are unstable—his statements on the sign, meaning, and signification are open to reinterpretation and possible reconfiguration.[33] This is the case because

Derrida's terms, such as "différance," "blind origin," "anguistia," and "force," have multiple and often conflicting strands of reference. Second, Derrida suppresses neither history nor the real world as possible places of reference.[34] Finally, Derrida assumes an excess or radical alterity which always eludes theoretical grasp—i.e., he assumes that the meaning of any sign is always far greater than its explicit meaning on any one occasion. Therefore there is always an unrealizable "outside" to any discourse—an outside which appears only through its effects and which can never be brought into that discourse. Derrida thus avoids the dangerous, totalizing and hegemonic aspects of Krauss's art criticism. He avoids closing off possible interpretive frameworks in which the texts and concepts he deconstructs might profitably function. Derrida's success in avoiding the errors into which Krauss falls stems from the model of signification he employs. In his 1963 essay, "Force and Signification," Derrida deconstructs a structuralist model of meaning similar to the one employed by Krauss—a model which emphasizes the preexisting system over the unique and contingent message, and which radically de-emphasizes the notion of time. An examination of this essay will show that Derrida's major criticism of the structuralist approach of Jean Rousset, author of *Forme et Signification: Essais sur les structures littéraires de Corneille à Claudel* (1962), applies to Krauss as well.

Not surprisingly, Derrida's deconstruction of Rousset's text centers around the model of the sign or meaning which underlies and guides Rousset's analyses. According to Derrida, Rousset conceives of meaning as form or structure.[35] Force, which Derrida identifies with the creativity, movement, and energy inherent in meaning,[36] is almost completely neutralized by Rousset's approach. Thus, despite Rousset's best efforts to the contrary, "and although he calls structure the union of the formal structure and intention, Rousset, in his analyses, grants an absolute privilege to spatial models, mathematical functions, lines, and forms."[37] For example, Rousset interprets Corneille's works and development "teleologically on the basis of what is considered to be its destination, its final structure."[38] *Polyeucte,* a late work of Corneille, is understood to embody a completed structure—a structure towards which Corneille's earlier works all aim but which they are only partially able to realize. In this way, Rousset "geometricizes" Corneille's entire development.[39] Differences of time, context, and intention are reduced to differences that can be measured spatially—i.e., as more or less perfectly embodying the ideal structure represented by *Polyeucte.*

Derrida questions the validity of Rousset's assumption of an "interior design" existing prior to the work—a structure which Corneille would attempt to actualize, with greater and less success, in all his writings.[40] For Derrida, the model of meaning with which Rousset operates includes an implicit distinction between actualized and non-actualized meaning. By assuming that non-actualized meaning has a certain pure systematicity or absolutely ordered interconnectedness which may some day be captured in language, Rousset creates an ideal entity which is completely static. Derrida calls Rousset's model of static, non-actualized meaning awaiting inscription "pure speech" or "pure thought" and compares it to the one great Book

in Leibniz's *Theodicy* (1710). This Book, which Theodorus is shown by the daughter of Jupiter, is the book of the fates of the world. In it everyone and everything is completely represented and given their proper place. Since it is written by God, there is no anguish of choice during its inscription or actualization in language; God, in his infinite perfection, only actualizes the "best" choice.[41] For Derrida, the notion of a pure speech seems to be the product of a kind of theological optimism which haunts Rousset's paradigm. There is no reason for pure speech to exist other than the hope that everything has an order and a place. But, as Derrida notes, hope is no guarantee of existence—especially since the interpretation put forward seems to contradict the experience of writing or "inscription."

Against the notions of pre-actualized meaning as pure speech and the act of writing as free from anxiety, Derrida suggests that pre-actualized meaning more closely resembles a "blind origin," and that the moment when the writer attempts to inscribe his words is fraught with anguish. According to Derrida, the blind origin can never be made directly manifest in language. It is "that which is in excess of everything, the essential nothing on whose basis everything can appear and be produced in language."[42] As such, the blind origin is a pure absence; but an absence which, nevertheless, effects everything that is present within language and which "is the very possibility of writing and of literary *inspiration* in general."[43] Unlike pure speech, the blind origin is not a system awaiting actualization. Aware of this fact, the writer is consumed by anguish, knowing that "through writing, through the extremities of style, the best will not necessarily transpire."[44]

The anguish of writing is a result of *angustia,* the necessary contingency of everything that is inscribed in either speech or writing. *Angustia* is the Latin term for both narrowness and distress. It is used by Derrida to signify:

> the necessarily restricted passageway of speech against which all possible meanings push each other, preventing each other's emergence. Preventing, but calling upon each other, provoking each other too, unforeseeably and as if despite oneself, in a kind of autonomous overassemblage of meanings, a power of pure equivocality that makes the creativity of the classical God appear all too poor.[45]

The writer's anxiety at the moment when he attempts to write is thus the result of his knowledge of the "pure equivocality" of meaning which subtends his endeavors—the knowledge that what he inscribes could always have turned out differently. Thus the experience of writing suggests that, *contra* Rousset, meaning is not a preexisting static structure but rather a process which begins with the act of inscription. As Derrida puts it,

> To write is to know what has not yet been produced within literality has no other dwelling place, does not await us as prescription in some *topos ouranios,* or some divine understanding. Meaning must await being said or written in order to inhabit itself, and in order to become, by differing from itself, what it is: meaning.[46]

By rejecting Rousset's vision of pre-actualized meaning as an absolute system awaiting inscription, Derrida recovers a notion of meaning as force. Inscription, for Derrida, begins a play or movement wherein what is inscribed gives rise to multiple and differing interpretations depending on the audience and context in which it is received. Thus, as Derrida says,

> It is because writing is *inaugural* in the fresh sense of the word, that it is dangerous and anguishing. It does not know where it is going, no knowledge can keep it from the essential precipitation toward the meaning that it constitutes and that is, primarily, its future.[47]

It is important to note, however, that Derrida does not emphasize the notion of meaning as force to such an extent as to suppress a notion of meaning as structure.

> Our intention here is not, through the simple motions of balancing, equilibration or overturning, to oppose duration to space, quality to quantity, force to form, the depth of meaning or value to the surface of figures. Quite to the contrary. To counter this simple alternative, to counter the simple choice of one of the terms or one of the series against the other, we maintain that it is necessary to seek new concepts and new models, an *economy* escaping this system of metaphysical oppositions. This economy would not be an energetics of pure, shapeless force. The differences examined *simultaneously* would be differences of site and differences of force.[48]

Derrida's model of meaning thus attempts to unite the diachronic and synchronic aspects of meaning divided by Saussure's structural approach to language. Rousset—and, by implication, Krauss—fail in Derrida's eyes because they too quickly accept the structuralist elevation of the communal code over the particular message. The deconstructionist accepts the fact that meaning is partially predetermined—of course, there is some form of *langue*. But what the deconstructionist cannot grant is that the code is unchanging and perfect. Rather, the meaning constituted by the code changes as individuals use it to communicate their specific messages. The failure of the structuralists lies in their mistaken hope that meaning can be fully articulated. Because the system of signs must always remain incomplete, the writer cannot represent *langue*. Derrida's theory of signification reminds us that all interpretation must take account of the radically multiple nature of signification, that the reference of any sign is always complex, and that the things, meanings, and experiences signified are often conflicting. By recognizing one's limits, one's inability to "say it all," one avoids closing off other possible interpretations.

Meaning, as Derrida reminds us, happens in the unstable and shifting space between sender and receiver, author and reader, artist and viewer. As such, it neither preexists the act of its inscription, nor, once inscribed, is it static. Rather, meaning works, changes, and develops long after the one who has articulated it is dead. It is imperative that the deconstructionist understand this. To read art, as does Krauss, as if it were simply about its own systems of representation, its own *langue*, its own differential structure, its own intermingling of presence and absence, is to deny art its basic fecundity. Art

is never simply "about" its own form. In addition, it is also potentially "about" what can be experienced—*anything* that can be experienced. For this reason, art may also discharge its meaning back into experience, thereby helping to determine and change our world. To deny art its personal and historical context, to deny it its applicability to human existence, is to radically undermine one's role as an art critic. A good art critic will always remember that art *works*—that art sets itself to work—in many contexts. When we regard something as art we assume that it means many things to many viewers over a long period of time. To deny the validity of certain interpretations, to deny that certain contexts even exist, to attempt to reduce the work of art to the level of a mere illustration of one's own theoretical viewpoint, is a danger which a truly deconstructive art critic would, and *must,* avoid.

Notes

[1]For example, in a review of Hal Foster's *The Anti-Aesthetic,* Michèle Cone makes the following claim: "Originally a method for 'reading' literary texts introduced by Jacques Derrida and popularized by Roland Barthes in *S/Z,* deconstruction is also helpful in exposing expressions loaded with objectionable connotations which can then be used against intellectual (and political) rivals." Not only does Cone incorrectly locate deconstruction's genesis in the analysis of literary texts (seemingly in ignorance of the fact that Derrida's first two books are on phenomenologist Edmund Husserl and that the abiding context of almost all of Derrida's early deconstructions is philosophical), but she also conflates Barthes's still essentially structuralist analysis with Derrida's decidedly post-structuralist methodology (an error Krauss also makes). Both these mistakes are deadly for a truly deconstructive art critical practice. *Flash Art* #120, Jan. '85, pp. 38-9. For an interesting account of the problems surrounding the introduction of deconstruction into literary criticism see Rodolphe Gasché's excellent book on deconstruction, *The Tain of the Mirror* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1986), pp. 255 ff.

[2]In *Positions,* Derrida describes "a kind of *general strategy of deconstruction*" as a "double science" of the metaphysical text. This double science begins with a phase of overturning wherein the deconstructionist ferrets out important conceptual oppositions operative in the text under consideration, and destabilizes (but does not simply invert) the concepts' hierarchical order (Jacques Derrida, *Positions,* trans. Alan Bass, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981, p. 41). Antecedent to this phase of overturning comes a phase wherein the deconstructionist "marks the interval between inversion, which brings low what was high, and the irruptive emergence of a new 'concept,' a concept that can no longer be, and never could be, included in the previous regime" (*Ibid.*, p. 42). "Marking the interval" is the activity of inscribing site specific conceptual oppositions within a shifting matrix of alternative conceptual oppositions by means of terms Derrida calls "undecidables, that is, unities of simulacrum, 'false' verbal properties (nominal or semantic) that can no longer be included within philosophical (binary) opposition, resisting and disorganizing it, *without ever* constituting a third term..." (*Ibid.*, p. 43). The general strategy of deconstruction is thus geared towards the opening up of a text's meaning at careful

chosen sites—and not toward closing it down. The attempt to stifle the endless play and tracing out of meaning is a pitfall into which Derrida would never tumble.

³My point is obviously *not* that there is nothing insightful in Krauss's work. Indeed, the brilliance of many of the individual analyses contained in *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths* stands in clear contradiction to such a position. Nor do I contest Krauss's recourse to different theoretical frameworks in different interpretive situations. This, again, is a very positive aspect of Krauss's work and should be hailed as exemplary rather than destructive to the practice of art criticism. However, I do claim that Krauss is not sensitive enough to the differences between structuralist and post-structuralist thought. Even though she notes that there are differences between the two—"On the one hand, structuralism rejected the historicist model as the means to understand the generation of meaning. On the other, within the work of poststructuralism, those timeless, transhistorical forms, which had been seen as the indestructible categories wherein aesthetic development took place, were themselves opened to historical analysis and placement" (Rosalind Krauss, *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths,* Cambridge: MIT Press, 1985, p.2)—she too easily glosses over these differences in her general statements about signification. By mentioning Derrida and post-structuralism *and,* in one and the same breath, uncritically taking over the Saussurian model of sign criticized and displaced by Derrida, Krauss radically undermines her own best insights. I am thinking in particular here of Krauss's use of the term "absent origin," and the cluster of insights she derives from it, in "In the Name of Picasso," an essay whose theoretical base is primarily Saussurian (*Ibid.*, p. 38). "Absent origin," as we shall discover in the third part of this paper, strongly recalls Derrida's "blind origin" (later "*pharmakon,*" "*différance,*" and "supplementarity"), which represents, among other things, a thorough criticism and reconceptualization of the Saussurian concept of the sign. Krauss is therefore a perfect example of the danger we all potentially run when we separate too far our theory from our practice.

⁴*Ibid.*, p. 25.

⁵The expression "positive doctrine" is perhaps something of a misnomer as applied to Derrida's writings. The reason for this is that all of Derrida's concepts are "undecidable" and, hence, not really concepts because they signify a shifting and unstable nexus of meanings. For this reason Derrida does not articulate a "doctrine" in the traditional sense of the word. However, in as much as Derrida does not simply take apart other texts but rather, in addition, makes a number of important statements as to the general nature of meaning or signification, "positive doctrine" is perhaps not as misleading as it might initially seem.

⁶Krauss, p. 24.

⁷*Ibid.*, p. 31.

⁸*Ibid*.

⁹*Ibid.*, pp. 26-8. Krauss uses "intension" to indicate a sign's reference to sense or meaning, and "extension" to indicate a sign's reference to real objects. Here we can see a parallel with Husserl's distinction between the expressive and indicative function of the sign in *Logical Investigations.* "Expression," for Husserl, means reference to sense; "indication," reference to real objects or states of affairs. Edmund Husserl, *Logical Investigations,* trans. J.N. Findlay, 2 vols., (New York: Humanities Press, 1977), pp. 269-98. It is interesting to note that Krauss never questions this

distinction in her essay, thereby ignoring Derrida's deconstruction of Husserl's separation of indication and expression in *Speech and Phenomena*, trans. David B. Allison (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1973). Furthermore, although Krauss claims to take over the distinction between intension and extension from Frege and Russell, a closer look at the theories of Frege, Russell, and Krauss reveals great differences in the meaning signified by these terms. For example, as mentioned above, Krauss uses "extension" to signify the unitary reference of the proper name and carefully separates it from any reference to meaning. Frege, on the other hand, holds that a term can have both meaning and extension; and, furthermore, that the extension of a concept does not have to be singular. As Frege says in his review of Husserl's *Philosophie der Arithmetik*, "A concept under which just one object falls has a definite extension; so has a concept under which no object falls; so has a concept under which infinitely many objects fall..."*Translations from the Philosophical Writings of Gottlob Frege*, 3rd. ed., Peter Geach and Max Black, eds. (New York: Rowman and Littlefield, 1980), p. 82. Finally, for a very interesting and polemical account of the dangers of "postmodern" art theories which reject all reference to reality, see Linda Andre, "The Politics of Postmodern Photography," *the minnesota review*, no. 16 (Fall 1984), pp. 17-35.

[10]This example of a sense model of reference is borrowed from Ludwig Wittgenstein; see Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, trans. G.E.M. Anscombe (New York: Macmillan, 1968), sec. 79, pp. 36-8.

[11]For a short account of Saussure's career, see Oswald Ducrot and Tzvetan Todorov, *Encyclopedic Dictionary of the Sciences of Language*, trans. Catherine Porter, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1979), pp. 14-19. For a short account of Saussure's structural linguistics, see Paul Ricoeur, *Interpretation Theory: Discourse and the Surplus of Meaning* (Fort Worth: Texas Christian University Press, 1976), pp. 2-6.

[12]Ferdinand de Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics*, trans. Wade Baskin (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1959), pp. 79 ff.

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

[14]*Ibid.*, p. 66.

[15]*Ibid.*, p. 67.

[16]*Ibid.*, p. 120.

[17]*Ibid.*

[18]See Derrida's excellent explication of this point in *Margins of Philosophy*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), pp. 12-13.

[19]Krauss, p. 34.

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

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

[22]*Ibid.*, p. 35.

[23]*Ibid.*, p. 37.

[24]*Ibid.*

[25]*Ibid.*, pp. 37-8. By using expressions such as "absent origin," Krauss appears to intentionally link her thought with that of Derrida (see footnote 3 above). However, as the third part of this essay will show, the mere use of Derrida's terminology does not a deconstructive art critic make.

[26]*Ibid.*, p. 293.

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

[28]*Ibid.*, p. 294.

[29]*Ibid.*, pp. 1-2.

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

[31]*Ibid.*, p. 4.

[32]As Krauss says in the final essay of *The Originality of the Avant-Garde*, "instead of a work's being 'about' the July Monarchy or death or money, it is 'about' its own strategies of construction, its own linguistic operations, its own revelation of convention, its own surface." Krauss, p. 293. It is this either/or attitude necessitated by Krauss's notion of meaning which is ultimately the cause of her undoing. By insisting that art is simply about its own mechanisms of representation, Krauss sets up precisely the same type of hegemonic discourse her post-1976 writing allegedly sets out to deconstruct.

[33]Thus, as Derrida says of his own "anti-concept" "*différance*," a later term for what shall be studied below as the "blind origin," "This unnameable is the play which makes possible nominal effects, the relatively unitary and atomic structures that are called names, the chains of substitutions of names in which, for example, the nominal effect *différance* is itself *enmeshed*, carried off, reinscribed, just as a false entry or a false exit is still part of the game, a function of the system." Derrida, *Margins of Philosophy*, p. 27.

[34]Derrida does not deny authorial intention; he merely asserts that such intention cannot exist unmediated by the effects of language and *différance*. Nor does Derrida deny objective reference. As he says in a 1981 interview with Richard Kearney: "It is totally false to suggest that deconstruction is a suspension of reference. Deconstruction is always deeply concerned with the 'other' of language. I never cease to be surprised by critics who see my work as a declaration that there is nothing beyond language, that we are imprisoned in language; it is, in fact, saying the exact opposite. The critique of logocentrism is above all else the search for the 'other' and the 'other' of language.' Every week I receive critical commentaries and studies on deconstruction which operate on the assumption that what they call 'post-structuralism' amounts to saying that there is nothing beyond language, that we are submerged in words—and other stupidities of that sort. Certainly, deconstruction tries to show that the question of reference is much more complex and problematic than traditional theories supposed. It even asks whether our term 'reference' is entirely adequate for designating the 'other.' The other, which is beyond language and which summons language, is perhaps not a 'referent' in the normal sense which linguists have attached to this term. But to distance oneself thus from habitual structure of reference, to challenge or complicate our common assumptions about it, does not amount to saying that there is *nothing* beyond language." Richard Kearney, *Dialogues with Contemporary Continental Thinkers* (New Hampshire: Manchester University Press, 1986), pp. 123-24.

[35]Jacques Derrida, *Writing and Difference,* trans. Alan Bass, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), pp. 4, 15-16.

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

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

[38]*Ibid.,* p. 17.

[39]*Ibid.,* p. 16.

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

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

[42]*Ibid.,* p. 8; see also footnotes 3 and 25 above.

[43]*Ibid.*

[44]*Ibid.,* p. 10.

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

[46]*Ibid.,* p. 11.

[47]*Ibid.*

[48]*Ibid.,* pp. 19-20.

Böcklin's Reputation: Its Rise and Fall

By Elizabeth Tumasonis

At the end of the nineteenth century, the Swiss-born painter Arnold Böcklin (1827-1901) was the most celebrated artist in the German-speaking world.[1] He was known throughout Europe and his fame extended to North America. After his death in 1901, however, his reputation declined rapidly. His most famous painting, *The Isle of the Dead* of 1880 (Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York), remains a work of enduring mystery but otherwise his pictures are little remembered today. A study of Böcklin's rise to renown and his subsequent plunge into obscurity has much to tell us about the workings of taste and the history of modernist criticism, as well as about the transitory nature of fame. The case of Böcklin clearly demonstrates that great art is far from immutable; one generation's masterpiece is another generation's kitsch.

Böcklin achieved fame slowly. His reputation did not begin to blossom until the middle of the 1880s, when he was already almost sixty years old. After a lifetime of poverty and neglect, Böcklin enjoyed recognition and financial security only in his old age. For many years, his work was received by critics and public alike with indifference and even mockery. There are several reasons for his lack of popularity in the early decades of his

career. Perhaps the most significant is that he himself was unwilling to fight for material success. Recognition and money were of small importance to him; his son reported that he was as naive as a child in business dealings.[2] In later years, the artist advised his students not to seek fame or fortune through their work, but only the development of their art:

> One will actually only be happy in life when one no longer has any reputation to lose in society....All [artists today] want to achieve something with, not in, their art....The one wants to be rich, another socially successful, the third famous or notorious, the fourth wants to be director of an academy. None of them thinks quietly, without looking either to the right or the left, how to develop that within himself.[3]

Seeking the freedom to paint as he pleased and to develop "that within himself," Böcklin spent most of his life in Italy. In self-imposed exile, he developed his own style and subject matter, very different from the fashions prevalent in the capitals of the north. Although the journey to Italy had long been considered part of the education of young German artists, few chose to remain there, recognizing the difficulty of pursuing a career isolated from the mechanisms of patronage operating in Germany in the nineteenth century. Before unification in 1871, the country was made up of a series of small states, each with its own court, and many with their own academies. Artists who sought a secure niche usually affiliated themselves with an academy or a court. Böcklin however preferred to remain far away from the arena of aristocratic patrons, academies, exhibitions, critics, art historians, and all those whom he called "art rabble" (*Kunstgesindel*).[4]

Born the son of a cloth-merchant in the city of Basel, Böcklin was trained in Germany at the well-known Düsseldorf Academy. After completing his education he traveled to Italy in 1850, where he married an Italian woman and remained for seven years. He probably would have stayed for the rest of his life, had it not been for the threat of imminent starvation. In 1857, driven by extreme poverty, he returned to Germany but there endured a terrible period of illness and hunger. In the fall of 1858, he fell sick with typhus fever; he was in bed for fifty-five days and suffered raging hallucinations. His four small children also became ill. The youngest died but no one dared to tell the father. His wife, desperate, could not feed her family and was forced to rely on the charity of friends.[5] This period was the nadir of Böcklin's fortunes. Conditions improved only when the King Maximilian II of Bavaria purchased his painting *Pan in the Reeds* (1859, Bayerische Staatsgemäldesammlungen, Neue Pinakothek, Munich), after seeing it on exhibition in the Munich *Kunstverein*.

This royal recognition led in 1860 to an invitation to teach landscape painting at the newly-formed academy in Weimer, founded by the Grand Duke Karl Alexander. Having no money, Böcklin was forced to take the position but he remained in Weimer only two years. This period was a trial for him. He missed Italy, with its wine and its sunshine. The landscape of the cold, gray north did not inspire him to paint and he disliked the constrictions of life at the court of the grand duke. He was expected

to participate in ceremonial functions dressed in an anachronistic uniform, complete with knee breeches and a sword.[6] Feeling stifled by the pomp and protocol, Böcklin avoided his courtly duties as much as possible. This did not make him popular with the grand duke, who thought that the artist was not "genteel."[7] Such an opinion seems to have been shared by many of his artist colleagues as well. Springing from a middle-class family, Böcklin felt out of place in the aristocratic environment of the Weimar court and at odds with the pretensions of the Weimar academy.

In letters to friends, Böcklin avowed his intention to leave Weimar, no matter what the cost. To the historian Jacob Burckhardt he wrote, "A long time ago, fate thrashed ambition and the hope for fame out of me. May the gods give me only a quiet little place where I can live unmolested. I want only to see and create and to keep away from all art-rabble."[8] Seeking his "quiet little place," Böcklin resigned from his professorial position and, in the fall of 1862, he returned to Italy where he lived intermittently for the rest of his life. From that time on, Italy meant freedom to him while Germany meant constraint. In his old age, he wrote from Florence to the art historian Schmid, inviting the younger man to come for a visit, "if sometime you get sick of life in the north and talk about freedom by spiritually un-free people."[9]

In Italy, Böcklin pursued a style and subject matter of his own selection. He paid no attention to German fashions in art, remarking, "In Rome, one lives in a certain solitude, far from exhibitions and art masterpieces of the past. One develops oneself more quickly under such circumstances."[10] When he sent his pictures north to exhibitions in Munich or Berlin, they were often received with little understanding or appreciation. Criticism leveled at his work frequently included charges of weak draftmanship or harsh color. Despite his education at Düsseldorf, Böcklin ignored the conventions of academic art. Drawing was of small importance to him; he scorned the painstaking anatomical studies required by an academic training. "With nothing does one need to think so little as with drawing the nude," he said scornfully. "Even my poodle could learn how to draw."[11] He always emphasized the importance of narrative or of emotional expression over imitation, deriding the slavish fidelity to appearances stressed at the academies. He believed that academic art was empty and sterile and that painting should be a matter of inspiration rather than of rote learning: "No form is eternal. One cannot set up laws for art, as do their excellencies the art scholars."[12] He dismissed perspective drawing as a trick and an illusion, saying, "A picture must be painted for the eye and not for the understanding."[13] To a public whose eyes were schooled to look at work issuing from the multitude of academies in Germany after the middle of the century, Böcklin's draftmanship could only seem uncouth and negligent.

The artist also rejected the approach to color taught at the academies. Academies in Germany were dominated by a style derived from the Nazarene tradition and German academic art tended to de-emphasize color in favor of line. The Munich academy in particular was noted for history paintings in Rembrandtesque shades of brown and gold, giving rise to a

common expression referring to the limited tonalities of painting in the Bavarian capital as "Munich brown sauce." This sauce can be seen swimming in the paintings of Karl von Piloty, foremost painter of the Munich academy, who carried on the tradition of elaborately detailed history painting he had learned in Paris in the studio of Paul Delaroche. In the early days of his career, Böcklin employed a relatively subdued palette but in the 1870s and 1880s his colors became increasingly intense. Under the influence of ancient Roman paintings seen at Pompeii and Herculaneum, he began to employ strong contrasts, brilliant reds and blues applied in large flat unbroken areas. German art-lovers, accustomed to the dark tonalities of academic art, found Böcklin's choice of colors acrid and jarring.

In 1873, Böcklin sent several paintings to an exhibition in Berlin. His former student and assistant Rudolf Schick attended the exhibition and sent back a letter noting the critical comments of various artists. Schick began with an apology for having so much unfavorable criticism to report, saying that many of the artists, who represented the taste of the public, found Böcklin's work "crazy." Of all Böcklin's paintings, he wrote, the *Euterpe* (now in the Hessisches Landesmuseum, Darmstadt) found the least approval, since many of the artists felt that the figures were not correctly drawn. Others found the colors too bright. The sky was too blue; the women's robe, too red. Schick tried to console his teacher:

> It is significant for the observation of nature in your picture, that the animal painters like [Karl] Steffeck were best pleased by your centaur picture; the landscapists, by your landscapes; and the figure painters almost exclusively supported your self-portrait and the Cleopatra. You see, dear Professor, how checkered the criticism is, and how impossible it is to do everything right.[14]

Böcklin's work was disparaged by artists and public alike, not only for his style, but for his choice of subject matter as well. He often based his pictures on classical mythology at a time when classicizing subjects were not fashionable in German art. Romantic nationalism emphasized the painting of themes from German history or literature. Around the middle of the century, the most important and respectable form of art was history painting, as practiced at the academies of Munich and Düsseldorf. Landscape painting, being an evocation of the soil of the German fatherland, was also popular. Böcklin began his career as a landscape painter, but while working in Italy he started to people his landscapes with imaginary creatures drawn from classical myth. By the seventies and eighties, he seldom painted pure landscapes and preferred to paint depictions of nymphs and satyrs, Pans and centaurs—the inhabitants of a chimerical realm of his own creation. His characters were drawn from myth but his paintings were by no means illustrations of classical texts. The originality of his subject matter mystified art lovers who were accustomed to history paintings depicting specified events in history or literature and who expected them to illustrate literary sources. In the eighties, one of his students noted with amusement how "an ink-slinging schoolmaster demonstrated to the artist, in all

seriousness, from...[a] handbook of archaeology, that the sirens didn't look the way Böcklin had painted them."[15]

Böcklin did not adhere to the archaeological accuracy expected of the academic history painters and his pictures seemed historically inexact. When the National Gallery in Berlin acquired Böcklin's fantasy, *The Elysian Fields* of 1878 (disappeared 1945), the public was baffled because the picture conformed to no known text. This work represented an idyllic landscape, in which a friendly centaur gives a lift across a stream to a nymph so that she can join her colleagues on the other side without getting wet. The subject aroused a storm of controversy.[16] Everyone demanded an exegesis. The title was of little help and had not been invented by Böcklin, anyway; he seldom titled his own pictures, believing that titles stifled the imagination.[17] There was a great deal of intellectual scurrying about as critics and scholars sought a textual source for the picture. One Guido Hauck proposed an ingenious interpretation, suggesting that the painting was based upon Goethe's *Faust*, Part II; the nymph borne upon the back of the centaur was supposed to represent Helen of Troy carried by Chiron through the waters of the lower Pereus.[18] Böcklin admitted that he had read *Faust*, but he denied that his painting was an illustration to it.[19] This non-illustrative approach to painting was very different from that practiced at the academies; for example, Piloty's *Seni and the Corpse of Wallenstein* (1856; Bayerische Gemäldesammlungen, Neue Pinakothek, Munich) depicted a scene from Schiller's drama *The Death of Wallenstein* and would have been readily comprehensible to anyone familiar with the play.

If Böcklin did not appear academic enough to the older generation, he soon appeared too academic to the younger. Beginning in the sixties, a growing trend towards realism began to pervade German art. This is best exemplified in the work of Wilhelm Leibl, who maintained a studio in Munich in the early seventies and worked in a realistic style influenced by Courbet. Leibl and his circle of friends drew their subjects from ordinary life, which they attempted to depict in an objective, unsentimentalized manner. Böcklin lived in Munich from 1871 to 1874, during one of his periodic sojourns in the north, but he remained untouched by Leibl's ideas about art. Böcklin was inalterably opposed to realism, valuing imagination over imitation. Although he himself had made studies after nature in his youth, in his mature years he resisted the reproduction of appearances at the expense of emotional expression, saying, "One should not be too naturalistic. That is not the purpose of painting, which is to bring certain appearances and moods (*Stimmungen*) to consciousness, to perception; it will always depend on nature in expression, but will not be slavishly bound to it."[20] Böcklin felt it was a mark of low intelligence and feeble creativity for an artist to reproduce unselectively what he saw. He referred to Courbet as a "knothead" (*Knoten*) and, when he learned that Leibl had spent three years working on his famous picture of praying peasants, *Three Women in Church* (1882, Kunsthalle, Hamburg), Böcklin remarked, "What a boring sluggish fellow he must be!"[21]

In the 1880s, French Impressionism began to exert an increasing influence

on German art, especially in Berlin. Böcklin, however, approved of Impressionism no more than he did of academic art or of realism. He believed that *plein air* painting dulled the imagination and said, "People who sit down in front of a pretty piece of nature in order to imitate it...are not artists."[22] In his youth, Böcklin, had often painted *en plein air;* he had been trained to paint directly from nature by his teacher, Wilhelm Schirmer (1807-1863), a professor of landscape painting at Düsseldorf, who encouraged his students to paint outdoors at a remarkably early date.[23] Böcklin continued to make studies (and even complete paintings) in the open air for many years after he left Düsseldorf. When he was in Rome in the middle sixties, he is known to have made studies from plants. Yet at that time, he was already beginning to feel that copying nature was too confining.[24] By the seventies, Böcklin began to oppose *plein air* painting and the making of studies; he advised his few students to sharpen their powers of observation so that they could draw from memory, not from nature. In this, he completely reversed the advice that Schirmer had given him. Böcklin once remarked, "Yes, I was Schirmer's student for a long time, but also for a long time I needed to get free of him." When asked in what way he needed to get free, he replied, "In my whole view of the world."[25] By this, Böcklin undoubtedly meant not only that he had to free himself from Schirmer's example in painting from nature, but also from the cautious way the older man led his life. After a journey to Italy in 1839-40, Schirmer longed to return but never did. In a letter to Böcklin, Schirmer expressed his envy that the younger man was free to live in the "land of his desire." Böcklin replied by inviting his former teacher to join him in Italy. But, in the meantime, Schirmer had become director of the academy in Karlsruhe and did not feel that he could leave his important post; he had become old and "philistine," Böcklin reported sadly.[26] It was characteristic of Böcklin in his search for freedom and his disregard of fashion that, although he had once practiced *plein air* painting, he gave it up just as it was coming into vogue.

It was because of this defiance of artistic fashion that Böcklin remained little known and lived in straitened circumstances for much of his life. Fortunately, from about 1860 on, he received some support from Adolf Friedrich von Schack, a wealthy art collector from Munich, who maintained a stable of impecunious young artists in Italy. Graf Schack's patronage enabled Böcklin and his family to eat, but they still suffered considerable hardship. Böcklin's work remained of small market value until after 1877, when he signed a contract with the Berlin art dealer Fritz Gurlitt. For a set amount of money, Gurlitt was to receive each year a certain number of paintings, a large proportion of the artist's total output. The first exhibition of his work at Gurlitt's gallery went badly and very few of the pictures were sold.[27] In order to protect his investment, Gurlitt undertook a vigorous campaign to boost the artist's popularity. Beginning in 1882, Gurlitt commissioned Max Klinger, the foremost printmaker in Germany and one of Böcklin's greatest admirers, to make a series of etchings after Böcklin's paintings.[28] Through these etchings, as well as through newer reproduction techniques such as photogravure, his work achieved wide distribution.

Gurlitt's program to popularize Böcklin's work was enormously successful. By 1885, after years of struggle, the artist and his family were free for the first time of financial care. Prices for Böcklin's work escalated rapidly and by the nineties they fetched huge sums. The Basel Museum had made several efforts to patronize a native son and had, in 1862, paid 9,000 Swiss francs for Böcklin's painting of Diana; by 1895, the museum could not afford the 100,000 francs demanded for a Venus by the same artist.[29] This boom in the Böcklin market must have made Fritz Gurlitt a wealthy man. Much later, the dealer's brother claimed otherwise, maintaining that Gurlitt was a true servant of art who put up with much misunderstanding and ridicule as Böcklin's champion. He reported that when Gurlitt died, the words "Artibus inserviens consumptus" were engraved on the tombstone, implying that the dealer had pined away as a result of heartbreak over the neglect of his efforts.[30] Other reports, however, indicate that the opposite is true and that Gurlitt's contract with Böcklin was such a good investment the dealer made annual trips to Italy to oversee the artist and to make sure that he fulfilled his obligation.[31] The large profits Gurlitt made selling Böcklin's pictures naturally aroused the resentment of the artist and his wife.[32] Gurlitt's establishment was among the first art galleries, in the modern sense of the term, in Germany; Böcklin was among the first of that uniquely modern breed: an artist whose market was created by an art dealer.

The rapid growth of Böcklin's reputation was not, of course, entirely due to Gurlitt's machinations. The Böcklin boom was made possible by the economic conditions prevailing in the last quarter of the century. After Bismarck's victory over the French in 1871 and the subsequent unification of Germany, the country developed from a backward agrarian society to a modern efficient industrial state in less than thirty years. The *Grunderzeit*, the time of the founding of the Wilhelmine Empire, was a period of economic turbulence and rapid social change. The accelerated development of industry was accompanied by the growth of a large new middle class, which asserted its influence by voracious consumption. The establishment of art galleries like the one owned by Gurlitt was made possible by industrialization and the development of the bourgeoisie. As Böcklin's work became popular with the middle class, he no longer had to depend upon the support of aristocratic patrons like King Maximilian II, Grand Duke Karl Alexander, or Graf Schack. Gurlitt tapped the new art market.

The time was ripe for a change in taste, as the dealer must have foreseen, or he would never have undertaken a contract with a little-known artist working far away in Italy. During the *Gründerzeit*, Germany attained preeminence in the natural sciences. German education began to stress science, research, and technical skills. The great tradition of German idealist philosophy found a competitor in philosophical materialism, as progress in science is based upon a belief in actuality of matter. Realism, concerned with reproducing the empirical perceptions of the senses, became a widespread trend, not only in the visual arts but in literature and drama as well. Poetry, traditionally the most important form of literature in Germany,

was eclipsed by prose and the novel gained ascendence.[33] Yet the developing popularity of realist art and literature precipitated an anti-realist reaction. It has frequently been noted that, in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, there was a growing wave of reaction, not only in Germany but all across Europe, against realism, materialism, and the positivistic faith in science and technology. Not everyone in Germany was pleased by the rapid progress of industrialization and urbanization that transformed the country in such a short period. Many critics of the new German culture perceived the intellectual climate of the second *Reich* as vulgar, philistine, and ultimately sterile. These *Kulturkritiker* deplored the new bourgeoisie as crass and complacent. They decried what they believed was the decline of German poetry and philosophy. Some feared advances in technology, predicting the eventual supremacy of machine over man. Many rejected the rationalist basis of science and revived the concepts of Romanticism, insisting on the primacy of intuition over reason. To these critics of German culture, Böcklin, with his emphasis on fantasy and imagination and his contempt for empiricism and scholarship, seemed like a kind of saviour.

The "movement against modernity" has been described by Fritz Stern in *The Politics of Cultural Despair: A Study in the Rise of Germanic Ideology*. Stern defined what he called an "ideology of resentment" which arose in Germany in the latter part of the century, springing from dissatisfaction with urban industrialized society and the discontents of modern civilization.[34] Stern selected for close examination several prophets of the German cultural crisis, including Julius Langbehn, who, in 1890, published a widely read polemic, *Rembrandt als Erzieher*. Langbehn deplored industrialization, urbanization, commerce, and materialism; he equated science with evil. He believed that Germany was being "Americanized," to its detriment, and that the Jews were behind this destructive process. Langbehn maintained that art was the highest good of society and looked forward to an era when art would triumph and the age of science would come to an end. He held up Rembrandt as a model for the future, believing that the Dutch painter was the most truly German of all artists of the past because of his powerful individualism. Langbehn called for strong individuals to make up the great German society which was to come about in the future, individuals who could not be worn down by the leveling forces of mass society. Langbehn believed that in Böcklin he had found a representative of true Germanism in the arts and a modern embodiment of "Rembrandtesque individualism."[35] *Rembrandt als Erzieher* was an instant success and excerpts from it were published in the periodical *Kunst für Alle*. Langbehn's book shows us how the critics of modern German culture acclaimed Böcklin as one of their own; its popularity indicates how widespread this mentality was by 1890.

Much of the cultural criticism of the nineties was based on the belief that artistic and intellectual achievements could spring only from an elite. Many of the thinkers of the time based their ideas upon those of Nietzsche, who was himself a critic of modern German culture and gave the concept of the anti-bourgeois superman to those who came after him. In *Beyond Good*

and Evil (1886), he predicted the evolution of the *Uebermensch*, a strain of titanic human beings who would tower above ordinary mortals by their great strength of will. These supermen would not be subject to ordinary morality or to the petty dictates of the Judeo-Christian ethic, which, Nietzsche believed, was invented by weaklings to protect themselves. He heralded the development of a new aristocracy, not to be based upon the accident of birth but to be made up of those who would distinguish themselves by the courage to live outside convention. Towards the end of the century, Nietzsche's philosophy became very popular, in part because of his glorification of the isolated individual.[36] Those who feared, like Langbehn, that all brilliance would be dulled by the abrasions of life in a mass society found justification and hope in Nietzsche's cult of individualism.

Because Böcklin rejected security and servitude for artistic and personal freedom, he came to be seen as an embodiment of the Nietzschean individual. His name was often linked with Nietzsche's, for example, in a *Festschrift* published in 1901 to celebrate the new artists' colony at Darmstadt. This experiment in social engineering was to be inhabited by a group of artists who were to have the freedom to create as they wished and to live and work without outside interference. The colony included architects Joseph Maria Olbrich and Peter Behrens, who designed houses in the newest *Jugendstil* mode for the artists to live in.[37] When it was opened, the aims of the colony were stated in a pamphlet dedicated to Nietzsche, Böcklin, and the French painter Puvis de Chavannes. These three men were eulogized as the prophets of a new society and a new generation of artists:

> Nietzsche, the architect of shimmering palaces of ideas; Böcklin, the painter of nature, greatly seen and greatly reflected; Puvis de Chavannes, the creator of tender, quiet, noble dreams; under this trio of stars the youth of new culture has grown to maturity.[38]

Böcklin occupied a paradoxical position in the German art-world. As a result of Gurlitt's efforts, his work was admired and purchased by the middle class, yet he was revered by the intellectuals and *Kulturkritiker* as one who had escaped the traps and snares of middle-class mediocrity, a Nietzschean superman who dared to be free. Böcklin was no Bohemian. He lived, on the whole, a quiet, respectable life, married to one woman his whole life and the father of many children. Yet he had a restless spirit and he indeed suffered poverty in order to live where he wished and to paint as he liked. It was precisely this independence that kept him poor in his younger days but that also ied to his elevation to the status of hero in his later life.

Böcklin refused to pursue fame within the framework of salon exhibitions and academic honors. This rejection of the academy and of the salon system was taken up in the nineties by many artists who rebelled against the domination of art by the academies. The times were infected by a fever of Secessionism. In nearly every art capital, artists banded together to form anti-academic splinter groups.[39] In 1892, a Secession group was founded in Munich; in 1897, the movement spread to Vienna and, in 1898, to Berlin.

The first president of the Berlin Secession was Max Liebermann, the foremost representative of Impressionist painting in Germany.[40] Böcklin became an existential hero to many young Secessionist artists in their struggle against the official art organizations because he had always worked in isolation. In the first exhibition of the Vienna Secession, Böcklin was represented by two important paintings, suggesting the kinship the Secessionists felt with him. In the first exhibition of the Berlin Secession, ten of his paintings were hung, and Böcklin was made an honorary member of the group.[41]

The decade of the nineties was a time of great artistic ferment, reflected in the wide spectrum of art periodicals founded during the period. Among the most lavish and prestigious of these was the periodical *Pan*, established in Berlin in the middle of the decade. The primary organizers behind *Pan* were the critic Julius Meier-Graefe and the poet Otto Julius Bierbaum; the founders also included Richard Dehmel, Eberhard von Bodenhausen, Otto Erich Hartleben, Paul Scheerbart, and Ludwig von Hofmann.[42] The title *Pan* was selected because of the wealth of associations it conjured up; it implied, not only the name of the Greek nature god, but also the Greek word meaning "all," and it suggested that the magazine was non-partisan in presenting many different movements and directions in German art. The title was also a tribute to Böcklin, who had made the goat god into his own characteristic subject.[43] For the cover of the magazine, the Munich artist Franz von Stuck, one of the most literal of Böcklin's many imitators, designed a logo in the form of a Pan's head. This image was clearly based upon Böcklin's treatments of the theme, for example his painting *Idyll* of 1875 (Bayerische Staatsgemäldesammlungen, Neue Pinakothek, Munich.)

When Böcklin visited Berlin in the summer of 1894, the staff of *Pan* honored him with a banquet. Eminent painters, writers, and dignitaries gathered to heap accolades upon the aging artist.[44] When the first issue of the periodical appeared in April 1895, Böcklin and Nietzsche shared pride of place. The magazine opened with excerpts from *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, followed by a reproduction of Böcklin's painting *The Dragonkiller*, also known as *Roger Freeing Angelica from the Dragon* (formerly in the Kunstmuseum, Düsseldorf, disappeared 1945). The first issue also included an etching by Max Liebermann, thus justifying the name of the periodical with its suggestion that it was to be a forum for all sorts of non-academic trends in recent art, both Impressionist and anti-Impressionist.

During the nineties, the adulation of Böcklin reached almost hysterical proportions. He was compared by various writers, not only to Nietzsche, but also to Goethe, Wagner, Dürer, and virtually every other German cultural hero. One devotee wrote worshipfully, "The fifteenth century gave us a Leonardo, the sixteenth Albrecht Dürer, the seventeenth the great Rembrandt...and the nineteenth Arnold Böcklin."[45] As if it were not enough to compare Böcklin to Rembrandt or Leonardo, there were those who wanted to compare him to God. Richard Dehmel wrote ecstatically,

> I am always astounded by the gigantic spirit of this prodigious man. He holds all of nature in his soul—and what is more important for the rest of us—in his fingers. For that is art, to be able to create anything. Yes, yes,

we men are gods! We can make the world, the stones, the air, the plants, the beasts, known through art, not through science.[46]

Dehmel, like many of Böcklin's admirers, saw the artist as a Nietzschean hero who had control over the world and could, through a combination of genius and audacity, bend fate to suit himself. To many Germans, including Dehmel and Langbehn, Böcklin appeared as the ultimate German artist because of his individualism, his emotional approach to art, and his sensitivity to nature, all of which were considered to be uniquely German traits. It was widely believed that Böcklin could never be understood by foreigners and, least of all, by the superficial French. Yet his reputation was not limited to the German-speaking world and extended across Europe. He was by no means without admirers in France. As early as 1883, the French poet and critic Jules Laforgue praised Böcklin's work, in a report on an exhibition in Berlin for the *Gazette des Beaux-Arts*. Laforgue particularly admired *The Elysian Fields*, which had aroused such debate over its subject. He found Böcklin to be a strikingly original painter but felt his originality was primarily "literary rather than optical"; this was, he thought, "characteristic of the race." He felt that Böcklin's technical skill (*métier*) left something to be desired but wrote, "those who have technical skill are swarming all over the place but there is only one Böcklin; the word 'genius' exists to be applied to creatures like that."[47]

If Laforgue, writing in 1883, was somewhat reserved in his praise for Böcklin, by 1896 the French critic Charles Saunier wrote about him with almost unrestrained enthusiasm in *La Revue blanche*. Saunier began: "If it were still necessary to prove how superficial was the Impressionist movement—a simple evolution and not a revolution as some believe—it would suffice to consider contemporary art in its international manifestations." This was especially evident, he found, in Germany where "Arnold Böcklin is the most illustrious [of modern German painters]...What profound emotion soon wrings you before these grandiose works! They are both melancholy and passionate like a passage from Wagner, as stirring as a ballad by Goethe!" Saunier admitted that Böcklin's work was "very different from French art." However, his work evoked "grand passions and ferocious human dramas" and he "could take his place next to Ibsen and Wagner."[48]

By the time of his death in 1901, Böcklin had achieved the stature of a legend. Numerous eulogies were published. *Kunst für Alle* dedicated a special issue to him with a tribute by Hugo von Tschudi.[49] *Deutsche Kunst und Dekoration*, published in Darmstadt, included an encomium which began, "His art was virile! His art was rich! His art shone with magnificent splendor!"[50] The stylish Munich periodical *Jugend* also devoted an issue to him. The cover was inscribed "In Memoriam" and featured a drawing of the artist and his friend, the Swiss writer Gottfried Keller (who had died in 1890), embraced by a bare-bosomed allegorical figure who could only represent Immortality.[51] Hugo von Hofmannsthal added a new prologue to his play, *The Death of Titian*, originally written in 1892. The play was re-enacted in Munich in Böcklin's memory; the pro-

logue was a tribute to the artist, who was described as a magician of such might that he contracted a "secret bond" with Nature herself.[52]

Among those who paid homage to Böcklin was the poet Stefan George, who celebrated him in a poem titled with his name:

> Because of you we stand with lifted foreheads
> Instead of weeping through a barren darkness,
> And only you—O warder, thanks!—protected
> The sacred fire through an age of ice.[53]

George was among the most important of the *Kulturkritiker,* as he contributed to a revival of German poetry at the end of the century after decades dominated by prose. He kept himself aloof from what he perceived as the vulgarity of modern society by surrounding himself with a group of chosen disciples. He viewed Böcklin as an artist who had courageously furthered the Romantic tradition in painting during the decades after the middle of the century, at a time when realism was the most important direction in art and literature, and thus "protected the sacred fire through an age of ice." George celebrated Böcklin as an artist who painted what he imagined, rather than what he saw.

Among all of this tumult of acclaim, few voices of dissent were heard until the critic Julius Meier-Graefe set out to deflate Böcklin's reputation with a sharpened pen. As one of the original founders of *Pan,* Meier-Graefe had at first admired Böcklin but he soon had an encounter that persuaded him to change his opinion. After the publication of the first issue in 1895, he went on a trip to Paris, where he met Toulouse-Lautrec. He returned to Berlin with a radically altered concept of art, as well as with a lithograph by Lautrec, a portrait of Marcelle Lender, which he proposed to publish as a supplement to the next issue of *Pan.*[54] The ensuing dispute has been described by Kenworth Moffett, who tells us that the other members of the editorial staff were less than enchanted with the lithograph. They found it crude and inartistic. Meier-Graefe fell into an argument with Bodenhausen, who said that it was "poison." Meier-Graefe proclaimed grandly that he would take "Poison against obstinacy! Poison against inflated metaphysics! Poison against Elysian Fields, against Walkyries and Siegfrieds, against the whole moth-eaten mess!"[55] Bodenhausen inquired if Meier-Graefe had not himself promoted this "moth-eaten mess" in the first issue of *Pan.* Meier-Graefe admitted that he had, but maintained that he was "finished with the household deities."[56]

The work of Böcklin and his followers seemed suddenly to Meier-Graefe to be tired, old-fashioned, wearily elaborate. The art of Lautrec, on the other hand, seemed simple, fresh, based directly on life rather than encumbered with the heavy burden of literature. Meier-Graefe's new enthusiasm for Lautrec and for French art led him to attempt to revolutionize *Pan,* which he hoped to transform into a forum for the international avant-garde. But the other members of the association wanted the periodical to continue to emphasize German art. The controversy culminated in the ouster of Meier-Graefe, Dehmel, and Bierbaum from the *Pan* staff.[57]

Meier-Graefe subsequently became the self-appointed champion of French art in Germany. He rebelled against the parochialism of the German art-world, the narrow nationalism that had led many Germans to dismiss the art of other countries throughout the nineteenth century and especially after the Franco-Prussian War. In 1904, he published his *Entwicklungsgeschichte der modernen Kunst (Developmental History of Modern Art)*. Despite its title, this influential book was not a true history but a series of rather disconnected essays dealing primarily with nineteenth-century French painting. Meier-Graefe viewed the history of modern art as a direct, logical, linear development from the work of Delacroix through Courbet and Manet to French Impressionism. He dismissed as aberrant those artists who did not fit into this linear progression; the work of Böcklin he viewed as an obstacle between Germany and the creation of genuine art. By genuine art, Meier-Graefe meant Impressionism, which represented to him the apogee of modern painting.

Meier-Graefe sniped at Böcklin in his *Entwicklungsgeschichte*. The following year, he launched a full-scale campaign against the artist with the publication of his book, *Der Fall Böcklin (The Case of Böcklin)*. The title referred to Nietzsche's pamphlet, *Der Fall Wagner* (1888), likewise an attempt to debunk an artist so enshrouded with the trappings of legend that to approach him with less than reverence was to incur the accusation of blasphemy. In his book, Meier-Graefe charged that German society was sick, just as the German view of art was sick. The sanctity in which Böcklin was held was symptom of that sickness. To make this point, Meier-Graefe contrasted the early work of Böcklin, professing to admire it, to the later works upon which the artist's fame depended. He extolled the virtues of the *Centaur and Nymph* (Nationalgalerie, Berlin), painted about 1855, describing the picture in terms of its colors. He mentioned the blue kerchief in the foreground, which picks up the softer blue of the mountains in the background. The interplay of color is the true subject of the picture, rather than the mythological theme which is the ostensible subject, according to Meier-Graefe, who viewed the early Böcklin as a master of color in the service of the picture plane, comparable to Corot. Here Meier-Graefe reflected the ideas of French *art pour l'art* theory, recalling those expounded by Maurice Denis in his famous article in *Art et Critique* of 1890, in which he wrote: "Remember that a painting—before it is a battlehorse, a nude women, or some anecdote—is essentially a flat surface covered with colors assembled in a certain order."[58] According to Meier-Graefe, the subject of Böcklin's *Centaur and Nymph* "disappears," since the subject is of small importance in comparison to the color harmony. In speaking of such a picture, he said, one should not speak of trees, nymphs, or centaurs, but of lines, planes, and colors. This "lack of subject" is characteristic of all Böcklin's successful early paintings.[59]

However, Meier-Graefe maintained, Böcklin's work changed as time went on because the goals of the artist changed. The subject came to intrude on the works more and more. Meier-Graefe unfavorably compared the later paintings, such as *The Elysian Fields* or *The Isle of the Dead*, to the early

ones. He felt that Böcklin's later work had nothing in common with true art. The use of bright colors and crude, simple forms served only, in his view, to cover up the lack of unity in the later works, "like a piano player who tries to hide his lack of skill by banging harder on the keys." The later paintings became worse and worse, until nothing was evident to the viewer except the obvious symbolism. As an example of this, Meier-Graefe selected Böcklin's *Self-portrait with Fiddling Death*, of 1872 (Nationalgalerie, Berlin). He asked, does this painting bring about that divine liberation from existence afforded by true art? No, he argued, because the picture stimulates thoughts, random thoughts which cannot ennoble the viewer. True art has nothing to do with thought, Meier-Graefe believed; rather it serves the highest activity of which the human mind is capable—pure perception (*Empfindung*).[60] Böcklin's early pictures showed "true art" but were despised by the "stupid masses." His later work, which abandoned all connections to true art, became enormously popular for all the wrong reasons. Böcklin led astray those artists who followed him and corrupted the taste of the people; thus, Meier-Graefe wrote, he did a disservice to art and injured the German people. Upon consideration, the critic concluded,

> One realizes that all of the false assumptions of so many different types in our fatherland represent only symptoms of one single phenomenon; a complicated state of affairs which has come into being in our country since the new *Reich* with its soldiers and officials, its formidable industry, its abundant money. It is impossible to succeed to the goal of what we call harmony in our teaching of art with these things alone, be they ever so powerful. The total picture is called culture. What Böcklin needed, what modern Germany lacks, is in the last analysis the same thing. The case of Böcklin is the case of Germany.[61]

Meier-Graefe thus disapproved of Böcklin for several reasons. First of all, he rejected Böcklin's work because of its reliance on subject matter. The pure, disinterested Kantian contemplation of color harmonies and other formal qualities was, for Meier-Graefe, the proper response evoked by true art. Böcklin, on the other hand, believed that the purpose of art was to create an emotional response in the viewer, less through the form of the work than through the subject. His pictures usually emphasized some kind of narrative and he advised his students, "One doesn't paint because of the colors; colors are merely the means to an end, which is to tell something."[62] Meier-Graefe found this concern with narrative reprehensible; Böcklin's pictures seemed to him crude and vulgar in their emphasis on elaborate subjects. This crudeness and vulgarity, he believed, were only a reflection of the crudeness and vulgarity of German society in the second *Reich*. Meier-Graefe adopted the role of a critic of German culture, but unlike other *Kulturkritiker*, he came to bury Böcklin, not to praise him.

Böcklin's popularity, Meier-Graefe thought, revealed that Germany suffered from a lack of sensitivity, a lack of true culture. He undoubtedly wrote his book just because Böcklin was so popular. No matter how much he disliked Böcklin's work, he would never have found it necessary to debunk it if the artist had not been held in such high esteem by so many. One

feels that Böcklin's fame was in fact one of the most important reasons that Meier-Graefe disliked his pictures. Much later, Meier-Graefe wrote,

> It was not the worthlessness of Böcklin's work...that was important—we had a plethora of bad pictures—but the type and the intensity of the admiration [it aroused].... Many [of his admirers] saw in Böcklin...the creator of a new German symbol. This is the bacillus. He poisoned the intellectuals of the race.[63]

The critic abhorred the fact that German intellectuals, like his friends Dehmel and Bierbaum, supported the very same artist whose work was purchased by the vulgar *parvenu* middle classes with their "abundant money," the same artist who was admired by the "stupid masses." Like so many critics of the culture of Imperial Germany, Meier-Graefe was an elitist. He conceived of the true artist as a Nietzschean individualist, a giant who dares defy the mob. If Böcklin had suffered all his life from the incomprehension of the public like his friend, the painter Hans von Marées (on whom Meier-Graefe wrote favorably), then he would never have aroused Meier-Graefe's enmity. The lack of recognition accorded to Böcklin's early work was not enough, in Meier-Graefe's eyes, to assure his greatness. It is fascinating to note that the entire trajectory of Böcklin's reputation was a kind of self-perpetuating spiral. It was his defiant independence of the art world in his early life that caused his paintings to be neglected. This independence caused him to be seen as an existential hero by the intelligentsia of the nineties and contributed to his enormous fame around the turn of the century. This fame, in turn, led Meier-Graefe to attack Böcklin's reputation and contributed to its decline in the following decades. One could almost say that Böcklin became famous because he had been neglected and that he then became neglected because he had been famous.

Although it probably cannot be maintained that Meier-Graefe single-handedly destroyed Böcklin's reputation, the effects of his book were certainly profound and long-lasting. *Der Fall Böcklin* dropped into German society like a bomb, created an explosive controversy with repercussions lasting for years. Thus blasted, the esteem in which Böcklin was held by the intelligentsia began immediately to dwindle away. The poet Richard Dehmel, who had praised Böcklin as a god who "holds all nature in his soul" (quoted above), found that after reading Meier-Graefe's book his ardor had cooled. In a letter to the critic, he half-heatedly defended Böcklin, saying, "I know no one who did not shiver at the first sight of Böcklin's pictures." He concluded indecisively, "Böcklin was not a great painter, perhaps—who knows, he wasn't a great artist, either. But nevertheless he was a great creator. A great man, but dangerous, as you have proven."[64]

The painter was not without his defenders. The most frequent response to Meier-Graefe was to counter-attack. Meier-Graefe was accused of being unpatriotic, of furthering French art at the expense of German art. He was charged with being insensitive to the German spirit, held to be so perfectly embodied by Böcklin. The issue became inflamed by German nationalism. Meier-Graefe's internationalism was seen as treason. The gathering miasma

of anti-Semitism in Imperial Germany led some, like one Ernst Schnur, to suggest that Meier-Graefe was part of a Jewish conspiracy to undermine German art.[65] As Peter Paret has shown in his book on the Berlin Secession, the battle over modernism was more intense, bitter, and angry in Germany than elsewhere in Europe. The derision meeting the French Impressionists in Paris seemed mild in comparison to the hatred aroused by the German Impressionists in Berlin twenty years later. This was in part because the German emperor Kaiser Wilhelm II took a close personal interest in the doings of the official state-supported art organizations, apparently regarding them as his own personal toys. When the disaffected modernists broke away from the Berlin academy to form a Secession under the leadership of Max Liebermann, the emperor and his supporters viewed this artistic rebellion, not only as a personal affront, but as virtual subversion. Modernism came to be perceived as akin to treason and, because Liebermann was Jewish (along with other leaders of the Secession), it became equated, in the fuzzy minds of some, with a kind of Jewish conspiracy against the state.[66] Böcklin's name became a political football in the struggle between the modernists and the artistic conservatives. Perhaps it was fortunate for the artist that he died at the height of his fame and that he did not live to see his name tossed about.

In the furor, it was generally overlooked that Böcklin had not been German, but Swiss; that he had disliked Germany; and that he had elected to spend most of his life in Italy. These matters were found to be of minor consequence. Böcklin was defended by a professor of art history at the university of Heidelberg, who maintained that the artist's choice of Italy as a home was actual proof that he was indeed a truly German artist and was characteristic of that type of German who, "driven by irresistible forces, sought the south."[67] This professor, Henry Thode, was Richard Wagner's son-in-law and a tireless champion of German art. In 1905, he held a series of public lectures attracting an audience of almost a thousand people, in which he supported Böcklin and attacked Meier-Graefe. Thode proclaimed,

> Meier-Graefe's utterances are the consequence, which I have long expected, of a concept of art that has recently been cherished by the fanatical admirers of modern French Impressionism. These people have gone so far as to maintain that Manet is a genius, worthy of comparison to the greatest artists of all time, and that we are indebted to him and to the French disciples of his direction, such as Renoir, Monet, Degas, Seurat, and Signac, for an entirely new artistic view of nature of the highest significance, and in consequence, a new aesthetic insight and doctrine which begins a great new epoch of art.... Since this French art stands in direct opposition to original German art, the latter had to be pushed aside in favor of French art, as in Meier-Graefe's *Entwicklungsgeschichte*, where it is even treated with contempt. So it has happened that masters of a particularly German type, like Thoma and Böcklin, have been submitted to the scorn of a critique which attempts to point out the inartistic, even anti-artistic, qualities of their work. These lectures are...a protest against that one-sided concept of art which promotes the foreign, and which is being forced upon Germany from Berlin.[68]

Thode made little attempt to analyze the characteristics of that "truly German" art which, he felt, was exemplified in the work of Böcklin and Thoma and which was being undermined by a seditious conspiracy. The following lines may be taken as an example of Thode's notion of pictorial analysis:

> That is great, that is German art:...the strong expression of emotion, universalism, truth to nature, and the most lively fantasy. Thus we perceive a forceful testimony of the Germans as their concept of art: every appearance is a revelation of the essential; and only in the elucidation of the all-embracing unity of man and nature does the soul find the necessity to reveal its inner life, its complete satisfaction.[69]

Thode defined German art in terms inherited from Romanticism: vague, grandiose generalizations like "emotion," "soul," "unity of art and nature." The Germans had long seen themselves possessed of a depth of feeling and peculiar sensitivity to nature not shared by other European peoples. Böcklin's work was thought to exemplify these German traits. The lines were drawn; to defend Böcklin was to defend Germany.

The great Swiss art historian Heinrich Wölfflin attempted to take a more reasoned stance; he wanted to defend Böcklin on pictorial rather than nationalistic grounds. Wölfflin wrote several essays on the artist over the years, in which he described Böcklin as a "classicist" in terms he himself set out in his famous *Kunstgeschichtliches Grundbegriffe (Principles of Art History)* in 1915. He selected Böcklin's picture *Odysseus and Calypso* of 1883 (Kunstmuseum, Basel) as the most perfect example of this classicism because of its bracketed composition and architectonic structure. He found the picture "virile" and "powerful" because of its "simplification, concentration, and clarity."[70] Wölfflin thus praised Böcklin's work for its formal qualities, the same grounds on which Meier-Graefe had attacked it. The art historian conveniently overlooked the many paintings by Böcklin which could not so easily fit into his system of polarities.

As time went on and as modernism succeeded, Böcklin's work found fewer and fewer champions. The most common response to a mention of his name came to be derision, rather than acclaim. This decline in his reputation was noted by the English writer E. M. Forster, who, in his novel *Howards End* (1910), has a character remark:

> The German is always on the lookout for beauty.... My blood boils...when I listen to the tasteful contempt of the average [Englishman] for things Teutonic, whether they're Böcklin or [something else]..."Oh, Böcklin," they say: "he strains after beauty, he peoples Nature with gods too consciously." Of course, Böcklin strains, because he wants something—beauty and all the other intangible gifts that are floating around the world. So his landscapes don't come off.[71]

Forster had a sense of history. He understood the cyclic workings of taste and commented:

The Earth as an artistic cult has had its day, and the literature of the near future will probably ignore the country and seek inspiration from the town. One can understand the reaction. Of Pan and the elemental forces, the public has heard a little too much—they seem Victorian...and those who care for the earth with sincerity may wait long ere the pendulum swings back to her again.[72]

The pendulum swung for Böcklin from fame to obscurity. He was soon almost forgotten and his work received little appreciation except from a few artists who took an anti-modernist stance, like Giorgio de Chirico. Chirico went to Munich to study in 1906 and there he painted overtly Böcklinesque canvases. By 1910, he was beginning to develop his characteristic style of painting, depicting mysterious figures and enigmatic juxtapositions of unrelated objects. James Thrall Soby has shown that Chirico adopted forms from Böcklin's paintings in his transitional works of around that time.[73] We may also find remnants of these forms even in Chirico's later paintings. One of the recurring motifs in his mature works is a tall cryptic figure wrapped tightly in a cloak or a shroud, which seems to be a quotation from Böcklin's *Odysseus and Calypso* or even a reference to the boat-borne mourner in *The Isle of the Dead*. This image appears in several of Chirico's pictures, for example, *Melancholy of a Beautiful Day* (1913; private collection, Brussels).

Chirico was perhaps influenced less by Böcklin's forms than by the dream-like mood evoked by many of his paintings. In 1920, Chirico published an appreciation of Böcklin in *Il Convegno,* where he wrote,

> Arnold Böcklin's metaphysical power always springs from the precision and definition of a decided apparition...Each of his works evokes that same disconcerting shock of surprise we all feel when we meet an unknown person whom we think we have perhaps seen once before, although we do not know where or when....[74]

Chirico's paintings had a great influence on the work of the Surrealists during the 1920s and 1930s. He also passed on, to some of them at least, his admiration for Böcklin. Salvador Dali was inspired by Böcklin and rework-ed Böcklinesque motifs in several of his paintings, for example, his *True Picture of Arnold Böcklin's "Isle of the Dead" at the Hour of the Angelus* of 1932 (Von der Heydt-Museum der Stadt, Wuppertal). He also proposed making Surrealist objects based upon themes from Böcklin's pictures, such as a "Böcklin-telephone," to be marked with a silver plate engraved with an allegory of death and installed within a cypress tree.[75]

Dali was not the only Surrealist to draw upon Böcklin. It has been sug-gested that the remote and secretive figure of Odysseus in *Odysseus and Calypso* influenced the work, not only of Chirico, but also that of Böcklin's fellow Swiss, Alberto Giacometti; some of the phallic sculptures of Giacomet-ti's Surrealist period resemble the form of Odysseus, especially his *Figure in a Garden* (private collection, Fontainebleau; 1931-33).[76] But esteem and emulation of the Surrealists could not prevent the eclipse of Böcklin's reputa-tion. He was never really recognized by the French surrealists like André

Breton, who were the real power in the movement, and without their support his fame continued to subside and he was all but forgotten outside Germany and Switzerland.

Within the German-speaking world he was not quite forgotten but he was no longer idolized. When, in 1917, the *Kunstverein* in Basel mounted an exhibition of his paintings, the response was hardly earth-shaking. The artist Karl Burckhardt spoke at the opening, delivering an address that reflected the somber mood of a world at war. He remarked, somewhat sadly,

> The last great Böcklin exhibition of 1897 was far more colorful than that of today; it was accompanied by celebrations, festivities, and flags. A giant wave of enthusiasm had, it seemed, swept the entire civilized world. I believed, as a young man with exalted feelings, that great and genuine art represented a power in the world...Those present who imbibed this always brilliant, victorious Böcklinesque world at an age of youthful susceptibility will understand how great the subsequent disillusionment was when the civilized world dropped its idol in the first onslaught of skepticism. A long period of paralysis and indifference ensued, when everyone who believed in Böcklin with the old enthusiasm was decried as backward and idealistic.... This time has lasted up to the present day.[77]

For decades, Böcklin's name remained a sore subject, reviled by many and supported by others. Carl Georg Heise, in an essay written in 1936, remarked, "To write about Böcklin means war."[78] The artist's work underwent a brief, dubious revival of popularity in the Nazi era. Böcklin was one of Hitler's favorite painters. The *Führer* ordered the acquisition of thirteen paintings for his private collection, including *The Elysian Fields* and a later version of *The Isle of the Dead*, which were removed from various German museums, particularly from the National Gallery in Berlin. Many of them have disappeared and were presumably destroyed in 1945. The interest of the Nazis meant that Böcklin's work was further discredited and it became even more unfashionable during the period directly after the war.

As if to prove the cyclic nature of all things, there have been some recent signs of a renewal of interest in Böcklin. In the last twenty-five years or so, there have been several important exhibitions of his work. The first of these was held at the *Kunstverein* in Frankfurt in 1964.[79] In 1971, the Arts Council of Great Britain sponsored an exhibition of the work of Böcklin at the Hayward Gallery in London.[80] Three years later, in 1974, the Kunstmuseum in Düsseldorf put on an exhibition of Böcklin's work.[81] The catalogue and the exhibition were large and ambitious, yet the show was not a popular success.[82] Sparse attendance indicated that Böcklin had not yet been rehabilitated in Germany at that time. In 1977, in honor of Böcklin's one hundred and fiftieth birthday, the Kunstmuseum in Basel mounted a large exhibition of his work, the most extensive in recent years.[83] It appears that the artist has never been forgotten in his home city. In the same year, Rolf Andree made an enormous contribution to modern Böcklin scholarship with the publication of his massive *catalogue raisonné*, titled *Arnold Böcklin: Die Gemälde* (Basel and Munich, 1977).

When judged by the formalist aesthetic prevailing in the twentieth century, Böcklin's works are found wanting and to contemporary eyes his pictures still seem somewhat absurd. Yet taste cannot be the only arbiter of historical importance; Böcklin's historical role cannot be denied. In time, as the principles of modernism are increasingly called into question, he will no doubt assume his rightful place in the history of art. Perhaps Böcklin will soon be seen, not as the object of either reverence or ridicule, but as an artist of considerable originality and imagination whose work and the controversy surrounding it can grant to us today an insight into the fears and aspirations of Imperial Germany, as well as into the mechanisms of critical evaluation. The case of Böcklin clearly demonstrates that, in Germany at least, modernist criticism was based upon the concept of an intellectual elite, allied to the Nietzschean idea of the *Uebermensch*. It also shows how the struggle against modernism in that country was political, nationalistic, and often even racist. And, since Böcklin's reputation was largely established by Gurlitt and destroyed by Meier-Graefe, it exemplifies the historical development of the power of both the art dealer and the art critic in modern society.

Notes

Much of the material in this article is drawn from my Ph.D. dissertation, *Classical Antiquity in the Paintings of Arnold Böcklin* (University of California at Berkeley, 1979), filed under my former name, Elizabeth Putz. I would like to take this opportunity to express my thanks to Professor Peter Selz and Professor L.D. Ettlinger, who oversaw my dissertation and encouraged my research in this area.

[1]Böcklin's great fame around the turn of the century is attested to by the vast body of literature published on him. Witness the huge bibliography in Rolf Andree's monumental *catalogue raisonné, Arnold Böcklin: Die Gemälde* (Basel and Munich, 1977), pp. 548-62. It appears as if everyone who ever knew Böcklin published their reminiscences of him between 1895 and 1915 when his reputation was at its height, including his wife, his son, at least three of his students, and several friends. These memoirs are an invaluable source of information about the artist for the modern scholar.

[2]Ferdinand Runkel and Carlo Böcklin, *Neben meiner Kunst* (Berlin, 1909), p. 19. This book is a reminiscence by the artist's son, edited by Runkel.

[3]Gustav Floerke, *Zehn Jahre mit Böcklin* (Munich, 1901), p. 14. Floerke was one of the artist's students. (Unless otherwise specified, all translations are mine.)

[4]R. Oeri-Sarasin, "Beiträge zum Verhältnis zwischen Jacob Burchkardt und Arnold Böcklin," *Basler Jahrbuch* (Basel, 1917), p. 270.

[5]Angela Böcklin, *Böcklin Memoiren: Tagebuchblätter von Böcklins Gattin Angela*, Ferdinand Runkel, ed. (Berlin, 1910), pp. 80-83. Despite its title, this book was not a true diary, but an "as told to" memoir, written by Runkel from Frau Böcklin's reminiscences. Her description of the terrible times she and her family underwent in Munich in 1858 is very affecting.

[6]*Ibid.*, p. 91.

[7]W.Scheidig, *Die Geschichte der Weimarer Malerschule* (Weimar, 1971), p. 36.

[8]Oeri-Sarasin, p. 270.

[9]Heinrich Alfred Schmid, "Böcklin und Jacob Burckhardt," *Jahresbericht der Kunstsammlung Basel, 1927,* 24 n.s. (Basel, 1928), p. 28.

[10]Rudolf Schick, *Tagebuch-Aufzeichnungen aus den Jahren 1866-1868-1869 über Arnold Böcklin* (Berlin, 1901), pp. 112-13. Schick was Böcklin's student and assistant.

[11]Floerke, p. 228, p. 105.

[12]Otto Lasius, *Arnold Böcklin aus den Tagebüchern von Otto Lasius (1884-1889)* (Berlin, 1903), p. 129. Lasius was yet another of Böcklin's students who jumped on the band-wagon at the time of Böcklin's great fame around the turn of the century to publish his reminiscences of his teacher.

[13]*Ibid.*, p. 115.

[14]Schick's letter was published by Angela Böcklin in her memoirs, pp. 217-18.

[15]Floerke, p. 24.

[16]The controversy over this picture has been documented by Andree, p. 400.

[17]Floerke, p. 32.

[18]Guido Hauck, *Arnold Böcklin: Gefilde der Seligen und Goethes Faust* (Berlin, 1884).

[19]Runkel and Böcklin, p. 144.

[20]A. von Salis, "Erinnerungen an Arnold Böcklin nach Tagebuchnotizen eines Studenten," *Basler Jahrbuch* (Basel, 1902), p. 7.

[21]Floerke, p. 184.

[22]*Ibid.*, p. 52.

[23]For a study of the development of *plein air* painting in Düsseldorf, see an article by Heinrich Appel, "Düsseldorf Landschaftmalerei im 19. Jahrhunderts," *Zweihundert Jahre Kunstakademie Düsseldorf,* E. Trier, ed. (Düsseldorf, 1973), pp. 85-100.

[24]Schick, p. 13.

[25]Floerke, p. 17.

[26]Schick, p. 202.

[27]According to the dealer's brother, Cornelius Gurlitt, in his book *Die deutsche Kunst seit 1800* (Berlin, 4th. ed., 1924), p. 408.

[28]These etchings have been reproduced by Hans W. Singer, in his catalogue of Klinger's graphic works, *Max Klingers Radierungen, Stiche, und Steindrucke* (Berlin, 1909), pp. 133-35.

[29]Basel, Kunstmuseum, *Arnold Böcklin 1827-1901* (Basel and Stuttgart, 1977), p. 170, p. 40.

[30]Gurlitt, p. 409.

[31]Albert Fleiner, *Mit Arnold Böcklin* (Frauenfeld, 1915), p. 42.

[32]Böcklin's wife complained in her memoirs that Gurlitt cheated and misused her husband. Whether or not this is true, it is certainly true that Böcklin *felt* misused. In an angry letter of June 1889, Gurlitt wrote to the artist, complaining about the scandalous remarks that he had heard Böcklin was making about him, and threatened to break off business relations with him. This letter was published by Frau Böcklin, pp. 306-09. Needless to say, Gurlitt never followed through with his threat.

[33]The classic study of the rise of the German middle-class as reflected in the novel and other literature of the time is E. Kohn-Bramstedt's *Aristocracy and the Middle Classes in Germany: Social Types in German Literature 1830-1900* (London, 1937). A lively account of German literature in its social context may be found in E. Sagarra, *Tradition and Revolution: German Literature and Society, 1830-1890* (London, 1971).

[34]Fritz Stern, *The Politics of Cultural Despair: A Study in the Rise of Germanic Ideology* (Berkeley, 1961).

[35][Julius Langbehn], in excerpts from *Rembrandt als Erzieher,* published in *Kunst für Alle,* 5, 13 (April 1, 1980), p. 198.

[36]For a study of the influence of Nietzsche on German literature before World War I, see Gunter Martens, *Vitalismus und Expressionismus: Ein Beitrag zur Genese und Deutung expressionistischer Stilstrukturen und Motive* (Stuttgart, Berlin, Cologne, and Mainz, 1971).

[37]The Darmstadt colony has been thoroughly documented in a lavish exhibition and catalogue put out by the art museums in Darmstadt, *Ein Dokument deutscher Kunst* (5 vols., Darmstadt, 1976).

[38]K. Breysig, ''Über Kunst und Leben,'' *Grossherzog Ernst Ludwig und die Ausstellung der Künstler-Kolone in Darmstadt* (Darmstadt, 1901), p. 41.

[39]An account of the Secessionist movement may by found in Siegfried Wichmann, *Secession: Europäische Kunst um die Jahrhundertwende* (Munich, 1964).

[40]The political and historical events surrounding the foundation of the Berlin Secession have been recounted in a fascinating book by Peter Paret, *The Berlin Secession: Modernism and Its Enemies in Imperial Germany* (Cambridge, Mass., and London, 1980).

[41]*Ibid.,* p. 84, p. 59 (note).

[42]An account of the events surrounding the foundation of *Pan* may be found in Kenworth Moffett's *Meier-Graefe as Art Critic* (Munich, 1973).

[43]In his *catalogue raisonné* of Böcklin's work, Rolf Andree lists 16 paintings on the subject of Pan and 13 more on the subject of fauns or satyrs, making these goat-footed creatures among the most frequently depicted subjects in Böcklin's entire *oeuvre.* Andree, p. 566.

[44]Max Klinger described this banquet in a letter of July 22, 1894, published in *Briefe von Max Klinger,* Hans W. Singer, ed., (Leipzig, 1924), pp. 123-24.

[45]Max Lehr, *Arnold Böcklin* (Munich, 1904), p. 8.

[46]Richard Dehmel, *Ausgewählte Briefe aus den Jahren 1883-1907* (Berlin, 1922), p. 16.

[47]Jules Laforgue, "Le Salon de Berlin," *Gazette des Beaux-Arts*, 28 (1883), pp. 172-73.

[48]Charles Saunier, "L'art Germanique: Boecklin, Stuck," *La Revue blanche*, 11 (1896), pp. 270-80.

[49]Hugo von Tschudi, "Arnold Böcklin," *Kunst für Alle*, 16, 11 (1901), pp. 251-56.

[50]*Deutsche Kunst und Dekoration*, Bd. 7 (1901), pp. 269-72.

[51]Jugend, 6, 19 (1901).

[52]Hugo von Hofmannsthal, "For a Commemoration on the Death of Arnold Böcklin," *The Lyrical Poems of Hofmannsthal*, ed. and trans., Charles Wharton Stork (New Haven, 1918), pp. 70-71.

[53]Stefan George, "Boecklin," reprinted in the catalogue by the Berlin Nationalgalerie, *Gemälde und Zeichnungen von Arnold Böcklin* (Berlin, 1927), pp. 2-3. Translation by Olga Marx and Ernst Morwitz, *The Works of Stefan George* (Chapel Hill, 1949), p. 160.

[54]Moffett, p. 16.

[55]*Ibid.*, p. 17. Translation by Moffett.

[56]*Ibid.*, p. 17

[57]*Ibid.*, p. 18.

[58]Maurice Denis, *Théories* (Paris, 1912). Quoted and translated by Linda Nochlin, *Impressionism and Post-Impressionism 1874-1904* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J., 1966), p. 187.

[59]Julius Meier-Graefe, *Der Fall Böcklin* (Stuttgart, 1905), p. 35.

[60]L.D. Ettlinger has pointed out that Meier-Graefe's theories were drawn not only from French *art pour l'art* theory, but also from the idealist formalist concepts of the German aesthetic philosopher Konrad Fiedler. The concept of pure perception as the goal of art is derived from Fiedler's writings and related, of course, to the whole German tradition of idealist philosophy going back to Kant. See Ettlinger, "Julius Meier-Graefe: An Embattled German Critic," *Burlington Magazine*, 117, 871 (Oct. 1975), pp. 672-74.

[61]Meier-Graefe, pp. 269-70.

[62]Lasius, p. 7.

[63]J. Meier-Graefe, "Was wird aus der Kunst?" *Neue Rundschau*, 44, 7 (1933), pp. 11-12.

[64]Dehmel, p. 72.

[65]Ernst Schnur, *Der Fall Meier-Graefe* (Berlin, 1905).

[66]Peter Paret, *The Berlin Secession: Modernism and Its Enemies in Imperial Germany* (Cambridge, Mass., and London, 1980), esp. pp. 85-112.

[67]Henry Thode, *Böcklin und Thoma: Acht Vorträge über neudeutsche Malerei* (Heidelberg, 1905), p. 145.

[68]*Ibid.*, p. 3.

[69]*Ibid.*, p. 168.

[70]Heinrich Wölfflin, "Der klassische Böcklin (Odysseus und Kalypso)," *Festschrift zur Eröffnung des Kunstmuseums Basel* (Basel, 1936), pp. 248-52.

[71]E.M. Forster, *Howards Ends* (New York, 1961), pp. 75-76.

[72]*Ibid.*, p. 108.

[73]James Thrall Soby, *Giorgio de Chirico* (New York, reprint ed., 1966), p. 25.

[74]Giorgio de Chirico, "Arnold Böcklin," *Il Convegno*, 4 (Milan, 1920), p. 50. Trans., Soby, p. 27.

[75]Salvador Dali, *The Secret Life of Salvador Dali*, trans., Haakon M. Chevalier (New York, 1942), p. 271.

[76]Reinhold Hohl, "Odysseus und Kalypso: Der Mythus der existentiellen Impotenz bei Arnold Böcklin und Alberto Giacometti," Kunstmuseum, Basel, *Arnold Böcklin 1827-1901* (Basel and Stuttgart, 1977), pp. 115-18.

[77]Karl Burckhardt, quoted by H.A. Schmid, "Böcklin und die alten Meister," *Gesammelte Kunsthistorische Schriften* (Leipzig, Strassburg, Zurich, 1933), p. 260.

[78]Carl Georg Heise, "Arnold Böcklin," reprinted in Kunstmuseum, Düsseldorf, *Arnold Böcklin 1827-1901* (Düsseldorf, 1974), p. 10.

[79]Frankfurt, Kunstverein, *Arnold Böcklin* (Frankfurt, 1964).

[80]Arts Council of Great Britain and the Pro Helvetia Foundation, *Arnold Böcklin 1827-1901*, essay and catalogue by Rolf Andree (London, 1971), p. 7.

[81]Düsseldorf, Kunstmuseum, *Arnold Böcklin* (Düsseldorf, 1974).

[82]Wend von Kalnein, director of the Kunstmuseum Düsseldorf, in conversation in 1976.

[83]Basel, Kunstmuseum, *Arnold Böcklin 1827-1901* (Basel and Stuttgart, 1977).

A Psychoanalytic Understanding of Aesthetic Disinterestedness

By Donald Kuspit

Psychoanalysis has had much to say about art since Freud's study of Leonardo (1911). However, it has been more interested in expanding the sense of art's content to include unconscious material than in analyzing the psychological purpose and import of form. This is not simply because of the difficulty of understanding the nature and motivation of form, but in deference to Freud's assertion, in *The Moses of Michelangelo* (1914), that "the subject-matter of works of art has a stronger attraction for me than their formal and technical qualities....I am unable rightly to appreciate many of the methods used and effects obtained in art." (SE, 13, 214.) He sets himself at odds—in my opinion deliberately—with the artist, whom, he acknowledges, "first and foremost" values the work of art's formal and technical qualities.

One can argue that he is juxtaposing his mature scientific interest in the psychology of art with the artist's unscientific—and so implicitly immature, "unrealistic'—aesthetic interest in form, but there is more to it than that. For his resistance to the analysis of form—which is what I regard his unappreciation of it to be—is a matter of principle. And yet, however reluctantly, he offers an analysis of sorts, for by psychoanalytic definition, as it were, the

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creation of form is on a par with symptom-formation and dream-formation. Its mechanisms are reducible to theirs, that is, to the automatism of condensation and displacement. In *The Claims of Psycho-analysis to Scientific Interest* (1913) Freud writes that the artist "represents his most personal wishful phantasies as fulfilled; but they only become a work of art when they have undergone a transformation which softens what is offensive in them, conceals their personal origin and, by obeying the laws of beauty, bribes other people with a bonus of pleasure. Psycho-analysis has no difficulty in pointing out, alongside the manifest part of artistic enjoyment, another that is latent though far more potent, derived from the hidden sources of instinctual liberation." (SE, 13, 187.) Clearly, Freud is more interested in the latent than manifest content of art. The latter—the softening transformation—obscures the former. It is a disguise that must be penetrated, a mask that must be torn off, an impersonal surface that must be stripped so that the personal depth can be seen.

Please note that Freud does not state that the mask of form is a Gordian knot, only that as a psychoanalyst he is interested in what is behind it. To study the mask for its own qualities makes little sense to him; it is what can be associated with its components and over-all character that interests him. In other words, Freud's psychological realism, as it were, leads him to reduce the work of art, and what people seriously interested in art—people incorporating it into their existence on a regular basis, indeed, who cannot seem to live without it—regard as the essential part of it—its formal character—to a bit of clinical evidence.

It is not just that Freud is unappreciative of and reluctant to study form, but that the psycho-critical analysis of it as a phenomenon in and for itself would be beside the key psychoanalytic point. "Art," writes Freud, "is a conventionally accepted reality in which, thanks to artistic illusion, symbols and substitutes are able to provoke real emotions. Thus art constitutes a region halfway between a reality which frustrates wishes and the wish-fulfilling world of the imagination—a region in which, as it were, primitive man's strivings for omnipotence are still in force." (SE, 13, 188.) Here Freud gives us a cursory, dismissive "analysis" of form, assimilating it to psychoanalytic preconceptions—it is a matter of symbols and substitutes, a zone of illusion. There is no way that anyone who conceives of form in this way—reducing it to wishful content—can begin to comprehend why anyone would establish a so-called "aesthetic" interest in it. And indeed, as Harry Trosman points out, for Freud "the reaction of persons moved by art resembled a 'narcosis',"[1] which to my mind depreciates their response—into a chemical "reaction." Similarly, when Freud wrote that "the first example of an application of the analytic mode of thought to the problems of aesthetics was contained in my book on jokes," (SE, 14, 37) he in effect reduced aesthetics to a joke. Trosman remarks that "the dream resembles a bad joke whose point has been lost because the dreamer did not take sufficient care with the communicative effect."[2] Art, which presumably takes better care—although many people think modern art takes even less care than the dream with communication—is at best a good joke.

Trosman notes that psychoanalysis has moved beyond Freud in its understanding of form. Understood from an ego perspective rather than Freud's id perspective, it is the organizing and structuring factor in the work of art, and as such that which makes it consequential as art. It is the adult, as it were, rather than childish element in the work of art. In this sense it can be regarded as having a defensive function, affording, as Gilbert Rose says, a sense of mastery. Through form the artist exercises executive control of the work, as it were. But even the ego understanding of form, with its more sophisticated attitude to art than Freud's, still does not address the core of the issue for aesthetics: the way attention to form generates—indeed, the way form seems to exist to catalyze—what Trosman calls aesthetic response. The nature of form cannot be fully understood without understanding its intended function as the object of disinterested aesthetic contemplation. Trosman does not adequately characterize aesthetic response, nor does psychoanalysis, which is why, I think, that it is unable to completely unravel the riddle of form.

The British aesthetician Harold Osborne points out that "the idea of 'disinterested' attention and 'disinterested' pleasure...has remained a key notion of all systems which recognize a special mode of experience called 'aesthetic.'"[3] Since Shaftesbury, who first articulated the idea, and Kant, who developed its necessary, basic logic, what Osborne called the "disinterested attitude"—an attitude which implies not "lack of interest in the object of attention but the absence of any 'self-interest,' any considerations of advantage or utility, and indeed any interest at all other than the direct contemplation of the object and satisfaction achieved from our awareness of it"—has remained the fundament of aesthetics. Indeed, as Osborne writes, it is not necessary to know "the iconographical significance" of a "human artifact" for it to "exert an aesthetic appeal upon us." In fact, attention to iconographic content hinders aesthetic "appreciation": "the aesthetic value we ascribe to many...'denuded' art objects may be far higher than that which we find in other artifacts whose original significance and functions are known to us." Thus, aesthetics implies that psychoanalytic investigation of the latent meaning of a work of art's iconographic content is of secondary interest, the primary interest in the work of art being the quality of disinterestedness it arouses through its formal character. In a sense, psychoanalysis and aesthetics are necessarily at odds, for the former assumes there is no situation of perception that is free of human interest—even scientific observation is a sublimation of essential human curiosity about sexuality, as Freud noted in his study of Leonardo (SE, 11, 74-78)—while aesthetics regards the situation of perception of form as "disinterested." The psychoanalytic assumption, of course, is that hidden human interests lurk behind aesthetic disinterestedness, presumably the most disinterested of all modes of disinterest.

Before I offer what I hope are some valid psychoanalytic insights into aesthetic disinterestedness, and thus, however indirectly, into form—Osborne notes that "the concept of disinterestedness in theory of art had its analogue in the notion of 'fine art,' which came to prominence at the same time,"

fine art being art that seemed to exist largely as a matter of form, the inherently most "refined" component of the work of art—I think it is necessary to remark, in some detail, the theoretical characterization of aesthetic disinterestedness, about which there is an amazing consistency in aesthetic thought. As Osborne says, Shaftsbury's formulation of the concept of aesthetic disinterestedness was "more than just a new theory or a new twist to theoretical habits. It was more akin to the discovery of a new dimension of self-consciousness." The "aesthetic impulse" that had been latent in the making of artifacts became a "self-conscious motive." Indeed, it legitimated, for the first time, the concept of "art." In fact, the systematic study of art history, the development of fine art, the philosophical inquiry into art as an ontological puzzle, and the formulation of aesthetic disinterestedness, begin more or less at the same time, and are correlative recognitions of this thing called art. Aesthetic disinterestedness—interest in form—seems to be the horse that pulled this heavy art cart, for without aesthetic disinterestedness—in the words of C.W. Valentine in *The Experimental Psychology of Beauty,* the apprehension or judgment of an object "without reference to its utility or value or moral rightness...when it is merely being contemplated"—there is no sense of the art in art, and thus no sense of art as such. In general, as Paul Weiss said, aesthetic disinterestedness occurs "when, by a mere shift of attitude, we hold something away from nature and outside the web of conventional needs." We radically "distance" ourselves from it, as Edward Bullough said, fixing our attention upon its "immediately presented features," its hereness and nowness. In general, the "doctrine of aesthetic apprehension" has had an elaborate history since its first formulation by Shaftesbury. Such apprehension has been elaborated as either a kind of sensation or feeling, both modes of cognition being manifestations of the "inner sense" of "taste." Osborne regards this as the true and high road of aesthetic understanding, as distinct from "the 'expression' [of emotion] doctrines which emerged from Romanticism," for him the low and misleading road.

The most influential, telling account of aesthetic disinterestedness is that of Kant. He held that aesthetic "judgment" was a "mode of direct awareness" rather than a form of conceptual thinking (theoretical judgment), moral judgment, and judgment about utility. It is inherently subjective. It is not a judgment of the object's apparent perfection or lack of perfection. Even more, and above all, disinterestedness means no "concern for the *existence* of a thing." "Kant," writes Osborne, "went further than his predecessors...when he excluded from the aesthetic attitude not merely considerations of advantage and disadvantage, desire for possession and use, but any concern for the existence of a thing." Ultimately this meant the exclusion of any desire for it; for Kant, like Hutcheson, Burke, and other aestheticians, thought that "'interest' implies or involves *desire*": aesthetic disinterestedness was sharply separated "from the 'interested' pleasures of the senses on the ground that the latter are connected with desire."

With this assertion our psychoanalytic antennae clearly start picking up signals: the idea of aesthetic transcendence, as I would call it—I would fur-

ther qualify it as transcendence of contingency—begins to come into psychoanalytic focus. But before we psychoanalytically judge and tune in to it, let us further refine and deepen our sense of what is implied by aesthetic transcendence. It suggests a kind of judgment on existence—a recognition of and response to its essential mediocrity and misery. It implies a need to emotionally distance oneself from it, to achieve what might be regarded as a quasi-Buddhist sense of desirelessness or detachment, desire being the root of attachment to existence, attachment always leading to emotional and practical problems. No doubt the pathos of aesthetic distance can ironically be regarded as part of the pathos of existence, but it is meant to articulate transcendence of the pathos of the human-all-too-human—which is exactly what psychoanalysis delves into. Indeed, some aestheticians regard aesthetic disinterestedness as a way of operationalizing the Silenian wisdom that it is better not to have lived than to have lived. Certainly it seems one way of awakening from the (unending) nightmare of history, as James Joyce stated the problem. In general, taken on its own terms, the aesthetic attitude seems to afford a certain "superiority" to existence. The pleasure it affords is not simply a pale version of sexual pleasure, as Freud thought. The pleasure of transcendence is as strong and intense as sexual pleasure, as Pater implied, and as difficult to sustain, but they are different in kind. Roger Fry suggests as much in his critique of a Freudian approach to art,[4] as does Malevich, in his insistence that art must not serve the state or religion—they seem to have divided up existence between them—but rather articulate what he called nonobjective sensation and feeling, associated for him with the "spirit," that is, transcendence.

Moreover, while aesthetic transcendence, according to Kant and other aestheticians, is not the monopoly of art—one is able to take an aesthetic attitude to any experience, even an unpleasant toothache—art-created form (style) is a deliberately designed means of aesthetic transcendence. When Donald Kaplan quotes Lévi-Strauss's idea of art as "miniaturization" and Kris's view that it is "a simplification, a reduction of reality,"[5] or, in Kaplan's own words, "a real experiment with form, that is, with scale and reduction,"[6] and notes "the artist's reduction of interest to issues of form,"[7] Kaplan is pointing out the wide, and finally unbridgeable gap that separates the artistic fiction generated by stylistic transformation—and its attendant aesthetic effects—from the actuality of the lifeworld.

We need to acknowledge one more element in the aesthetic equation to position ourselves to understand aesthetic disinterestedness psychoanalytically, if the aestheticians will allow us to so violate it. Assuming that art is a privileged zone of aesthetic experience—tailor-made, as it were, for the cultivation of aesthetic disinterestedness—we must ask what quality artistic form has that makes it so catalytic of disinterestedness, so conducive to the experience of aesthetic transcendence. Trosman tells us: "The aesthetic response to the form of a work is contingent on the perception of a constructed unity, which resonates with the coherence and form given to the self."[8] It is the uniqueness of particular modes of unity that Freud missed or ignored in his pursuit of the unconscious content of the work of art.

Estheticians and aesthetic critics, from Oscar Wilde through Roger Fry to Clement Greenberg, have emphasized the formal unity of the work of art as its salient quality. They never speak of form alone, but of formal unity. Greenberg preferred to attend to the work's literal order of effects rather than its preconscious and unconscious order of effects, as he called them, because it was in the literal order of effects that unity emerged, while in the preconscious and unconscious order of effects—which psychoanalysis attends to— no unity of effects is likely, or indeed, possible. Even modern dissonance or disunity comes to be experienced as potential or quasi-unity, as Adorno noted, that is, as delayed or "more difficult" (than traditional) unity. It is the experience of formal unity that catalyzes aesthetic disinterestedness. It should be noted that to describe unity as a unity of opposites, as is customarily done—as a miniaturization of lifeworld and psychic conflict—is to simplify it, indeed, to undermine the complexity and subtlety of connection in a successfully unified work of art, in which all parts seem formally equivalent.

What, then, is one to psychoanalytically make of the aesthetic response of disinterestedness to formal unity? Trosman gives us one important answer in his correlation of the work of art's constructed unity with the self's struggle for coherence and form—"integrity." His assertion that the ego is the "locus" of aesthetic pleasure is a further elaboration of this.[9] His ideas make good sense, for the achievement of formal unity implies the reconciliation of conflicting formal elements—a balancing of formal forces, so to speak, which can no doubt be regarded as analogous to the balancing of psychic forces. Trosman also brings the superego into play in his analysis. He notes that there is a normative aspect to aesthetic appreciation, in that "standards of beauty...provide an ideal against which the worth of a work can be measured."[10] For Trosman such standards are connected to the artist's striving "for perfection of form...preserving some aspect of infantile narcissism in the work, which is an ideal extension of his or her self."[11] But, as Kant said, standards of beauty are not empirically provable, although making logical claim to universal validity. That is, they "ought" to be accepted but will not necessarily be. One artist's perfection is another artist's poison, as the history of art and taste readily reveal. Kaplan also notes the role of the superego in art, and culture in general. Freud, Kaplan writes, "did not regard the superego, hence culture, wholly as an imposition on autonomy...for the transpersonal aspect of the superego was, in Freud's view, a liberation of the individual from the tyrannies of personal history."[12] This seems to correlate with Kant's notion of the aesthetic judgment as "existentially" disinterested, that is, psychically liberating from personal, even sociohistorical, existence.

Certainly these, as well as other, psychoanalytic efforts to move away from a strictly psychosexual understanding of the psychology of aesthetic disinterestedness make good psychoanalytic sense. But I want to suggest that they ignore one phenomenological feature of aesthetic disinterestedness that provides a clue to an even more complete psychoanalytic understanding of it. Aestheticians agree that in aesthetic experience or appreciation there is hyperalertness or hypersensitivity to the formal elements of the work of

art. There is an intense scrutiny of them which is indifferent to their iconographic identity or narrative function. They are apprehended—cognized, "realized"—in their nameless immediacy. I think that what occurs, psychoanalytically speaking, in the contemplation of nameless immediacy is the stripping away of the psyche's sedimented identifications. The desirelessness embodied in aesthetic disinterestedness has to do with the liberation of the aesthetic appreciator from identities that are not his own, or at least are recognized as alien through aesthetic disinterestedness. This is akin to what Osborne calls, as previously noted, the denuding of the work's iconographic interests to recognize its formal core. This is not so much a kind of disavowal as a kind of neutralization of their existence, especially of its toxicity. No doubt some de-cathecting is involved, but something more crucial is at stake: the recognition that their existence is a fiction, at least in the psyche of the appreciator and in the state of aesthetic disinterestedness. In other words, an art "operation" is performed on them, on a par with the "operation" art performs on reality—attenuates and simplifies it, to the point where it finally comes to seem no more than a formal matter, even a kind of theatrical game, and thus under control. The aesthetic reduction of internal reality parallels the artistic reduction of external experience.

The upshot of this, for me, is the realization of a sense of invulnerability, which no doubt is connected with Freud's notion of omnipotence, only, as we will see, has a different point. When Oscar Wilde said that the work of art was "the only shield against the sordid perils of actual existence"[13] he was making the aesthetic point succinctly. His statement epitomizes what is psychologically at stake in the aesthetic attitude. The sense of invulnerability is the grandest, and as I hope to show, the most necessary of all illusions—delusions. It is the illusion that the formal integration of the work of art catalyzes. From the aesthetic viewpoint, we go to art to remove our selves from life, not just as an empty exercise in distancing—a temporary emotional escape—but because distance contains within itself the germ and myth of invulnerability, untouchability. Out of this the idea of the sacred grows, that is, the idea of the divineness of art. Art—or rather, the formal element in art—is compensation for and relief from the personal feeling of vulnerability that invariably comes with the recognition of impersonal reality.

But that is not the end of a possible psychoanalytic account of aesthetic disinterestedness. The sense of what Kant called "purposiveness without purpose" inherent to formally adequate art (profound formal unity) implies not only a sense of the inner harmony—"the mutual subjective harmony of our cognitive powers," among other phrasings—that comes with a sense of the fittingness of our perception to its object—as Kant put it, the sense of the perceived thing and our cognitive faculties being "adapted" to one another—but the "free and unimpeded interplay of imagination and understanding," for Kant inseparable from the "vitality" which he held "to be an essential of great art." The psychic shield which aesthetic disinterestedness is not only protects against reality, but behind the aesthetic shield a zone of psychic freedom is established. The illusion of invulnerability permits the free functioning of the psyche—allows it to become extraordinarily vital, but

something more—mind—than body is at stake. This zone of vital, free mentation—of fictive play—is akin to the zone of transitional phenomena, but something else is at stake in it: the free, seemingly irresponsible, imagination and conceptualization—they become simultaneous—of the lifeworld. It is the zone of so-called creativity.

Kant differentiated between rational or intellectual ideas, which are referred to transcendental concepts, to which experience can never be fully adequate—they "strain after something lying out beyond the confines of experience"—and aesthetic ideas, "representations of imagination" which "induce much thought, yet without the possibility of any definite thought whatever, i.e., concept, being adequate to it, and which language consequently can never get on level terms with or render completely intelligible." Authentic aesthetic disinterestedness always includes, in Osborne's words, "a feeling of something just out of grasp, a sense of something still to be apprehended, a revelation and a light just beyond reach." In creating the supreme illusion of invulnerability, form also generates the sense of mysterious revelation beyond—the upshot of the vital, free play of all the faculties of mind. Simply put, aesthetic disinterestedness permits free emotional-intellectual play, not in a regressive manner, but as a speculative mode of inquiry, a way of articulating possibility. Moreover, to call this speculative play a regressive return to fantasy—to argue that it is infantilizing—as one is undoubtedly tempted to do, is to miss the purposiveness within its apparent purposelessness: it is a free play that exists to give form to the self. Free of—psychically untouched by—the identities of others and seemingly a world unto itself like the formally unified work of art, the self in the state of aesthetic disinterestedness can speculatively imagine and conceive its own unity. At the same time, in this state of playful self-creation, as it were, it implicitly acknowledges its lack of unity. If the formal unity of art is numinous in the strict Kantian sense, that is, a regulator of possibility, then the playful positing of fictional selves—fictional integrity or unity of being—through art becomes the most transcendental of activities, in Kant's sense of the term. Beyond both sensing and reasoning, such psychic activity reminds us that the self has no final, perfect form, while at the same time speculatively positing one, that is, a transcendental illusion of selfhood. (The great variety of styles of art—modes of formal unity—testifies to the "impossibility" of final form.) At the core of art there are narcissistic concerns, as Trosman and others have argued, but they are not the residue of infantile ones. Rather, they involve the mature adult's recognition of his or her vulnerability and disintegrity—incomplete unity of being—and the use of art to posit an invulnerability and integrity of self that is never to be, that is always to remain a transcendental illusion or fiction—a necessary one for psychic survival—both by reason of nature and society. Art is not reparative regression to an old mode of being-self, but a means of progressing to a new sense of self—a means of speculatively working through to and articulating the real possibility of achieving a new sense of self. This supposedly is what psychoanalysis is also interested in, ultimately.

Notes

[1] Harry Trosman, *Freud and the Imaginative World* (Hillsdale, NJ: Analytical Press, 1985), p. 145.

[2] *Ibid.*, p. 134.

[3] Harold Osborne, *Aesthetics and Art Theory: An Historical Introduction* (London: Longmans, Green, 1968), p. 102. All subsequent allusions to aestheticians are from Osborne, chapters 6 and 7, on "Eighteenth-Century British Aesthetics" and "Kant's *Critique of Judgment.*"

[4] See Trosman, p. 137.

[5] Donald M. Kaplan, "The Psychoanalysis of Art: Some Ends, Some Means," *Journal of the American Psychoanalytic Association,* 36 (1988): 285.

[6] *Ibid.*, p. 287.

[7] *Ibid.*, p. 286.

[8] Trosman, p. 134

[9] *Ibid.*, p. 138.

[10] *Ibid.*, p. 139.

[11] *Ibid.*

[12] Kaplan, p. 290.

[13] Oscar Wilde, "The Critic As Artist," *Intentions* (New York: Brentano's, 1912), p. 168.

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