VOL. 4, NO. 1

Art Criticism

Editor: Donald Kuspit

Published by
Department of Art
State University of New York at Stony Brook
Stony Brook, NY 11794-5400

Prospective contributors are asked to send abstracts. If, however, they do submit manuscripts, the editors request that they include a return stamped envelope.

Subscriptions: $5.00/single issue, $15/year; $17/year outside the United States.

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The editor wishes to thank the Stony Brook Foundation, Provost Jerry Schubel, the Dean of Humanities and Fine Arts, Don Ihde, and the National Endowment for the Arts for their gracious support.

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ISSN: 0195-4148

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More on "A Discipline in Crisis" and Some Possible Remedies; General Methodology in Art History and a Special Application to the 19th Century

By Rudolf M. Bisanz

Because art is a function of its own time and place—subject to historical relativity—apposite aesthetics and art criticism can never do more than envision relative standards. But art history, using all but uncertain valuations under the guise of scholarly objectivity, often dares to simulate universal meanings. In order to remain valid, scholarship in art history must guard its continued intellectual credibility by clarifying the limits of its general semiotics. Moreover, in order to be functional, art history must seek specific means with which to cleave common sense—the concrete and practical—from accumulated layers of dysfunctional concepts and obscure principles. The inconsistencies, ambiguities, and contradictions which mislead in art historical nomenclature must first be identified. Means of coping with the prevailing dialectical vagueness can then be proposed. To the extent that

art criticism partakes of the values of art history and orients itself by its linguistic coordinates, and does so routinely and daily, it can only profit from such a clarification of language. A methodological revision of art history can only add strength to art criticism by helping to redefine the limits and scope of its authority.

The following pages set out to indicate weaknesses in common art historical language and reasoning and suggest the beginning for the review, examination, and change of a number of basic assumptions. Following this general account, the Nineteenth Century will serve as a specific model for reassessment. While this essay, then, takes issue with certain charges of determinism, categorism, and retrospective bias that have been hurled at the discipline, especially in recent years, it would serve a useful purpose if it only stimulates reexamination or provokes revaluation of at least *some* positions still considered by many to be secure. Although all of the issues to be taken up here have broad applications to the history of art of most times, they also have a particular relevance to the study of Nineteenth-Century art, a field that holds my special interest. My organization endeavors to follow the paths of logic, but, because of the intimate interrelationship of all topics discussed, it may lastly prove to be only an approximation of a desirable order.[1]

Aesthetics might be considered the discipline of the strategists of art, art theory that of the tacticians. The single work of art falls to the foot soldier, the artist. But excepting rare cases, both general and colonel lie outside his desired purview. Aesthetics seeks to absolutize beauty in art, which is, according to Aristotle, a form of human activity in imitation of nature. It is a remote representation of abstract ideals according to Plato. It is pleasure or entertainment or play or ecstatic vision according to Descartes, Schiller, and Novalis, respectively. Kant and Herder relativize the concepts of taste and imagination as functions of time and place. Hegel lastly posits art as a historical (dialectical) process. It supposedly evolves toward its final consummation, namely the concrete realization of the absolute, infinite spirit. It moves cyclically toward an ultimate transcendence into philosophy. We conclude: because its nature, quality, and meaning depend on modifications lying outside itself—they are posited in the circumstance attending its creation, i.e., history—art cannot be absolutized. It can only be understood under condition of commonsensical historical relativity. It is a reflection of its own historical necessity. But change runs deeper than history (Heidegger). Therefore, art is infinitely variable. Enter the art historian.

A functional critical art history advances from premises that are visible and locked into the work of art. Medium, technique, form, and symbol are studied and evaluated; so are documents; so is the artist's biography, psychology, and life philosophy. All culminates in this question: to what extent did this *particular* work of art serve and fulfill the moral, ethical, religious, political, aesthetic, psychological or any other legitimate needs and expectations of the artist, patron, involved individuals or society, during the time of its creation? The answer posits the measure of excellence. This question should be posed not in the spirit of a search for an elusive absolute, but for the real hypothetical imperative that informed the historical situation

and caused the work of art through expediency, choice, or necessity. Such manner of inquiry will permit the critical art historian to go beyond art theory even if that theory be historical itself. It will allow him to penetrate to the artist himself; to enter his work in its essential context relative to the specific time, place, and circumstance of its origin. A functional critical art history is, therefore, by definition not an echo but a critical response to criticism contemporary with the historical art which it examines.

Development in art is a notion that implies progress, advance, improvement. It also suggests an ultimate goal for art. It permits art historical writings to hop, skip, and jump over decades or even centuries and to consign them to oblivion. It gives rise to the delineation of major, minor, peripheral, and insignificant lines of development within one or over many centuries. Some "lines" are even considered to be counter-productive in development. This whole approach fits neatly into an art history conceived as linear. The result is a lockstep sequence of stylistic transmission, change, and succession. Accordingly, art marches forever onward and upward toward her appointed rendezvous with fate. In this rush over the landscape of art, uncharted, vast stretches of it can drop by the wayside and into the dust, if they do not lead art to its appointment with fate.

The scenario of art as a dynamic force moving relentlessly along a continuous linear track could be supplanted by a different model: the closed revolving chain suspended in eternal stasis. Its links overlap and interlock. For any given time and place they eventuate random numbers from myriad solutions. The entire syndrome of mechanistic priorities and determinist strictures that I have just discussed is eliminated. Innumerable legitimate "lines of development" are possible in a luxuriant variety of genuine milieux. The onus of chauvinism, parochialism, aesthetic party politics, and ethnocentric speculations is removed. If they produced art, all centuries and their chronological and geographic parts are major. We study all on the basis of particularism: one artist at a time.

Influence (as of one artist on another, or one region on another) implies, on the basis of linear time and evolution, a rigid and calculable consequence. But "influence" is not a scientifically supportable term. No projectable necessity or anticipatory causality can be demonstrated. The facticity of art cannot be deduced from historical antecedent. Between facticity and historical precedent lies an abyss (Heidegger, Kiesel). Instead, we should substitute or at least try to condition our thinking of the term "influence" with the notion of "partial causality" (Zeitler). A more precise term, it allows for the ineffable psychological dimension of elective affinity. It further admits all manifest elements of erraticism, fluctuation, and caprice into the equation.

Style, as a qualitative historical concept, stands as a major impediment between the student and the work of art. It is an abstraction that, linked with the mechanistic priorities implicit in the concepts of development and influence, has caused the stringent polarization of periods (see below). The result was the creation of a compound abstraction known as "period style." It has, moreover, segregated the art of recent centuries into many "isms." These pigeon-holes are also known as the compound abstractions called

"movement styles." Far from helping the student to reach an understanding of art, "style" confuses him and makes him a cynic. First, it is impossible to speak of a "period" style. There is, after all, no Renaissance "style," no Baroque "style," no Nineteeth-Century "style." One can only speak of style in the plural, i.e., Renaissance styles, Baroque styles, etc. (Evers). Moreover, "stylistic isms" hardly ever appear in pure culture but only in mixes of varying constitutions. The term *structure* should, therefore, replace "style" in keeping with an approach based on particularism. "Style" cleaves form from content and content from subject. But taken singly, none of these can be discharged of its full meaning (Croce). *Structure* transcends in meaning the aggregate of the morphological sub-parts making up the whole. It unites form, subject, and content in the *gestalt*. And that exhausts art's syntactical totality (Sedlmeyer, Paulsson). The unique nature of the *gestalt*, its specific tonality or inflection, the historical context, and the biographical condition of the artist—together, these reveal the total meaning of a work of art. All "style" concepts prove to be unfunctional in the specific case. As they are moved to the outer periphery of our analytical thinking, the individual artist and his work become liberated. (It is, however, also possible and desirable to determine an integral, personal character or "signature structure"—and the change therein over the years—for any given individual artist.)

The period as a qualitative unit in art history once stood in functional subservience to the idea of an epoch in the history of culture or civilization (Winckelmann). Adrift from such moorings, the term becomes problematic (e.g., as regards to Renaissance), misleading (Baroque), and meaningless (Nineteenth Century). Since no case can be made for the notion of "period style," the term "period" serves no ultimate usefulness in art history other than the most mechanistic purpose: to divide the material for collegiate study purposes. Even so, reasonable grounds should support such period classifications as are used to differentiate college courses; they should also be accompanied by cautionary explanations to the students. Periodicity (Panofsky) may be an attractive concept with respect to the Duecento, Trecento, and Quattrocento "renascences" and Renaissance. When applied to later art, however, it unfortunately tends to bolster the extraneous dogmatics already mentioned. It lends strength to notions of "development," "progress," and, most unhappily, the theory of a "mainstream" of art presumed to flow in a vast marshland filled with myriad insignificant rivulets. It lends encouragement to skipping over decades or even centuries in hot pursuit of a hypothetical "major" or "superior" current.

The idea of the cyclicity of art within given periods as a qualitative concept in art history was formerly, as in the Cinquecento, largely a product of a kind of chauvinistic aesthetic party politics (e.g., Vasari). Later it became a sort of obbligato of German idealist philosophy (Winckelmann, Wölfflin). Linear (i.e., Darwinian) evolutionism was instrumental in the critical resuscitation of Early Christian, Mannerist, and Baroque art (by Riegl, Friedlaender, and Würtenberger, among others). Nor is it necessary to subject art history to philosophical or scientific super-theories of history. In fact, analogy with biological cycles—the rise and fall of organic growth,

maturation, decay—may, by its own inherent logic, also and just as easily consign most of the Sixteenth Century, for example, into a state of evolutionary limbo. Conversely, relativism, particularism, and pluralism will bring us faster and closer to the true dynamics of art history than any hypothetical genetic laws of natural progress. Moreover, any form of superior historical strategics—cyclical, linear or otherwise—reveals nothing about the irreducibles in art: the individual artist and his work.

Comparative art history, or the exegesis of the meaning of art out of and in analogy with other disciplines has numerous aspects. For example, psychoanalysis (Freud) and psychology (Gombrich) prove very stimulating in the discourse on art. So does social history (Hauser, Antal) and anthropology. The study of literature and philosophy is a very useful tool in deepening our understanding of the art of the past. From all these comparative hermeneutics, however, no universal hypotheses or common constants can be drawn that hold true in every instance. Only a common sense relationship between political, social, cultural, and art history can be shown to prevail generally (Burckhardt). All factors of personal psychology, culture, and economics do not equal art. In the last analysis, art also seems to obey its own laws (Riegl). This leads us back to the question of the subject of art history. And that must be the individual painting, the individual sculpture, the individual building. These must be shown, described, their significance indicated.[2]

The scope of study in art history is properly that which encompasses *all* art produced in the past. Critical judgment regarding excellence should rest solely on grounds intrinsic to the work of art itself. Such a judgment is, therefore, a functional historical criticism. Only a personalist approach can ensure a scope that is truly commensurate with the marvelous plurality of the art of the past. The superiority of some "styles" over others is a myth (Evers). Research and instruction should concern themselves with all artistic phenomena that existed with equal intensity. Study and instruction should further seek to establish technographic balance. All places and circumstances must be taken into account. The radius of inquiry should range over a technographic scope of mondial scale. Synchronic (across time) and diachronic (across space) meanings should be explored. As to the last, they would try to differentiate between what Raphael, for example, means to us as compared to what he meant to the Nineteenth Century or the Sixteenth Century. (See Footnote 1.) All art structures are valid. They are all functioning, legitimate, and authentic elements in the story of art.

A critical history of art should be creative, functional, historical, and positive. "Creative" means that facile classifications should be avoided and that the imagination can be expanded by art's boundless pluralism. It suggests an attitude that seeks for no outward utility to the dialogue about art. It is based on the inner logic and private purposiveness of productive individual perception. It stresses personal involvement through sympathy for and empathy with the artist, his work and times. It is capable of constructive self-enrichment through openmindedness, tolerance, and humor. "Functional" means an understanding of art as a functioning part of the cultural whole; as dependent upon the needs, interests, and desires

of a specific artist, specific people, time and place; as working and useful according to the prevailing psychological and cultural conditions to which that art is adapted. "Historical" implies the "general" theory of historicism. It negates, therefore, the existence of all absolute or total standards in the judgment of art. It urges the student to shed all preoccupations resulting from present-day values and to participate imaginatively in the thought patterns of the past period as they are reflected in its art. "Positive" implies a logically affirmative, non-comparative method relative to other times, places and circumstances. It is based on facts and matters rather than on theory; on empirical rather than on speculative reasoning; on historically present and measurable quantities and qualities rather than on incompatible sentiments.

The art of the Nineteenth Century, which is chronologically so close to us, may be less well known to us than Quattrocento art. On the whole, it simply has not been studied with the intention of honoring the historical truths of its works. Nineteenth-Century studies in art await to be humanized so that their vast subject matter and profuse contents may be allowed at last to communicate to us. A functional critical art history applied to the Nineteenth Century will soon take the student beyond Planche, Bürger-Thoré, Castagnary, Chesnau, Baudelaire, Zola, and other "participants in the gerrymandering of aesthetic party politics" (Zeitler). A typical illustration from Germany will suffice to illuminate the point. If we relied solely on a reading of "official" German criticism contemporary with Wilhelm Leibl, we should not feel compelled to bother much at all with his art. But if we balance that reading with letters from France dating from the same time, or with views expressed by those who were close to him, Leibl emerges as a major master. This is just fine, because it happens to correspond with Twentieth-Century aesthetic sentiments regarding his art. But what if those sentiments run counter to a Nineteenth Century artist, as they do in the case of hundreds of academics, *Malerfürsten,* and protégés of officialdom. Should we not also here try to reach for a balance? The answer seems obvious but has eluded us for a long time. Only in recent years have special exhibitions and highly specialized literature, notably catalogues, tended to shift attention to the "unknown" vastness of the Nineteenth Century. But the pace at which general texts, to say nothing of college textbooks, have been touched by that emerging knowledge has been agonizingly slow.[3]

Applied to the Nineteenth Century, the notion of development is used to suggest that art sabotaged its own development in that century. Francophilia, Germanophobia, Twentieth-Century aesthetic hindsight, etc., also tend to prejudice interpretation according to the writer's ethnocentric leanings. But in fact, art *did* also flourish in Denmark, Belgium, Poland, Italy, and Greece, to say nothing of Germany, Austria, the United States and Russia during the Nineteenth Century. Moreover, no eminent domain of logic dictates, for example, the "succession" of Classicism, Romanticism, Realism, Naturalism/Impressionism, etc. These schemata were all potentially and simultaneously present. Most of them always overlap in given works. Runge, for example, painted Impressionist/Neoclassicist works;

Renoir produced Classical-Impressionist canvases; Feuerbach was a Neo-Romantic-Classicist/Naturalist. The schemata are adjusted to nature by the artist (according to Gombrich) and their choice and application by him fluctuate widely.

Because individualism triumphed in the Nineteenth Century, the concept of influence requires strong modification. Then more than ever only a partial causality linked "master" and "disciple." Properly applied, this alternate concept will reveal the uniqueness of, say, an Adolf Schreyer or Eugène Fromentin, and properly establish Delacroix with his Orientalist paintings as a *primus inter pares* in their midst. The term style has pitted realism against idealism, Romanticism against Neoclassicism, and Naturalism against abstraction. These "confrontations" are presumed to have been the "decisive battles" fought in the glorious "advance" of art. It has compartmentalized regional, institutional, school, group, circle, early, middle, high, and late styles. More seriously, the "stylistic disunity" and seeming "chaos" in the art of the Nineteenth Century has been posited as a sign of general weakness by an art history which is impeded in its understanding by such inappropriate concepts as "development" and "period style unity." Relieved of such encumbrances, the marvelous plurality of that century's expressive modes comes to light as a clear sign of creative vigor. Its pursuit of individualist eloquence and personal freedom comes through as the signal of its greatest strength. It is these qualities that make the Nineteenth Century a great century. Alas, until very recently, the signs have often been misread.

Applied to the Nineteenth Century, structuralism relieves art from the strangle hold of a categorial Gordian Knot. It untangles the most bewildering problems: the differentiation between the *gestalt* of Classicism and Romanticism, between Realism and Naturalism, between Biedermeier and Proto-Realism, between *Zopfstil* and Sentimental Classicism. "Dualism" (a term assimilated by Zeitler for use in art history) defines an art whose structure simultaneously encompasses the real and the ideal, or supernatural or transcendental, in its makeup. In short, all conceivable mixture ratios of Classicism, Romanticism, abstraction, Realism, and Naturalism fall within its purview. "Monism" (again, Zeitler) defines an art whose structure is exclusively made up of the sensorial or phenomenal world alone. Doctrinaire Realism, Realism, Naturalism, and Impressionism fall under its domain. Dualistic works may, within the same picture plane, formally contrast sculpturesque figures with a painterly milieu; or a naturalistically drab foreground with a fantastic middleground; or a realistically detailed middleground with a distant light reaching into infinitude; or a close reality with background irreality. Monistic works formally treat of the entire *mise-en-scène* within their frames of reference in a uniform manner. Particularism paired with structuralism is the most productive approach to a century best known for its burgeoning individualism, and its flourishing pluralism of expression.

The Nineteenth Century is neither an epoch in civilization nor a "period" in art history. A rather meaningless centurial quantum, in and by itself, these hundred years are merely a major fragment of a period which we

propose to name Modern Art. It can be distinguished from the periods of "traditional" art (i.e., Duecento to mid-Settecento, on the one hand, and Contemporary Art, on the other). The dates 1750 to World War One mark the period of Modern Art as a (reasonably) continguous entity. The 1750s witnessed the disintegration of Rococo, the last art standing in a direct or "linear" relationship to the Renaissance. It is the last of the many Renaissance structures. World War One marks a cataclysmic caesura that terminates an epoch in civilization. As to periodicity, that concept can be and has been made to serve the idea that, by and large—some exceptions, such as French Impressionism, to the contrary—the Nineteenth Century was a kind of hibernation, lying between "active" former times and the even more "energetic" contemporary age. And as regards comparative art history, no compelling grounds can be established, for example, for holding that a general correlation exists between the individual artists' socio-economic position and the nature of the art they produced (Zeitler). And finally, as to the scope of study in the Nineteenth Century, that should include all so-called arriere-garde, naturalistic, academic, institutional, eclectic, salon, devotional, and commemorative art, etc., as well as, of course, all nationalities that produced art.

So far we have applied the initial points to the interpretation of Nineteenth Century art. In order to complete this brief review, it is necessary to introduce several new critical issues that have a special bearing on the present discussion. These include the theory of generational conflict, the fact of historical proximity, the philosophy of historicism, and finally the study of the symbolism of Nineteenth Century art. Generational conflict has been proposed as the cause of "stylistic" change in art (by Pinder). The round 160 years of Modern Art (1750-1914) can be roughly divided into nine 20 year intervals marking the appearance of new artistic "generations." The row reads: 1750, 1770, 1790, 1810, 1830, 1850, 1870, 1890, 1910. The "corresponding styles" are: 1) austere Rococo, *Zopfstil,* realism; 2) Sentimental Classicism; 3) severe (doctrinaire) Neoclassicism; 4) Romanticism and Neoclassicism; 5) Biedermeier Realism; 6) doctrinaire Realism; 7) radical Realism, Naturalism, Impressionism; 8) Neoidealism, Neoromanticism, Symbolism; 9) Expressionism, abstract formalisms. The row is intriguing, but it must be qualified as follows: 1) the already shown scientific inexactitude of stylistic classifications; 2) the frequent overlapping and simultaneity of several groupings; 3) the absence of some groupings in some countries; 4) the lack of synchrony in the appearance of various groupings in various countries.

Much more serious and damaging is critical prejudice resulting from sentiments of generational conflict in the actual writing of Nineteenth Century art history. These attitudes have biased the accounts of Nineteenth Century art by some highly influential writers during the early years of the Twentieth Century (e.g., Meier-Graefe). Partiality to such Modernist movements as, for example, Cubism, Expressionism, Constructivism, etc., and enthusiasm for the so-called "functionalism" of the International Style in architecture, have caused many of them to denigrate and ridicule most Nineteenth-Century art and architecture. Even now, they continue to haunt

our perceptions of the past century by embroiling it in extraneous aesthetic debates. Historical (chronological) proximity to the Nineteenth Century is, therefore, the oft-stated reason for our lack of historical perspective and a handy excuse for neglect. But as fewer of us relate to the Nineteenth Century as the time of our fathers and ever more of us look at it as the time of our grandfathers and great-grandfathers, objectivity and interest will prevail. Or can the Oedipus Complex be transferred to one's Grandfather?

Historicism is generally given as the reason why the Nineteenth Century has not produced a style of its own as had, e.g., the Eighteenth Century, with its Rococo (see Pevsner). But historicism has also been responsibly shown to have been among the greatest spiritual revolutions in Western thought (see Meinecke). It was one of the dominant forming impulses of the Nineteenth Century. To arrive at an understanding of the nature and proper role of historicism free of the acccustomed shibboleths, it is first necessary to alter our understanding of the concepts of development, periodicity, style, and cyclicity of art. Then historicism will emerge as a positive force. As Renaissance artists allied themselves with the natural sciences, so their Nineteenth Century counterparts associated themselves with the science of history (Evers). Neither can be reproved for its preference. Either choice led to fabulous variety and excellence in art. The usual argument that historicist art and architecture is peripheral (while Realist art and architecture—functionalism—is central) to the Nineteenth Century is false. This view simply arises out of a misunderstanding of historicism stemming from a materialistic but irrelevant Twentieth Century position. Historicism's working and useful response to unique historical exigencies is demonstrable, not least of all, by its overwhelming presence in and endorsement by the Nineteenth Century. Historicism was, therefore, a functional *modus operandi.* It was, moreover, the very source of both variety and originality in Nineteenth Century art. After all, who would "confuse" Overbeck with Dürer, Thorwaldsen with Phidias, Garnier with Sansovino, or Georg Hauberisser with Erwin von Steinbach?

Symbolism in Nineteenth Century art and architecture has not yet been properly defined and isolated from other iconographic systems of the past. Yet, throughout the past century, meaningful symbolic content was considered the prime requisite of the modern language of art. The structure of a work of art is revealed as the synthesis of that expression and the vision that concretizes it (Riegl, Fiedler). Happily, therefore, some groundwork for the exploration of Nineteenth Century symbolism in art has been laid (e.g., by Beenken, Bisanz, Eitner, Hofmann, Nochlin, Sedlmayer, Weissberg). Symbolic phases of action and reaction—occasionally even in synchrony with generational conflict—have been recognized. Idealizing, metaphorical, allegorizing, and graphological symbolisms, e.g., have been associated with many different monistic and dualistic art structures throughout the Nineteenth Century (e.g., as shown by Hofstätter). According to these promising beginnings, exegesis of symbolic content cannot but be assigned paramount significance in consummate analysis. Too much of what we distinguish in Nineteenth Century art is still known to us only by its form alone; not nearly enough by its comprehensive meaning.

Passionless scholastics and their routine proliferation in "textbooks" have desiccated art of much of its inherent vigor, beauty, variety, and importance. Its marvelous wealth and diversity of meaning have been shackled by uniformist theories. Its spirit has been sapped by specious dogmatics. A retentive art history must not impede our affectionate dialogue with the artists of the past. Instead, a humanizing art history could facilitate communication between the student and the artist on a one-on-one basis and assist the student in his or her personal enjoyment of the art of the past.[4]

Notes

[1]The *Art Journal* (42/4, Winter, 1982) with the arresting thematic topic of "The Crisis in the Discipline" assayed with several excellent articles the depth of the problem besetting art history today. (It also suggested to me a part of the title for this article.) In his lead article, Henry Zerner bemoans the fact that, in the later Twentieth Century, art history has fallen from the forefront of intellectual life, a position which it has scaled earlier in the century. While the thoughts of the founders of the discipline have been subjected to a steady process of deterioration, a busy academic machine grinds out mindless art history products. Traditional distinctions between high and applied art, between high and folk art, etc., have become totally blurred. Moreover, a deep ambivalence between the ideal of art as absolutely autonomous and, conversely, as a link to history, has opened up. Zerner predicts that, as more art historians lose their belief in universal truths, and thus in the autonomous nature of art, and adapt the view that art has many historically necessitated functions, connoisseurship will reemerge as an important method for deciphering visual clues.

The other lead article, that by Oleg Grabar, urges that art history move away from its Western-dominated ideology and become inclusive of all cultures. He also suggests a set of new pedagogical means with which to force the discipline into the later Twentieth Century, i.e., means for the faster dissemination of knowledge, new textbooks that are not mired in early Twentieth Century concerns, and the need for revamping general terminology. These steps are necessary, he thinks, in order to facilitate the process of perception which lags behind the times. I hope that my present essay will at least begin to address the last mentioned issue, terminology.

[2]To summarize: the basic argument of art as an autonomous entity versus art as necessitated by external conditions, is simply this. If art is autonomous, then the link to history does not matter. If, on the other hand, art is not autonomous, then positivism is the proper research venue, i.e., facts from political, economic, military, and social history, etc., *do* matter. The big question is, can art be "half and half," half ideal/aesthetic/autonomous, half necessitated by history? Or can the ratio vary, say, 1/3 to 2/3 or 1/4 to 3/4, etc.? Lastly, if art is totally necessitated by history, then it is certainly random in its eventuality. At best then, its study becomes a branch of social history. If art is random, then we cannot have a discrete academic discipline dealing with it. Why? Because academic disciplines are defined by a body of coherent knowledge about their subject. But randomness obviates coherency. Perhaps only a common sense solution along the lines suggested by Burckhardt is either possible or desirable to stanch the conundrum.

[3]A notable exception: R. Rosenblum, H.W. Janson, *19th Century Art*, New York, 1984, a book that, while brilliant in some important respects, suffers from enough methodological (and editorial) problems to limit its usefulness as a "general text," the purpose which it espouses.

[4]For further reading: Frederick Antal, *Classicism and Romanticism*, New York 1973; Hermann Beenken, *Das Neunzehnte Jahrhundert in der deutschen Kunst, Aufgaben und Gehalte,* Munich, 1944. Rudolf Bisanz, *German Romanticism and Philipp Otto Runge; A Study in Nineteenth-Century Art Theory and Iconography,* DeKalb, Ill., 1970; *The René* von Schleinitz Collection of the Milwaukee Art Center; Major Schools of German Nineteenth-Century Popular Painting, Madison, Wis., 1980. Jacob Burckhardt, *The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy,* New York, 1954. Benedetto Croce, *Aesthetic as Science of Expression.*

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Newspaper Art Criticism

By Michael Brenson

I want to begin by thanking Michele Bogart, Donald Kuspit and the art department of Stony Brook for organizing this conference. As far as I know, this is the first conference on newspaper art criticism to take place, and only a department with independence and curiosity would have attempted it. This is the only speaking engagement I have accepted this year, which I mention only to indicate how much I wanted to be here.

Basically no one knows what we do, and because we work in the realm of "journalism" many people either judge us according to stereotypes or don't care. Having been a graduate student, I know the kind of contempt in which journalism can be held in universities. "We think you're an important critic," an important critic said to me not long ago, adding, "for a journalist." He may or may not be right. What is noteworthy is the clear distinction in his mind between a newspaper and a "real" critic, and the ease with which superiority was assumed and judgment was made.

This is a time when even "real" critics are not safe. At a recent panel at the Whitney Museum in which Chris Knight participated, Kate Linker made a distinction between art criticism, which she said approaches art as a bounded object and is concerned with questions of meaning, value, interpretation and exegesis, and art theory, which is involved with the

production of meaning, with locating art within a larger field, with the grounds for the reception of art, and with its social and ideological formation.

She said she made no hierarchical distinction between the two, which is somewhat hard to believe since she had just gotten through saying, in effect, that art criticism is involved with appearance and art theory with reality. I know many people would not accept the bounded distinctions she made, but, in the university at least, there is a definite hierarchy. Theory is well out in front, criticism a distant second, and somewhere in the rear, overworked, a bit scruffy, without much of a kick, almost lost in the dust as theorists and critics gallop into the future, there we are—the newspaper critics.

On the other hand, after five years at the *Times,* I have seen journalists be no less contemptuous of academics. If the arrogance of academics has to do with a distance that enables them to feel that only they know how to think, or that only their thinking is real thinking, the smugness of journalists grows out of their sense of being in the thick of the action, where theory is not so much wrong as irrelevant, or beside the point. Both responses are partly true and partly defensive; for someone in whom both worlds are present, both are unfortunate.

I am not going to stand up here and compare the relative seriousness of newspaper and university writing. What I am going to do is to try and suggest why newspaper criticism is the most complex thing I have ever tried to do—so complex, in fact, that it is almost impossible to begin to circumscribe or define it. I am also going to try to suggest why each person on this panel knows something, even if what we know may not lend itself to theoretical formulation. But part of what we know is that theory has unbounded limits.

I want to try and give a concrete sense of what it means to write about art for the Times. I want to give some idea of all that comes into play each week. I would like you to keep in mind a question with which everyone who now writes about and indeed makes art must be concerned. If this were a conference on criticism and art in the '80s, I would probably approach it more directly. What are you going to do with all the art that is now being made, from almost every conceivable creation, that together throws every kind of art, criticism and institution into question? One possibility is putting yourself in the eye of the storm and writing in such a way that you are at the same time describing the storm, getting your bearings and trying to determine its course and shape.

I want to emphasize that I am speaking only for myself. I am not speaking for the paper. If another *Times* critic were here, he or she would tell a different story. We all work within similar conditions but the ways in which we relate to those conditions are idiosyncratic and have everything to do with how we approach our job. The conditions I deal with are similar to but distinct from the conditions with which other members of today's panel are faced. The statements we are going to make are colored by the publications for which we write.

Let me give you an idea of what it means in day-to-day terms to write

about art for the *Times*. In general, I am in the paper every Friday and two or three Sundays a month. For the Friday Weekend section, I usually write five reviews together amounting to between 1,600 and 1,800 words. The lead review tends to be 600 to 900 words. Although five reviews may be filed, sometimes only three or four appear.

There are a number of reasons for this. Sometimes there are breaking news stories that eat into the column space. Sometimes you have no choice but to use a photograph of a large vertical or horizontal image, which can take several inches, some 200-300 words, out of a column. You have to be conscious of the decisions you make. You have to know how much space a photograph will need, you have to be sure it is a photograph of a work with which you are comfortable, and you have to be sure that you want the artist to gain the attention the photograph is likely to bring.

In the new format for the Arts & Leisure section, photographs are more conspicuous. Recently I planned to do a Sunday piece on a show I had not yet seen but which I thought was important. Once I saw the show, I decided not to write the article because the size of the photograph would automatically give the artist a certain prominence, no matter what I said about him, and my reaction was very mixed. In general, I have found that the constant interaction between what is written and the forum in which it is presented does not compromise the writing but makes it stronger.

This is one of the issues to which an entire talk could be devoted. I am not someone who believes that entering the world automatically corrupts the beauty and truth of words assembled in the tranquility of a secluded study, although the problems that can arise from such a collision are obvious. I like working with editors. I like writing for a publication where I must constantly keep the reader in mind, and I feel privileged to be in a situation where I can learn about and respond to the machinery of power.

This is an essential issue for artists as well. There are those who feel that having to deal with worldly issues pollutes them. There are others who feel they become better by having to function with the conditions surrounding their work in mind. There is no right or wrong here. The issue has been around a long time. Michelangelo may have been exhausted and even tormented by his struggle with princes and popes but his art was certainly not diminished by it.

But functioning within a huge, powerful institution, you also never forget that the machinery of power can turn against you. You cannot take anything for granted. I am not talking about censorship, of which I have encountered none. Nor am I talking about a climate of resentment or fear; the culture staff of the *Times* is the most supportive and least back-biting group of people I have ever worked with.

I am talking about a gap between the sensibilities of the Weekend and Arts & Leisure sections and the sensibilities of the news desks. It is a gap that has probably always been and will probably always be there. It is a key to the dynamism and tensions within the paper, and it reflects the dynamism and tensions within the society in general. It is, in effect, the tension between the need to find out, to get answers, to produce, to report quickly, clearly and with authority—and no one should lose sight for a

second how much intelligence and craft it takes to do this well—and the need to wait, to feel, to question and to search for a language in which the fullness of the moment can be revealed. There are not many newspapers in the world in which this tension would be allowed to play a formative role.

No Weekend review is ever cut without my knowing it. I try to be around Thursday afternoon when the final decisions about space are made. If an item or two has to be held, I am always asked, if I am there, which ones they should be. I make the decision based on a feeling for the texture of a column and the relative urgency of the show. If I am not around, the editors will hold the review or reviews with the most distant closing date. If a review is held, it will usually run the following week.

When a major museum show opens, it is covered the next Friday. The review can take the entire column. The Weekend editors usually consider putting it on the front page of the section. These shows fall to the senior critic. This year I was able to write on van Gogh, Paul Klee and Italian Baroque painting because just before each show opened, John Russell wrote an advance article for the Arts & Leisure section. I can't tell you how lucky I feel to be able to write about shows like these.

John usually assigns Vivien Raynor. He may propose a lead to Roberta Smith, who always knows what she wants to do. He will usually tell me what he is going to cover. Sometimes he will propose a lead or ask me to look at one or two shows. He is not the kind of person to tell anyone to do anything. Of all the *Times* critics, I am probably the one who is most determined to keep the column open. There are always shows that guide my route but I prefer to decide what will be in the column only after seeing as many shows as I can.

I have always liked many different kinds of art. I do not find that different points of view exclude each other. Respecting Hans Haacke, let's say, does not mean not respecting someone in the Hudson River Valley or the hills of Connecticut trying with all his or her might to paint the flower on his windowsill or the hill in the distance in a way that makes sense. This is not to say that the art generated by both approaches is at this moment equally important.

It is to say that both Haacke's questioning of institutions and the culture industry and the landscape painter's feeling for the texture of light and earth are indispensable. I find the pressure now placed on critics to choose between art as cultural and political criticism fighting to leave the past behind, and art as a repository of joy, fear and wonder—those things that human beings have shared forever—to be diabolical. It is a choice I want no part of.

I tend to see all the constituencies in the art world in relation to one another, even though many of them bear murderous ill will towards those different from they. Whatever anyone can say of Janet Malcolm's disinginuous articles in the New Yorker last fall, and Gary Indiana lit into them with gusto and style, the articles captured some of the art world's arrogance and meanness. A great many segments of the art world have a place. The places are constantly shifting. The way the relationships shift is fascinating to me. Keeping the Friday column as open as I can enables

me to feel that I can in some way be carried by the ebb and flow.

I want to speak a bit about the gallery experience. Making the rounds week in and week out, you can see things happening. You can walk into a gallery not knowing what to expect and be hit over the head. In an essay about her early photographs in "The Eye of the Story," a collection of essays, Eudora Welty wrote: "I learned quickly enough when to click the shutter, but what I was becoming aware of more slowly was a story-teller's truth: the thing to wait on, the reach there in time for, is the moment in which people reveal themselves. You have to be ready, in yourself, you have to know the moment when you see it." She is writing about a need to listen, a readiness for that instant in which something exposes what it is, and the responsibility of the writer to do justice to the revelation.

She is also talking about the spark that informs us that something is alive, and about the writer's need to shape language in such a way that the reader will continue to feel the fire. I think critics can write about art from any point of view, and be as probing and analytical as possible, as long as their language is in some way inhabited by the kind of spark that makes us want to talk about art in the first place. As soon as criticism forgets or denies that this spark matters, then it is no longer talking about the art it is talking about, It is talking about something else. With notable exceptions, right now the only art writers whose words retain the memory of those moments in which art is most fully itself are novelists, poets and journalists.

I do not want to be (mis)understood here. I am not saying that there should be just one kind of criticism. In an age when $40 million can be paid for a faded painting and the auctioneer who sold it can bubble forth, while pouring champagne, that van Gogh never sold his paintings because he "wasn't very good at marketing," I am certainly not saying that essential observations and arguments cannot be made by cultural critics and theorists who do not give a damn about the particular object. I think even reacting out of anger and misunderstanding can be useful. I am saying that there is a need for art writing that carries within the language itself an awareness of that miraculous moment when something mute begins to speak. The language we use reveals what voices within a work of art have a chance to be heard.

What determines the choice of reviews on any given week is complex. It depends upon what I wrote the previous Friday and Sunday, and in the weeks before that, and on the way I felt about what I wrote, and on what I read recently that made sense or pissed me off, and on an ideal texture for a column that I aim for but rarely achieve, and on my sense of all that is involved in writing for the "newspaper of record," and on wanting month in and month out to represent all serious art in the paper, and on past mistakes I have made and the criticism levelled at me, and on much more. Each week is different.

Let me give you an idea of how one column got put together. Before starting out on the morning of Tuesday, March 10, I had a list of shows I wanted to see. They were all over town. I had no commitment to writing about any of them. I did have one review, on the abstract painter John Moore, that had been held, that had to get in since the show closed that

week. I had seen drawings by Alan Turner in a group show a couple of years earlier and found his running together of eyes and bodies sufficiently weird to make me eager to visit his solo show. The work was part of the mainstream in its meditation on consciousness, and outside it in its imagery and method. I knew immediately that I wanted the show in the column.

Then I went to see Al Held's show on 57th Street, for which Donald Kuspit wrote the catalogue. I had no intention of writing about it. I had written about Held's last show, he is such a well-known artist, and he has been written about so much, that I don't believe the *Times* should cover him now without good reason. But it was clear that the show was important, not just in terms of his own career, but for the information it provided about that pivotal moment about 1960. So now I had two reviews that could be leads.

I stayed on 57th Street, then spent quite a bit of time in SoHo, looking particularly at shows of sculptors I had been following. I decided to write on two realist painters. One reason that I had written a column for the following Sunday on the new wing at the Metropolitan in which I had made a point about Realism finally having a chance to be represented in a major New York museum. I have consistently tried to set up on Friday what would be said on Sunday. I thought this would be the right time to include two artists representing approaches that should be given attention. It had also been a long time since I had devoted an entire column to painting.

The make-up of the column was not yet decided. I wrote the Turner review as a lead and the Held review to follow. But once both were written, it was apparent that however much I valued the surprise of Turner's paintings, the Held show was of more general importance. So I switched the two, filled out the Held review and made it the lead. But in the process of changing the review and changing the photograph, the column had changed shape and the reviews of the two realist shows had to be held. The column that appeared included Held, Turner and Moore. Since I was off the next week and the week after had to review the Italian painting show at the Met, the realist reviews never appeared. The traditional emphasis of the March 13 column meant that I have been looking for shows with a more radical orientation. Because of the reviews that did not appear, I have also been looking for realist shows that could take their place.

In some circles "review" is a dirty word: the first question I was asked in an interview two years ago was about "impressionistic" criticism. There is also a tendency to see reviews as monolithic. But let's stop for a moment. Moore is an abstract painter in his 30s, Turner a figurative painter in his 40s, Held an abstract painter in his 50s. I had never met or written about Moore. I had never met Turner and had previously written one paragraph on his work. I had written one review on Held, whom I had met twice and interviewed for two general articles. His review required some reporting and some historical background. For Turner's review, I needed to learn enough about his career to have some idea where the paintings came from. With Moore all I had was what was in front of me. All three asked something different from me. The column was written in a day.

My point is not to amaze or appall you. It is to give some idea of the

demands of newspaper criticism and the potential it has for insight, growth and error. It is also important to suggest what the job can do to your sense of time. Time has become so accelerated for me that it has largely ceased to exist. The moment bulges. So much happens so quickly that you function differently. You see differently, think differently, write differently, and the movement from seeing something to writing about it to having it appear in the paper is so compressed and the language itself, if it is any good, has a bang.

I don't think you can write newspaper criticism without, to some degree, giving yourself to the moment, trusting it, letting yourself be carried by it. It is of course important to be careful, but you can't be afraid of making mistakes. People will tell you if you're wrong. You do not have a chance to step back far enough to see things from a distance, and sometimes you want it badly, but when I look at other criticism, I am not sure this distance is always an advantage, and I know that it creates its own problems. There are ways of gaining a perspective. I read constantly. Being able to write on subjects outside contemporary art, from medieval manuscripts to the Old Masters to Chinese art is, to me, indispensable.

As a rule, I see shows Tuesday and write about them Wednesday. The copy is edited Wednesday evening by the deputy Weekend editor, who will call me and talk about it when she has finished reading it. On Thursday, I take another look. A copy editor reads the column early Thursday afternoon. What is called the culture slot editor reads everything just before it is typeset. You do have to know which copy editor is going to read the column. If you are not in the office, you have to call in at the end of Thursday afternoon to see if there are any questions.

I approach the Sunday Arts & Leisure section very differently—although it should be mentioned that Arts & Leisure is in a state of flux since changing format March 8, and it is unclear whether critics will be able to approach their columns the same way. The Sunday article is usually on one exhibition, one person, or one idea; sometimes it is a development of something in a Friday column. If the Sunday piece is on a show, I usually see it on Thursday or Friday and write about it on the weekend. While the audience for the Weekend section is generally confined to the New York area, the Arts & Leisure section goes around the country and has a circulation more than twice as large. As a result, the subject of a Sunday piece has to be of general interest.

Each Sunday column is read by three or four editors, unless it is the lead piece in the section, when it will also be read by the main culture editor and perhaps by the *Times* culture czar. If this sounds intimidating, it does not have to be. The primary editing is done with the art page editor. He is the one who reads the piece most closely and goes through the changes with you. The final measure of editing, ultimately the only criterion, is whether the piece turns out better.

The fact is that no one can see with complete objectivity what he or she has written. This is certainly true when writing under newspaper deadlines. The *Times* editors help you far more often than they hurt. I have never worked with editors I like and trust as much as the Weekend Arts & Leisure

editors, and I probably never will again.

The relationship with editors is important enough for me to make a point about it. In this country many people grow up with an extraordinarily inflated sense of their ability to write. When I taught English, I used to wonder if there was another country in the world in which high school students who cannot tell a noun from a verb run up to teachers after a paper is returned declaring that the corrections are due to the teacher's personal dislike of that student's style. The disease is particularly virulent in Paris, where every other American calls himself a writer. It's something you get used to when you live there, like rain.

For the remainder of this talk, I am going to consider some of the questions that I have been asked most frequently. One is, what about mistakes?

There is probably no way not to make mistakes, no matter how much time you have. The mistakes can be major—like totally missing the boat—or minor. I have written Sunday columns where I did not believe I had gotten to first base, and Friday columns in which I was not happy with a single one of the five reviews. Factual errors make me crazy.

One of the great advantages of writing regularly is that you always will get another chance. I have changed my mind sharply from one year to the next. I have made major mistakes and then set about rectifying them over two or three years. Being able to sustain a dialogue with an artist's work may give us as good a possibility of objectivity as anyone.

One of the larger questions here is how much any critic can understand. This would need a book to answer, if it can be answered. I am very aware of different approaches to art now, and of all the approaches to all the other approaches. This is not a time in which anyone can pretend to get the whole thing. In most reviews, I am looking to define something essential. I am sure enough of some articles I have written to believe that they will mean something a long way down the road. I know I have written columns that have challenged people. I know I have hit some things on the button. But I also know that other remarks I have made may become footnotes or citations in a scholarly work by a future T.J. Clark looking to take the political and cultural temperature of the 1980s in New York—which is ok, too, as long as I learn from what I have done.

One crucial question is, for whom do you write?

This is another question that is so complex I am not sure it can be answered. It is like asking a painter, for whom do you paint? It is almost like asking, for whom do you live? Or who are you?

The question needs to be considered in the context of a publication, of a particular column and review, and of the entire network of forces that make up anyone's life. One of the reasons writing for the *Times* is so different from writing for a trade publication is that its readership is so diverse. *Times* columns may be read by art professionals, by the general art public, by people who may stumble cross the art pages on the way to the film or music pages, by people who may be curious about a particular show, and by people who are just generally curious. I am not so much trying to write for all of them as much as I feel that all of them are part of me, and I would like to be responsive to as many different readers and

parts of myself as I can.

On the simplest level, when I sit down to write, what I am trying to do is get it right and be as intelligent and convincing as I can within the particular limits of time and space. But the fact is that there are many voices inside us, and we are more attentive to some than others, depending upon the circumstances. The voices may emanate from what we read last night, or from what we read ten years ago, or from a remark that enabled us to respond to a key work for the first time. They may have to do with ideas that surfaced at dinner, or they may have to do with traditions to which we ultimately feel we belong.

I trust you understand what I am saying here. I am not talking about sitting on a bench in Central Park, having the sky open up and hearing Moses, Mary, Michelangelo and Marx shout instructions at me, although I kind of like the idea. I am talking about all the personal, cultural and political threads that wind through everyone, sometimes tying us in knots, often pulling us in different directions. No critic or artist who is any good can be broken down into the sum of these voices, in part because each voice is itself a composite of others.

For those of you for whom this may still seem strange, let me try to clarify it this way. The form of what we call thinking is generally believed to be sitting down and trying systematically to get to the bottom of an idea or problem. When I am on the bus, or subway, or just walking down the street, however, I often think in the form of dialogues. In other words, someone I know to a lesser or greater degree suddenly asks a question, waits for an answer, and then keeps asking me questions, leading me further and further along a train of thought. At a certain point someone else may join in.

I am not made of one voice, and I am never speaking to just one listener. But when I actually write, voices largely disappear, or perhaps merge, although at some point one may pop up and give me an insight, or ask me to reconsider, or say to me: are you sure you want to say this? In trying to get the thought, feeling and language right, I end up with a tone and language that will proobably not be mistaken for anyone else's. At the moment when I feel I can let the writing go, the whole is greater than the sum of its parts, and I can be said to be speaking in my voice.

It is possible that the more voices that are interiorized into a writer's words, the richer the writing will be. Different voices come from different places and represent different points of view, ideologies and interests, so much so that the more there are, the more likely they are either to turn us into an arena, or to define the arena we are. I don't have any particular desire to exclude totally any of them. Besides they take on meaning in relation to each other, not in isolation.

I do not find language that comes largely from one source and speaks primarily to one audience very sustaining. Nor do I have any particular sympathy with criticism that relies upon others—"as Derrida said," "As Foucault said," "as Baudrillard said." As the Italian writer Natalia Ginzburg said in her essay called "My Vocation,": "We are constantly threatened with grave dangers whenever we write a page. There is the danger of suddenly starting to be flirtatious and singing. I always have a crazy desire

to sing and I have to be very careful that I don't. And there is the danger of cheating with words that do not really exist within us, that we have picked up by chance from outside ourselves and which we skillfully slip in because we have become a bit dishonest."

Great artists and writers use language in such a way that both the inevitability of conflict and the necessity of resolution are immediately felt. This kind of collision can become an utterance—a sound or evocation that lets us know that a spark is present and the language is a concentration of lived experience. Perhaps all this will suggest to you why it can be an advantage to write for a broad audience.

I think anyone who writes assumes an ideal reader, and has faith, justified or not, that there are people who are willing to take the trouble to understand what went into the writing and what it is trying to achieve. These are our followers, the people who keep up from column to column, who know that something is always going on. The public can sense immediately whether a writer or artist carries the hope of an ideal reader or viewer. A writer without this hope is not worth reading.

In "The Eye of the Story," Eudora Welty wrote that "No matter how fast society around us changes, what remains is that there is a relationship in progress between ourselves and other people; this was the case when the world seemed stable too." This relationship in progress says something about the attraction of writing in an age with such a disruptive velocity of change. Writing enables us to maintain the possibility of more relationships with ourselves and others than would be possible in daily life. The relationships change, just like the voices change, just like the art changes in galleries. The only constant is that relationships are in progress, the more the better.

The last but certainly not the least important question I want to consider here is, how much power do you have?

I am afraid to say that this is one more question that is almost impossible to answer. Sometimes I have found the effect of what I have written has been greater than I expected. Sometimes I have written a rave review of an artist's work, gone back in the gallery for another look and found no one there. Shows I panned have sold out. Certainly newspaper critics can help artists get off the ground. One artist told me that a positive review I wrote of his show had given "permission" to people to trust their feelings about his work. You can also give people permission to dislike something or feel that their doubts are justified. Sometimes, and this may matter more than anything, I visit shows and see from the art that I have been part of a silent dialogue.

But you never know what happens when your words go out into the world. Thousands of people read each column, but you never really know what they think or feel, and even the comments that come back tell only part of the story. Between the immediacy of the writing and the relative silence of the response there is a gap that can never be filled. This makes it that much more imperative that you trust your instincts, and that you have a firm sense of what you are doing and what you have or have not done. And if you never know exactly how much power you have, you

can never forget that you are writing for an institution of enormous power.

The presentation is important. I have had articles on the front page of the Weekend section make people furious, whereas the articles would not have caused a stir if they had been buried inside. One article I wrote, called "Is Neo-Expressionism an Idea Whose Time Has Passed?" provoked such a vehement reaction in part because of the headline, and in part because the article led the Arts & Leisure section in early January. People outside New York felt that the *Times* was telling them what to think. People in New York accused me and the *Times* of caring only about fashion and trends. I have never written an article that provoked such hostility in people who never took the trouble to read it.

If this seems irritating, keep in mind that people can react to art criticism in the same way that they react to artists or shows. There is something in the presentation or look or medium or personality that sets something off, unleashes a stream of venom and makes it impossible to look at what the work is about. The reason I cannot allow myself to get that angry about such reactions to me, although I am not crazy about them, is that I have to fight that kind of reaction in myself, and I do not always win.

When you write for the *Times*, you are John Russell, Michael Brenson, Grace Glueck, Vivien Raynor or Roberta Smith of the *Times*. Because you write for the *Times*, people react. Some treat each word as gospel. Others dismiss it out of hand. The *Times* can both make readers take you seriously and prevent readers from taking you seriously. There is no way to accept one without the other, although knowing and accepting are not always the same thing.

As to what I want in terms of power, that is another long story, and it is not in the order of the day to sail off down another introspective track. I have been part of the debate and I am glad. Power needs to be used against power. I also know that the will to truth and the will to power are inseparable, that is in the Bible, but I have always been drawn to art and literature that struggles to keep them apart. So you can see that writing for the *Times* is not dull or simple, and that it has been an immense privilege to be able to do it.

Prophylactic Politics and the Next Left

By Shaw Smith

One of the principal questions facing the Left is how to create effective strategies for the remainder of the eighties and for the nineties. That is, what is the contemporary role of leftist art and politics? How can such a position avoid being a simplistic, nostalgic rehash of earlier approaches and motifs that sound like "tired politics" strummed from the graying of a generation which still believes in the alternative of activism?

Michael Harrington's book, THE NEXT LEFT (1987), charges that "the next Left cannot content itself to sit around waiting for some catastrophe to save it from its own political impotence." Typically, Harrington sees a fuller participation in the economy as the key to a brighter future. Although he does concede that the "absolute imperative" of contemporary society is to avoid the threat of nuclear destruction, he offers a position which, at center, only supports the status quo. For example, he suggests ways to achieve full employment rather than to question the nature of work under the American system. As one colleague asked me regarding Harrington's thesis, "Are you still reading that stuff?" and indeed is this really a NEW Left?

Whatever the deficiencies (and there are many!) of Dan Cameron's complaints about Lucy Lippard ("The Groundhog Report: The Trouble with

Lucy," ARTS MAGAZINE, February, 1985), the author does raise some very critical questions about the role of the contemporary Left. In this flawed report, Cameron stumbles onto the idea that a new age needs "new tactics, new rationales, and even new goals." The problem is that he mistakenly assumes that because the instruments of social control have changed their names, the purpose of social activism is, or should be, somehow different. In particular he condemns Artists Call Against U.S. Intervention in Central America because it reeks of "sanctified idealism." Complaining that such ideals become counter-productive, he would restrict artists to approach politics as "citizens" rather than as "artists" and myopically distinguishes between "art world politics" and "real world politics." Speaking of tired tactics. . . Having seen his shadow, this old groundhog denounces Lippard as, "the art world's humorless Old Left schoolmarm." Perhaps it is just that activists like Lippard realized long ago that it is not very funny to see a society on the verge of self-destruction.

Lucy Lippard is and has been one of the most consistent advocates of art as an arena for social change and one of the most conscious of the particular language of power at any given moment. As Patrick Frank has pointed out ("A Fan's Guide to Art Criticism," NEW ART EXAMINER, April, 1985), Lippard is not simply a Post-60s liberal precisely because her politics are "too explicit." Her career has evolved from formalist interests (1960s), to feminist concerns (1970s), to a more integrated political effort which she tends to label "oppositional" (1980s). Much of this develoment she has laid out in her book, GET THE MESSAGE? A DECADE OF ART FOR SOCIAL CHANGE, where she presents new social strategies for the eighties. As she says regarding the old saw of art vs. politics (What a dated concept!), "Art is an important enough aspect of society that it should have a conscience and have some responsibility to society. I think that people who claim art is either above it or below it are the ones who are really denigrating art." (Quoted by Mary Motian Meadows, "Lucy and the Politics of Art," MUSE, Denver, June/July, 1986.) In the last few years Lippard has spent several months each year at the University of Colorado at Boulder where she has been active in oppositional art and politics such as anti-nuclear protests, the call against covert operations in Central America, and "Image Wars," an oppositional art exhibition in the Denver area. She has also participated in a wide range of public lectures and meetings such as MUROS QUE HABLAN COMO ESPEJOS/WALLS THAT SPEAK LIKE MIRRORS, a symposium on mural art organized by the Chicano Humanities and Art Council where she gave a lecture titled, "Muralism in the Context of Politics." In addition to these activities, she continues to affirm art and artists which remain "outside the mainstream." These efforts alone refute the lame charges by Cameron.

However, what Lippard has recognized and Cameron has not, is that activist art in the eighties has redefined itself as "oppositional language." For it is through the violence of information systems that our realities are controlled and distorted, leaving us artificially reassured, pacified, and eventually numbed. The central task of the eighties is to clarify the abuses of such systems and to offer an oppositional voice. Lippard sees this as

a language of empowerment; for her, to participate in such a dialogue of self-expression is a "prerequisite for empowerment." In a sense, Lippard is actually a performance artist who continually rechoreographs her steps according to the critical themes of the present.

Lest there be any doubt about the artificiality of information, one has only to examine the nature of contemporary violence. Evidently, physical violence is found almost everywhere in dramatic form; however, the violence of information, disinformation, reinformation, and misinformation which attempts to preclude oppositional action, is perhaps the most pernicious threat. A listing of current examples hardly eases the actual suffering caused by these conditions and risks becoming a reactionary anecdotal description of violence. This further obfuscates the systemic problem and masks its causative agents.

In the age of simulation, one has only to view the current assaults on language in the superficial landscape of public consciousness, which in fact is where they are meant to be planted and cultivated. The diversions of Irangate "in a series with 'Watergate' "), Insider-Trading ("watch and you can be one too"), Christian Cannibalism ("this is what we thought all along"), Drug-Testing ("a play on anxieties about public security"), and Condom Ad Controversies ("capitalism's way of getting around the Meese Commission and profiteering from AIDS"), all present a kind of entertainment of supposed good-will and feigned concern without actually dealing with basic problems. Perhaps the perfect symbol for the 1980s is the prophylactic—a corporate-sponsored, mass-produced, synthetic device to protect us from our greatest intimacies and public fears. The prophylactic politics of this world divert our attention from an actuality which remains closeted. Take for example, the language of the so-called "Arms Race." What is a "race," "test," "Arm," "verification," "Treaty, " "ban," or "defensive weapon?" Obviously none of these words has any meaning whatsoever, for like the "delete function" on the so-called "personal computer," such definitions, significances, codes, and indexes can be dismissed in an electric flash. Other examples abound in public information about Central America—"contra," "aid," "public," "private," or the fact that the American Congress gave the contras $40 million in "aid" as a "warning." In short, it is clear that this sort of "entertainment information" represents a phenomenon of late capitalism which is central to the problems which face activist artists in 1987.

There seem to be several current areas of response to these problems. One is a kind of spiritualistic aspiration to a new wholistic culture as exemplified by the writings of Suzi Gablik. Even avoiding the term "strategy," this approach calls for a new spiritual awareness that evokes a Post-Cartesian world as a means of saving the planet. Such wholistic healing, which romances a state of technopeasantry, dwells under admirable, but rather cloudy premonitions, and unfortunately conjures a world without clarifying the structures which might bring it into being. Even more disarming is its defense against the rigors of such a metacriticism as being "too rational" (i.e., reactionary.)

A second position, at another extreme, is represented by Sue Coe. Her

work, which ranges from identifying the abuses of politics, history, racism, and animal genocide (as, for example, in her recent exhibition, POLICE STATE), certainly addresses the problems of social art and language structures with a voice of opposition. However, one comes away from this exhibition with the impression of having seen a kind of Pavlovian salivation sumptuously rendered, but without a great deal of reflection in terms of the paint or the issues.

A third response is manifested in the recent exhibition at "documenta 8" in Kassel, West Germany. This exhibition calls for a new recognition of the world of technology. In place of single-minded rejection of technology, artists cultivate a "New Modernism," that is, a new symbiotic relationship between society and its machines. Neither a completely negative nor positive utopia, this vision of the future accepts the existence of technology and at the same time attempts to realign the world in a more humanistic fashion. There is an extremely fine line between the celebration of the machine and its tragic consequences à la Futurism and Fascism, and the positing of a new kind of classicism. The greatest danger, it seems, is to encourage acceptance of things which should not be accepted.

But for Lippard, none and all of these positions are actually effective. She understands that the immediate problem of the eighties is that of language and particularly that of the language of the oppressed on one hand and the language of the oppression on the other. If art no longer resists (if it ever did) the language of society (see Brian Wallis, "The Art of Big Business," ART IN AMERICA, June, 1986, pp. 28-32), Lippard recognizes the responsibility of the language of art to confront the sirens of Reaganism. It is precisely the call for an oppositional voice on the public stage of the "The Great Communicator" that has recharged the Left and denies Harrington's claim of "political impotence" without becoming blithely visionary, blindly rhetorical, or assimilated. As Habermas has suggested, one acts only as an agent within a "speech community," but in order to act as an agent, one must recognize what is a false and what is a true statement. (See Raymond Geuss, *The Idea of A Cultural Theory* (Cambridge, 1981). In short, an artist can only act as a "citizen," as Cameron would have it, when the language of the society is clearly defined.

The strategy left to Lippard is to listen and respond rather than to shout at or shy away from the groundhog's shadow. It is a "position" which gives engaged art of the eighties a productive sophistication. By analyzing the language of the "official voice" in this way, the deceptive monotone of power is turned against itself, as occurs in the work of Hans Haacke, Terry Allen, Group Material, and others. The fact that Lippard remains sensitive to the actual language of the contemporary speech community may be for Cameron a "sanctified idealism," but it is one whose syntax is carefully grounded in the human grammar of contemporary structures. It is not content to "just say no!"

American Landscape Painting and National Identity: The Stieglitz Circle and Emerson

By Matthew Baigell

Since the founding of the nation in 1789, the issue of national self-identification has been raised continuously, especially in this year of the bicentennial celebration of the Constitution. Unlike earlier periods, however, when people hoped that a single American culture, an American spirit or an American consensus might one day emerge, contemporary observers indicate that this will never happen, as much by what they say as by what they do not. For example, Elizabeth Hardwick has suggested that "America is more concrete than American. In spite of the most insistent drumming, we are not a folk."[1] And Hendrik Hertzberg has observed:

> We may sing about purple mountain majesties and fruited plains, but we have no mystique of land or blood. We have no *patrie,* no *volk*. We come from all over the place, we're all different colors, and we don't all look alike. What unites us, finally, is a political compact, a constitution: *the* Constitution."[2]

He goes on to comment about the fragmentation of that illusive American consensus:

> The ties that bind are no longer just the ties of propinquity. The communities that count are communities of interest and belief—communities that are at least as likely to be national as local. Ideology, profession, class, even racial and sexual identity—these are the soil our roots grow in now, as much as or more than where we live.[3]

In today's art world interest in an American consensus or in identifying an American factor in art is minimal and insignificant, and we have forgotten how important defining an American art had been to generations of artists. But such concerns had been basic from the 1780s to the 1940s. This was especially true in the earlier part of this century when questions of national self-identification and nationalism were all but inseparable from the language and ways of thinking within the American art world.[4] Surprisingly, modernist American artists were affected as much as traditionalists and realists, including Alfred Stieglitz and the most insistantly modernist artists he supported—John Marin, Georgia O'Keeffe, Arthur Dove and Marsden Hartley. Not surprisingly, their principle vehicle for exploring and revealing American qualities in their work was the traditional one of landscape painting. It was James Jackson Jarves, the important nineteenth-century critic, who once wrote, "the thoroughly American branch of painting based upon the facts and tastes of the country and people is the landscape."[5] In their choice of subject matter, Marin and the others acknowledged and perpetuated Jarves' observation well into the twentieth century, providing their art with an often overlooked American dimension. It is precisely this aspect that I would like to consider here by concentrating on their search for identities as individual as well as American artists. In both instances, I want to invoke the Emerson/Whitman tradition, not with the intention of pointing out specific, provable influences, but to suggest that the Stieglitz artists, in wanting to be both individual and American, drew upon a tradition to which Emerson and Whitman belonged.

In discussing artistic nationalism in the Stieglitz circle, it is best to state first what it was not. It was not dependent upon the kind of sloppy and superficial thinking in which facts and interpretations of images were twisted to suit the wishes and fantasies of artists as well as critics. In an astonishing number of observations, almost any way American landscape painting could be made to look good and look American was acceptable. Here are a few examples: American landscapists, whatever their European sources, could be compared favorably to their European models. By this reasoning, Childe Hassam, J. Alden Weir, Ernest Lawson and J. Francis Murphy were better painters than Monet, Sisley and Pissaro because the Americans had assimilated and made more acceptable "tendencies that in others [were] exercized to a disproportionate degree."[6] By a similar sort of stand-on-your-head reasoning, American Impressionists were considered essentially American despite their obvious European training and styles.[7]

Other aspects of American landscape painting were considered attractive to critics besides good taste and the imitation of European models. The American spirit, whatever its many definitions, had somehow infused itself deeply into the minds of landscape painters. In a typical account, one

observer noted: "no painting is more permeated with a native spirit than the painting of [George] Inness, [Alexander] Wyant, [George] Fuller, [Winslow] Homer, Murphy and Weir. Their pictures are all but redolent with the very odour of the American countryside; they represent. . . the heart and soul of this country's innate spiritual and sentimental identity."[8] This kind of conservative, ruralizing thought meshed easily with anemic remnants of older Romantic notions which in place of finding in the landscape moral and civic regeneration, now found "sanity first of all" and "a sedative and tonic" from modern life.[9] American landscapists were also considered more lyrical rather than epical because of the nation's continued success in contrast to Europe's many tragedies. The landscape painters, because of their interests in local scenes, also had access to "the birth place of so much of our poetry and of our strength, of the humor and of the kindly tendencies of our nation."[10] The American note was also struck louder in landscape scenes than in other subjects, since recognizably American places could be seen, or, at least, imagined. Increasingly as the twentieth century progressed, views of, say, Arizona began to look more like Arizona, New England views more like New England, rather than like views of the Seine, Holland or the Brittany coast line.[11]

Stieglitz and the artists he supported were much more tough-minded in their searches for American qualities in art (if tough-minded is the right phrase for something as vague and ultimately indefinable as finding American qualities in art). Despite varying contradictory assertions and claims that are inevitable over a period of three or four decades, the basic intentions of Stieglitz and the others were these: to develop an American art based on a sense of place and a desire for the artist to respond as authentically as possible to that place. That is, the artist, in defining himself through his relationship to the landscape and to whatever cultural and personal meanings the landscape might convey, would define himself as an American artist. The quest was a double one: for personal identification and for an American identification. By defining oneself, one also defined oneself as an American. Authenticity and Americanism went hand in hand. Of course, this has to be qualified in all sorts of ways. Nobody in any society possesses an authentic self totally free from cultural conditioning, least of all the Stieglitz artists who were so profoundly influenced by modernism (both artistic and literary) and of their sense of themselves as Americans. But given these obvious constraints, they sought to paint, as it were, with their own voices and they believed that by so doing they would reveal their American voices.

This point of view began to gain currency in the art world at least by the century's turn. In magazines such as *The Craftsman* and in writings especially by Robert Henri, the leader of the early twentieth-century realists, great emphasis was placed on revealing the spirit of the country through its art. Emphasis, however, tended to lean toward subsuming oneself within the larger national body rather than stressing one's own unique experiences.[12] The Stieglitz artists did the reverse. Their own experiences were primary. American sources for this point of view grew

ultimately from that tradition associated with Ralph Waldo Emerson and Walt Whitman. And since precise influences are hard to pin down, it is more appropriate to say that in the Stieglitz circle there were Emersonian and Whitmanesque recollections, reflections and parallels. But they were clearly there, although not as demonstrably apparent as they were among artists in the Henri circle.[13]

Probably Whitman was the more potent immediate source for the Stieglitz artists, since his name was invoked repeatedly in the literary and artistic press before and after 1920 both as a model and as the first important American artist.[14] In Whitman, too, the problem between retaining one's individuality or merging it with the larger national body was also more immediate since he was primarily a creative poet rather than an essayist like Emerson. On balance, Whitman did not merge his individuality with the larger group, and, as indicated, neither did the Stieglitz artists.[15]

This is of some importance to mention because parallel with the Emerson-Whitman tradition, and, indeed, intertwined with it, was another in which the culture was studied first as a way to understand its art and artists. This point of view stems immediately from the social-minded Frenchman Hippolyte Taine rather than from Emerson the individualist. Taine's position, briefly stated, was that "to comprehend a work of art, an artist or a group of artists, we must clearly comprehend the general, social and intellectual condition of the times to which they belong."[16] Whitman was familiar with Taine's writings, but ultimately preferred to hear the voice of the larger body in his voice rather than to lose his own in the larger body. Or, at least, we can conclude this from the following passages in "Song of Myself" and "By Blue Ontario's Shore":

> I celebrate myself, and sing myself,
> And what I assume you shall assume,
> For every atom belonging to me as good belongs to you.
>
> A Nation announcing itself,
> I myself make the only growth by which I can be appreciated
> I reject none, accept all, then reproduce all in my own forms.[17]

Emerson, too, acknowledged the importance of environment several times in his essays. "No man," he wrote in 'Art," "can quite emancipate himself from his age and country, or produce a model in which the education, the religion, the politics, usages, and arts, of his time shall have no share."[18] But more typical is this passage from "Self Reliance," in which the individual is seen as more important than the group and, as in Whitman, can become a spokesman for the group. "To believe your own thoughts, to believe that what is true for you in your private heart, is true for all men,—that is genius."[19]

The more sociological point of view associated with Taine, although present throughout early twentieth-century literature on American art, reached its climax in the American Scene movement of the 1930s when artists such as Grant Wood and Thomas Hart Benton, who often acknowledged Taine's influence, tended to subvert the authenticity of their

own responses and experiences for those of the larger group, whether regional or national, and, by so doing, changed the focus "from an open search for national identity to nationalism of a narrower sort."[20] I might add here that in the Abstract Expressionist search for authenticity of expression beginning in the middle 1940s, the American factor was disavowed to such an extent that if it appeared at all it did so as a residual bi-product. Since that time, it is significant that the American factor has had so little significance in American art except, as in Pop Art, in a critical way.

In considering, then, the search for self and country in the Stieglitz circle, it is easiest to conflate their concern for national identity with the Emerson/Whitman tradition. Most broadly, Stieglitz and the artists found the act of painting more important than adhering to particular doctrines. Whatever their awareness of European thinkers (Bergson, Nietzsche) or cult figures (Madame Blavatsky), their inclination was for the real rather than the abstract, for the experiential rather than the conceptual. They seemed willing to be inconsistent and to remain open to possibilities—all Emersonian traits. Stieglitz in his various galleries—the Little Galleries of the Photo-Secession (1905-1917), the Intimate Gallery (1925-1929) and An American Place (1929-1946)—offered something equivalent to Emerson's Concord—a place in which ideals could be considered reasonably free of trade and commerce. Concord, like the galleries, could be "a place where thought and imagination could be exercised in relative freedom from immediate consequence, a center of intent both culturally, revolutionary and politically powerless."[21] Stieglitz, like Emerson, found history a hindrance, since its traditional forms arrested individual and spiritual development, and both believed that man's mind was stronger and more important than institutions. Both preferred individual adventure to group activities or mass movements. Stieglitz, no doubt, would have been sympathetic to the notion that "Emerson was advocating the mythic nature of our existence, the constant possibility for man to be in touch with his creation and in living along that channel to determine his daily reality."[22] (From this point of view one might read American Scene painting as a colossal loss of nerve and Abstract Expressionism as very Emersonian.)

At his most Emersonian, Stieglitz could say:

> I am the moment. I am the moment with all of me and anyone is free to be the moment with me. I want nothing from anyone. I have no theory about what the moment should bring. . . I am merely the moment with all of me. . . When I am no longer thinking but merely am, then I may be said to be truly living, to be truly affirming life.[23]

This sort of expression, whatever its associations with Henri Bergson's *élan vital*, reverberates with Emersonian feeling of the sort expressed in the essay "Nature." "Every hour and season yields its tribute of delight; for every hour and change corresponds to and authorizes a different state of mind, from breathless noon to grimmest midnight."[24] Stieglitz's contempt for the dead hand of tradition also finds its echo in Emerson. Just as the former considered 291 (the shorthand name for his first gallery) in revolt against authority, "in fact against all authority in everything," so Emerson said in

"The American Scholar" (which was a declaration of intellectual indepedence, "I had better never see a book than to be warped by its attraction clean out of my own orbit, and made a satellite instead of a system. The one thing in the world, of value, is the active soul." He repeated the thought in "Self Reliance:" "What I must do, is all that concerns me, not what the people think," and in "Circles," "No facts are to me sacred; none are profane; I simply experiment, an endless seeker, with no Past at my back."[25]

My point in citing all of these references is not to play the game of notecard shuffling to find parallel thoughts in Emerson and Stieglitz, but to indicate how profound were the reverberations of the one in the other, or, rather, how profoundly both, and the artists as well, responded to similar ongoing strains in American thought. And just as these parallels can be observed, other, more sharply focused ones can also be found expressing the need for an American content—not necessarily in particulars, but in general terms. In "The American Scholar" and in "Self Reliance," Emerson asked for studies of the American scene. In "The Poet," he sought a poet who might celebrate America. The quest for American definition and the regret that it was slow in coming was also strong in Stieglitz's mind. As early as 1911, years before he had decided to concentrate on encouraging the growth of an American art, he wrote, "there is certainly no art in America today; what is more, there is, as yet, no genuine love for it." Nevertheless, as he reflected much later, "In the years before the war (World War I), I was constantly thinking of America. What was '291' but a thinking of America?"[26] By the 1920s, when he had committed himself to American art, he wrote to the poet Hart Crane, "This country is uppermost in my mind—what it really signifies—what it is."[27] He began to concentrate his attention on John Marin, Georgia O'Keeffe, Arthur Dove, Charles Demuth, Paul Strand, the photographer, and himself. He also supported Marsden Hartley. Stieglitz's Intimate Gallery (1925-1929) was "dedicated primarily to an Idea and is an American Room. It is used more particularly for the intimate study of seven Americans [the above, less Hartley]." As Stieglitz said, "What I am doing here is to ask America, in the name of America, whether there is no place here for her own."[28]

Just as Emerson wrote in "The American Scholar," "We have listened too long to the courtly muses of Europe," so Stieglitz also questioned reliance on European models. In a letter to Paul Rosenfeld, who might be characterized as the resident theoretician of the Stieglitz circle, Stieglitz argued against an American art with "French flavor."

> That's why I continued my fight single handed at 291—That's why I'm really fighting for Georgia [O'Keeffe]. She *is* American. So is Marin. So am I. Of course the world must be considered as a whole in the final analysis. That's really a platitude—so self understood. But there is America.—Or isn't there an America. Are we only a marked down bargain day remnant of Europe?—Haven't we any of our own courage in matters aesthetic?[29]

In a letter to art patron Duncan Phillips, Stieglitz virtually trumpeted, "I have a passion for America and I feel, and have always felt, that if I could

not believe in the worker in this country, not in the imitator of what is European, but in the originator, in the American himself drifting from within, pictures for me would have no significance."[30] Over the years his efforts were gratefully acknowledged by the artists. "His battle was principally for the American artist—photographer, sculptor, painter," O'Keeffe said. "In his time the French were of much more interest than the Americans, but he thought that something of interest and importance must come out of America. And one by one, he chose a group that he thought of interest and did his best to make it possible for them to work."[31]

Of the painters Stieglitz supported, Marin, Dove and O'Keeffe are closer to each other than any are to Hartley, who ever restless, travelled to Europe both physically and spiritually far more frequently than the others. He will be considered separately. Marin was probably the most insistently and consistently American and closest to the Emerson/Whitman tradition. Even his mannered writing style, his punctuation and use of dashes recall Whitman's essay "Specimen Days." And it was Marin more than the others who combined, as did Whitman, a love both for the rural and the urban. In fact it is not a little to realize that the following passage from Whitman's "Democratic Vistas," published in 1874, is one of the best descriptions of Marin's work and captures wonderfully the excitement and vibrancy of his scenes of New England and New York City *avant la lettre*:

> The splendour, picturesqueness, and oceanic amplitude and rush of these great cities, the unsurpassed situation, rivers and bay, sparkling sea-tides, costly and lofty new buildings, facades of marble and iron . . . the flags flying, the endless ships, the tumultuous streets . . . barely ever intermitted even at night; these, I say, and the like of these, completely satisfy my senses of power, fullness, motion, etc., and give me, through such senses and appetites, and through my aesthetic conscience, a continued exhaltation and absolute fulfillment . . . I realize . . . that not nature alone is great in her fields of freedom and the open air, in her storms, the shows of night and day, the mountains, forests, sea—but in the artificial, the work of man too is equally great . . . .[32]

Marin's concern for an American art developed most strongly in the 1920s, but he was already aware of his responsibilities as an American artist when, after living abroad from 1905 to 1909 and planning to return to Europe, he decided that an American artist should remain in America.[33] During the 1910s, he developed the idea that artistic expression must come from immersion in the locale, or nature or the landscape—the words become interchangeable. This point of view, it is important to stress, is basic to all of the artists in the Stieglitz circle. Writing to Stieglitz in 1919 about two artists whom he met in Maine, Marin said their Maine was not like his.

> Theirs [was] a sort of Pseudo Romantic, Chaldean, Persian, Grecian, Roman, Italian, French, German Combination Vision, an Abstract Concreteness, a monumental memory of things. A light-house, two figures of an old European romantic manufacture . . . Sheep on an island used to Express Symbollically their European eyed Abstractions.

He preferred to have:

> at the root of the matter, however abstract, however symbolically expressed. . .'town of Stonington,' 'the boats of Maine,' 'the people of Maine,' 'the sheep of Maine isles,' seething with the whole atmosphere of Maine. In all great expression you feel that, and to such an extent that one might almost say that they didn't feel it, but, well, that it just was.[34]

For Marin and the others, the starting point for art, then, was nature, not art or the imagination, and the descriptive language was, as might be expected, filled with references to nature. One of the recurring images in the art literature of the time was that of the soil or the earth. In the Stieglitz circle, it did not carry folksy connotations more appropriate to the American Scene movement. For example, art critic Jerome Mellquist's assessment of Dove, that "he comes all loamy from the American Soil. His work does not arise in the European experience. . . . He is fully attached to the soil of America," is not the way the image was used in the Stieglitz circle.[35] Rather, it carried, in addition to American connotations, intimations of sensuousness and even sexual release, of fulfillment, of completeness of being. Georgia O'Keeffe, writing about Dove said:

> [He] is the only American painter who is of the earth. You don't know what earth is, I guess. Where I come from the earth means everything. Life depends on it. . . Dove comes from the Finger Lakes region. He was up there painting, doing abstractions that looked like that country which could not have been done anywhere else.[36]

Paul Rosenfeld found in Dove a "love and direct sensuous feeling of the earth," and in his work suggestions of its odors and textures.[37] O'Keeffe and Rosenfeld used such images to imply that Dove, an American artist, was finally painting with his entire being, with his "head, breast and belly," as Rosenfeld said, not just with his head, and that an American painter was finally beginning to emulate Whitman and bring the "whole man to his art."[38] This quality, Rosenfeld thought, was a key to the development of an authentic American art—evidence of the wholeness of an artist's person, of his authentic self, in his work, evidence which had been lacking in the past. The soil then, was not a country-home image as it was to become in the 1930s, but one implying a loss of personal inhibition, of the presence of artistic maturity in and self-fulfillment for American artists.

It was certainly in this context that Stieglitz once said of Marin, "[he] does not set out consciously to paint things American but he does so necessarily, because he is himself of the soil."[39] Marin's own use of the image was simultaneously more nationalistic and more descriptive of his art. "It is a legitimate hope," he once stated, "That Our Soil will produce the artist. . . When we grow potatoes in this country we use American soil and when we paint pictures I guess we use something like it."[40] Marin's potato image was his way of telegraphing his preference for art based on forms in nature. He disdained abstract art and believed that abstract artists found no delight in looking at the world. Of Mondrian, he once said "Curious, isn't it—there's a man with an exceptionally fine head—making

a series of fine uprights and horizontals as supports for things to grow—Yet nothing grows thereon."[41] Marin held, rather, that "art is produced by the wedding of man and nature," that the artist "can create from that which he *has* seen," that "to close one's eyes to the seeings on this Earth—to specialize in a limited seeing—that one is not for me and that limited seeing full of distortion—nothing recognizable—that you've never really seen with love," and that the artist "can transpose,. . . can play with [his] material, but when [he is] finished that's got to have the roots of that thing in it and no other thing."[42]

Dove also derived inspiration from forms in nature. In 1913, he wrote to Stieglitz that his line had gone dead because he had momentarily stopped working from objects in the landscape.[43] Unlike Kandinsky who wrote in *On the Spiritual in Art,* with which Dove was familiar, "that art is above nature is no new discovery," Dove held that "what we call modern should go smack to nature as a source." On another occasion, Dove wrote:

> Actuality! At that point where mind and matter meet. That is at present where I would like to paint. The spirit is always there. And it will take care of itself."[44]

Finally, in a letter to Stiegliz, written in 1929, Dove indicated his preference for the real as his point of departure when he said "to choose between here and there, I should say here."[45] But preference for the actual did not mean preference for imitation. Dove would have agreed with Marin who wrote in 1950, "Nature is so beautiful so wonderful—that to make that which is based on an imitation almost seems a Crime."[46]

O'Keeffe, too, found nature to be essential source of her inspiration. When asked about the relation between nature and her work, she said:

> From experience of one kind or another, shapes and colors came to me very clearly. Sometimes I start in a very realistic fashion and as I go on from one painting [to] another of the same thing, it becomes simplified till it can be nothing but abstact, but for me its my reason for painting, I suppose.[47]

Reliance on fact was, of course, basic to Emerson, but tyranny by fact was anathema to him as it was to Marin, Dove and O'Keeffe. Of the many passages one can find in Emerson's essays, one from "History" and another from "Art" well illustrates these points. After discussing the effect of the tyranny of facts over people, Emerson wrote:

> If the man is true to his better instincts or sentiments, and refuses the dominion of facts, as one that comes of a higher race, remains fast by the soul and sees the principle, then the facts fall aptly and supple into their places; they know their master, and the meanest of them glorifies him.
>
> In landscape, the painter should give the suggestion of a fairer creation than we know. The details, the prose of nature he should omit, and give us only the spirit and splendor. He should know that the landscape has beauty for his eye, because it expresses a thought which to him is good, and this, *because the same power which sees through his eyes, is seen in that spectacle* (my italics); and he will come to value the expression

of nature, and not nature itself, and so exalt in his copy, the features that please him.

The italicized passage points to Emerson's mystical belief in the connection between matter and spirit and to his own desire to connect to the wholeness of nature, that in the end nature was a teacher and a guide and the elemental stuff from which he derived his knowledge. The artists, if in less exalted terms, also felt a similar humility before the entirety of nature as well as a desire to learn from it and to comprehend and relate in some why to its vastness. For example, speaking of nature in a purely visual context, but with spiritualizing overtones, Emerson wrote in "Nature," "Such is the constitution of all things, or such is the plastic power of the human eye that the primary forms, as the sky, the mountain, the tree, the animal give us a delight *in and for themselves*. . ."[49] Almost as if in extension of this observation, Dove wrote in 1927, "I should like to take wind and water and sand as a motif and work with them." Two years later, in suggesting that one "should be able to feel a certain state and express it in terms of paint," he said:

> To feel the power of the ground or sea, and to play or paint it with that in mind letting spirit hold what you do together rather than continuous objective form, gaining tangibility and actuality as the plane leaves the ground, to fly in a medium more rare and working with the imagination that has been built up from reality rather than building back to it.[50]

Marin, too, in his way, indicated a similar thought when he wrote in 1928, "Seems to me the true artist must perforce go from time to time to the elemental big forms—Sky, Sea, Mountain, Plain—and those things pertaining thereto, to sort of re-true himself up, to recharge the battery."[51]

In their desire to possess and be possessed by nature, Emerson and the artists did differ, but only be degrees. Emerson, the nineteenth-century person, believed profoundly in the interconnectedness of the physical and spiritual worlds with man as the mediating agent. The artists, more self-conscious twentieth-century creatures, held back. They probably would have instinctively understood, but not gone as far as, Emerson who wrote, in his most famous passage asserting his belief in the continuity of spirit and matter:

> There [crossing a common or walking in the woods] I feel that nothing can befall me in life,—no disgrace, no calamity (leaving me my eyes), which nature cannot repair. Standing on the bare ground,—my head bathed by the blithe air and uplifted into infinite space,—all mean egotism vanishes. I become a transparent eyeball; I am nothing; I see all; the currents of the Universal Being circulate through me, I am part or parcel of God.[52]

By contrast, O'Keeffe turned a potentially similar sublime experience into domestic commonplace when describing a sunset in New Mexico to Stieglitz:

> At five I walked—I climbed way up on a pale green hill and in the evening light—the sun under clouds—the color effect was very strange—standing high on a pale green hill where I could look all round at the red, yellow, purple formations—miles all around—the color intensified by the pale grey green I was standing on. It was wonderful—you would have loved it too. . . .[53]

And Marin, perhaps more poignantly sensing the loss of connectedness and the alienation of modern man from nature wrote in 1927:

> As I drive a good deal I am conscious of the road, the wonderful everlasting road, a leading onward, a dipping, a rising, a leading up over the hill to the sea beyond. To nail that, to express that, to find the means to clutch, so that there it is, that's what torments me, to show with startling conviction.[54]

But O'Keeffe's quest was no less profoundly felt than Marin's, and on at least two occasions she discussed it in phrases that were filled with Emersonian resonances. In a letter to Sherwood Anderson, she wrote:

> Making your unknown known is the important thing—and keeping the unknown always beyond you—catching—crystalizing your simpler clearer vision of life—only to see it turn stale compared to what you vaguely feel ahead—that you must always keep working to grasp.[55]

Picking up the same line of thought years later, she wrote:

> The unexplainable thing in nature that makes me feel the world is big beyond my understanding—to understand maybe by trying to put it into form. To find the feeling of infinity on the horizon line or just over the next hill.[56]

Although versions of O'Keeffe's quest appear in several essays by Emerson, her words seem most nearly to be a gloss on passages in "Circles." In that essay, Emerson wrote:

> The eye is the first circle; the horizon which it forms is the second; and throughout nature this primary figure is repeated without end . . . Our life is an apprenticeship to the truth, that around every circle another can be drawn; that there is no end in nature, but every end is a beginning. . . .[57]

In a brilliantly perceptive essay on O'Keeffe, Marsden Hartley noted some very Emersonian correspondences in her work. He understood the ways she interrelated spirit and matter. From the first, he said, "the element of mystical sensation appears . . . passionately seeking direct relation to what is unquestionably to her, the true face of nature from which source and this alone—she is to draw forth her special deliverance." He felt that she operated at the border between "finity and infinity," but that she always returned to nature. "Nature in her simplest appearance is consorted with—and we find numbers of canvases and drawings that seek only to inscribe

the arc of concrete sensation and experience." He continued, comparing her to Blake and to Emanuel Swedenborg, the mystic, and found that at times she, like them, might try to reach beyond reality, but "the struggle is always toward a glorification of the visible essences and semblances of earth. . . ."[58]

Such wrestlings between the here and the not-here require tremendous strength of character and independence, and in their various declarations of artistic independence, the Stieglitz artists were resolutely, almost belligerently, Emersonian. None of the artists revealed a social vision or utopian schemes, unlike several contemporaries abroad. Instead, their aim was to fulfill themselves as artists. Their intensions were entirely personal and privatized, not public. For example, O'Keeffe wrote in 1923:

> One day seven years ago I found myself saying to myself—I can't live where I want to—I can't go where I want to—I can't do what I want to. School and things that painters have taught me keep me from painting as I want to. I decided I was a very stupid fool not at least to paint as I wanted to and say what I wanted to when I painted as that seemed to be the only thing that I could do that did not concern anyone but myself—that was nobody's business but my own.[59]

She then presumably began to paint to please herself. Dove, too, thought that artistic growth hinged on self-awareness and self-knowledge. In a poem he wrote in 1931, he said:

> It must be your own sieve through which you sift
> All those things and the residue is what is left of you.[60]

In similar fashion, Marin showed his disdain for conformity on several occasions. In letters to Stieglitz, he said:

> This living in crowds, living in herds, seems to kill fine things, fine thought. Kill the art output of the nation. Jealousies, Strivings. Competing to get ahead of one another. Instead of keeping ahead within ourselves.
>
> When your real artist transgresses he does it consistently so that it ceases to be a transgression and that's what your proper gentleman can never get.
>
> Reason and knowledge are the things we have to combat, they are always fighting sight. The thing seems to be to know how we see, not to let your knowing how the thing is to conflict.[61]

Again, passages in Emerson pop up in response to these assertions, but the ones closest in tone are from "Self Reliance" and "The American Scholar."

> And truly it demands something godlike in him who has cast off the common motives of humanity, and has ventured to trust himself for a taskmaster.
>
> Whoso would be a man must be a nonconformist. . . Nothing is at last sacred but the integrity of your own mind. . . What I must do, is all that concerns me, not what the people think.

> The sluggish and perverted mind of the multitude, slow to open to the incursions of Reason, having once so opened, having once received this book, stand upon it, and makes an outcry of it if it is disparaged. Colleges are built on it. Books are written on it by thinkers, not by Man Thinking; by men of talent, that is , who start wrong, who set out from accepted dogmas, not from their own sight of principles.[62]

This is strong and inspirational language. Even if Marin, Dove and O'Keeffe had not read Emerson directly (as had the artists of the Robert Henri circle—John Sloan, George Luks and the rest), they might have discussed his ideas with Marsden Hartley who had read Emerson when he was eighteen years old and, a short time later, Whitman's *Leaves of Grass.*[63] Hartley's relation to Emerson is ambiguous, however, since he read widely in European mystical litrature, and his interest in American art, at least in the 1930s, assumed a sociological rather than a more purely individualist flavor.

Hartley was also most willing to view American art as something separate from himself, something more than a conversation between his own genius and nature. In his various articles and unpublished manuscripts, he sought American qualities in others and, like others, scrambled around sometimes in contradictory fashion, trying to define American traits. He found Winslow Homer to be a Yankee and aware of locale—Maine—because his work was "flinty and unyielding, resolute as is the Yankee nature itself. . . ." For Hartley, Homer "typifies a certain sturdiness in the American temper. . ."[64] John Singleton Copley's art was national in "those metallic, almost dissonant harmonies and highly incised acid rhythms and designs [which] could only have been produced by American temper and American sensibility." Hartley found "hard sticking to facts" to be the distinguishing characteristic of American artistic sensibility—no sloppiness or slopping over, but evenness, regularity, measure and thus, with Copley, there was "a distinct racial decisiveness about him."[65] And Hartley found American traits in primitive painters to be "essentially cool, restrained and brittle and they are happily devoid of extraneous showmanship."[66]

At the same time, he praised the late nineteenth-century figure, George Fuller, in whose work he found a quality resonant of Deerfield, Massachusetts, which Hartley described as possessing a "high grade tradition" and which was revealed in Fuller's work through the amplitude of his pigment.[67] Hartley ranked Fuller with Albert Pinkham Ryder as the finest American artists for their "timelessness" and because they "strike a louder note in the American scale than any other of the American artists."[68] The note reverberated, without much definition, with both private imaginative and public American qualities. On a few occasions, Hartley singled out Ryder, Fuller and also Homer Dodge Martin as particularly American because "they were conscious of nothing really outside of native associations and native deductions," and, with Edgar Allan Poe, they were the "great imaginatives of our personally racial kind."[69]

Whatever were his varying and even opposing assertions of typical American traits, one thing remained clear. Ryder was Hartley's favorite,

"our most original painter. . ., the first of our real painters and the greatest in vision," because of his combination of imaginative powers and his truth to experience.

> What painter's culture he acquired was essentially European, his private experience was universal, and what gave him his personal and national power, was his New England gift of penetration into the abysses of loneliness. He knew the meaning of being alone with the Alone.[70]

In contrast to Hartley's observations of Copley's Americanisms, he found Ryder "in his autographic quality [to be] certainly our finest genius, the most creative, the most racial. For our genius, at its best, is the genius of the evasive; we are born lovers of the secret element, the mystery in things."[71] Whatever the characteristics of American art by turns became, Ryder was Hartley's hero and he probably projected his own longings and artistic aspirations onto Ryder's art. To read Hartley on Ryder is to read Hartley on Hartley.

Hartley described his first encounter with Ryder around 1909 as if it were an epiphany:

> When I learned he was from New England the same feeling came over me in the given degree as came out of the Emerson's Essays when they were first given to me—I felt as if I had read a page of the Bible. All my essential Yankee qualities were brought forth out of this picture [a marine] and if I needed to be stamped an American this was the first picture that had done this—for it had in it everything that I knew I had experienced about my own New England. . . it had in it the stupendous solemnity of a Blake mystical picture and it had a sense of realism besides that bore such a force of nature as to leave me breathless. The picture had done its work and I was a convert to the field of imagination into which I was born. I had been thrown back into the body and being of my own country as by no other influence that had come to me.[72]

Ryder then was the model, arguably an Emersonian model, an imaginative mystic with an immeasurable imagination whose work was nevertheless rooted psychologically rather than descriptively in a specific American locale. Whatever else Hartley said or did, this was the artist he wanted to become, but he probably did not quite sense this until the 1930s. Before this time, we can catch glimpses of his search. A few examples will suffice.

As early as 1913, Hartley rejected Kandinsky's art, about a year after he had been introduced to it, stating, "It is without the life germ—it is the philosoph painting—the theorist demonstration—not the artist's will bent on creation. He gets it in his writing but not in his painting." He found Kandinsky to be theosophic and Marc "psychic in his rendering of the soul life of animals," and rejected them as models, saying that he could never be French or German, but would always remain American. "The essence which is in me is American mysticism. . . so expressive of my nature. . . ."[73]

In Emersonian fashion, he rejected their mysticism in order to acknowledge his own, based on his own experiences, and to follow nobody's lead but his own. As he wrote in 1914:

> A picture is but a given space where things of moment which happen to the painter occur. The essential of a real picture is that the things which occur in it occur to him in his peculiarly personal fashion. It is essential that they occur to him directly from his experience.[74]

This profoundly Emersonian response has not been without echoes in the Abstract Expressionist generation. In 1947, Herbert Ferber said:

> Space and form take shape concomitantly in creating an arena where the creative personality of the artist is in anxious conjunction with his perception of the world about him.[75]

Five years later, Harold Rosenberg refomulated this idea:

> At a certain moment the canvas began to appear to one American painter after another as an arena in which to act. . . . What was to go on the canvas was not a picture but an event. The painter no longer approached his easel with an image in his mind; he went up to it. . . to do something to that other piece of material in front of him. The image would be the result of this encounter.[76]

All three statements seem to posit the ideal Emersonian situation—a presumably knowledgeable artist in the act of creation who is aware of but at the same time lets slip from his mind the inhibitions of his past training and experience when in the act of creation in order to free his mind for a more direct and a more honest and more authentic response to the stimulus at hand. Whether this is the ideal artistic situation is another matter, but it is certainly an Emersonian one.

In 1918, during another bout of Americanitis, Hartley discovered, when in the American Southwest, that he was "an American discovering America."[77] Responding to the then all but pervasive search for a credible American art, he anticipated the revival of an American realism after World War I. He felt that a more honest type of realism would emerge through "genuine individuals appearing with their own relationships to things, and their own methods of expression." This new realism would, therefore, be "a sturdier kind of realism, a something that shall approach the solidity of the landscape itself, and for the American painter the reality of his own America as Landscape." This meant, in a Southwestern context, more than painting Indians in Parisian modes. "There will be an art in America only when there are artists big enough and really interested enough to comprehend the American scene," in a manner, he said, similar to Whitman's example. This could happen only when "a stouter connection [is] established, a verity of emotion between subject and observer." Artists, then, had to establish contact with the land and what it signified in regard to customs and culture. "The painters will somehow have to acquaint themselves with the idea of America as landscape, as a native productive space before they can come to conclusions which will have any worth whatsoever among artists of America and the world."[78]

While Hartley was making these observations, common enough at the

time, he was also praising the Maine poet, Wallace Gould, for projecting a sense of place in his poems and a "feeling for his own specific soil . . . He is Maine inside and out in his poetry."[79] But Hartley was unable to take his own advice. He did not remain in the country, let alone return to New England, for several years, despite the opinions and encouragement of his friends.[80]

Finally, in 1931, Hartley, one of several other artists at this time, found it necessary to return to the United States for cultural sustenance and to redefine themselves and their art as American. Spending time in Massachusetts, he found Gloucester "to be a creative shot . . . It has given me a real connection with my native soil."[81] In a poem written for an exhibition of works painted there, he alluded both to re-eastablishing his bonds with New England and to an Emersonian interconnectedness of elements in which a single spirit moved through all things.

> When rock, juniper, and wind
> are of one mind,
> a seagull signs the bond—
> makes what was broken, whole.[82]

Despite good intentions, he did not make what was broken (his separation from his native turf) whole. Harley returned only intermittently to New England in the following years and did not stay in his native Maine for any length of time until 1937. It would seem that from the evidence of both his writings and paintings after this time the balance between an Emersonian mystical union with nature and a more nationalistic feeling for northern New England tipped in favor of the latter. For example, in 1933 in the Bavarian Alps, he described an experience that approximates Emerson's "transparent eyeball" passage from "Nature."

> Something whisked me away, completely enfolded me. I felt myself becoming everything—continuity, measure, surcease. I had become nothing and in that instant I saw myself perfectly—out of myself, and when I returned I heard myself saying to myself—wasn't it wonderful. Now we can begin again.[83]

By contrast, Hartley wrote in an essay in 1936, "On the Subject of Nativeness—A Tribute to Maine," a year before he returned to that state, of his need to identify with and become a part of the state. He hoped that one maintained one's nativeness "no matter how far afield the traveling may be . . . This quality of nativeness is coloured by heritage, birth, and environment, and it is therefore for this reason that I wish to declare myself the painter from Maine."[84]

But what was the quality of nativeness? Partly it was painting local objects "thrown up with the tides . . . marine vistas [expressing] the seas of the north."[85] Partly it was an unnameable capturing of the spirit of place. "I am completely recognized as an authentic painter of Maine born in Maine, but this recognition comes I am happy to say from the state itself and the native spirit which recognizes the authenticity of my private and local emotion."[86] This emotion was derived from, as Hartley said, "my tall

timbers and my granite cliffs—because in them rests the kind of integrity I believe in and from which source I draw my private strength both spiritually and esthetically."[87] Hartley also described the quality of northern light as cold and oblique, and which made people "introspective, sullen and bitter" rather than spontaneous and expansive. Moreover, he found the north to project a "primeval savagery" and to possess "elemental dangers."[88] All of these terms describe visual qualities Hartley infused into his late landscapes and which provided them both with a sense of locale and the imprint of Maine, whatever the subject. By melding a style that evoked the feel of the landscape of a locale with objects found in that locale, he clearly believed that an art would emerge representative of the life, customs and habits of that locale.

Despite his brave words, Hartley soon tired of Maine. "I am tired of this country and anyhow I have done my bit for Maine," he wrote to art dealer Hudson Walker in 1941. "I am so sick of granite and balsam and fir and whatever that I could scream almost."[89] But, presumably, Maine would remain within Hartley wherever he went. It was his authentic voice, both is own and his region's. Arthur Dove's comments on an art more representative of the entire country are pertinent here.

> When a man paints the El, a 1740 house or a miner's shack, he is likely to be called by his critics American. These things may be in America, but it's what's in the artist that counts. What do we call American outside painting? Inventiveness, restlessness, speed and change. Well then, a painter may put all these qualities in a still-life or an abstraction, and be going more native than another who sits quietly copying a skyscraper. . . .[90]

In their different ways, the Stieglitz artists attempted just that—to suggest through the local the larger American context, but not at the price of losing their own individuality. Thus, they also sought to suggest through the personal the larger American context. In this sense, they contributed to the search for an authentic American art, an important aspect of American art before 1940, but they did so in an Emersonian context and with strong Emersonian reverberations. Their modernism was tempered, then, by a respect for the real and by its extension into the spiritual and, not least, by a respect for self and for country.

Footnotes

[1]Elizabeth Hardwick, "The Fictions of America," *The New York Review of Books,* 34 (June 25, 1987), p. 12.

[23]Henrik Hertzberg, "Let's Get Representative," *The New York Republic,* 196 (June 29, 1987), p. 15.

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

[4]See my "American Painting and National Identity: The 1920s," *Arts Magazine,* 61 (February 1987), pp. 48-55.

[5]James Jackson Jarves, *The Art Idea* (New York: Hurd and Houghton, 1877), p. 231. First published in 1864.

[6]Charles L. Buchanan, "American Painting Versus Modernism," *The Bookman,* 46 (December 1917), p. 421.

[7]See William Gerdts, *American Impressionism* (New York: Abbeville, 1984), pp. 199, 299; and Thomas Folk, *Edward Redfield* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Art Gallery, 1981), p. 3.

[8]Buchanan, "American Painting," p. 422.

[9]Bliss Carman, "Thee Kinship of Nature (Boston: Page, 1904), pp. 143-144. Cited in Charles Eldredge, "Nature Symbolized: American Painting from Ryder to Hartley," in *The Spiritual in Art: Abstract Painting 1890-1981* (Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 1986), p. 115.

[10]Giles Edgerton [Mary Fanton Roberts], "American Painters of Outdoors: Their Rank and Their Success," *The Craftsman,* 16 (June 1909), p. 282.

[11]"The National Note in our Art: A Distinctive American Quality Dominant at the Pennsylvania Academy." *The Craftsman,* 9 (March 1906), p. 765

[12]Edgerton, "The Younger American Painters: Are They Creating a National Art?" *The Craftsman,* 13 (February 1908), p. 521; and Robert Henri, "The New York Exhibition of Independent Artists," *The Craftsman,* 18 (May 1910), pp. 161-162.

[13]See Joseph J. Kwait, "Robert Henri and the Emerson-Whitman Tradition," *PMLA* 71 (September 1956), pp. 617-636.

[14]His name appears in issues of *Seven Arts, The New Republic, The Arts, The Dial, The Craftsman, Broom,* among others.

[15]Roger Asselineau, *The Transcendentalist Constant in American Literature* (New York: New York University Press, 1980), pp. 90-94.

[16]Hippolyte Taine, *Lectures on Art,* trans. by John Durand, (New York: Henry Holt, 1883), p. 30.

[17]James E. Miller, Jr., (ed.), *Walt Whitman: Complete Poetry and Selected Prose* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1959), pp. 25 and 241).

[18]Alfred R. Ferguson and Jean Ferguson Carr (eds.), *The Essays of Ralph Waldo Emerson* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1979), p. 210.

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

[20]This formulation was provided the author by Elizabeth Broun, The National Museum of American Art, in a letter, May 11, 1987.

[21]Lazer Ziff, *Literary Democracy: The Declaration of Cultural Independence in America* (New York: Viking, 1981), p. 15.

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

[23]Waldo Frank *et al.,* (eds.), *America and Alfred Stieglitz: A Collective Portrait* (New York: Doubleday, Doran, 1934), p. 135.

[24]Stephen E. Wicher (ed.), *Selections from Ralph Waldo Emerson* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1957), p. 24.

[25]Alfred Stieglitz interview in the *New York Evening Sun,* cited in Dorothy Norman, *Alfred Stieglitz: An American Seer* (New York: Random House, 1960, 1973), p. 115; Wicher (ed.), *Selections*, pp. 67-68; and Ferguson and Carr (eds.), *Essays,* pp. 31 and 188.

[26]Letter from Stieglitz to Sadakichi Hartmann, December 22, 1911, in Norman, *Alfred Stieglitz,* p. 110; and passage from "Ten Stories," *Twice a Year,* 5-6 (1940-41), pp. 135-163, cited in Bram Dijkstra, *Hieroglyphics of a New Speech* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969), p. 94.

[27]Herbert J. Seligmann (ed.), *Alfred Stieglitz Talking* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1966), p. 212.

[28]*Ibid.,* Statement of April 21, 1926, p. 77.

[29]Wicher (ed.), *Selections,* p. 79; Letter from Stieglitz to Paul Rosenfeld, September 5, 1923, in Seligmann (ed.), *Stieglitz Talking,* p. 212.

[30]Letter from Stieglitz to Duncan Phillips, in Sasha M. Newman, *Arthur Dove and Duncan Phillips: Artist and Patron* (New York: Braziller, 1981), p. 31.

[31]Georgia O'Keeffe, *A Portrait of Alfred Stieglitz* (New York: Viking, 1978), n.p.

[32]Miller, Jr., (ed.), *Complete Poetry,* p. 462.

[33]Seligmann (ed.), *Stieglitz Talking,* p. 131.

[34]Dorothy Norman (ed.), *The Selected Writings of John Marin* (New York: Pellegrini and Cudahy, 1949), p. 51.

[35]Jerome Mellquist, *The Emergence of American Art* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1942), p. 362.

[36]Cited in Barbara Haskell, Arthur Dove (Boston: New York Graphic Society,. 1974), pp. 77, 118.

[37]Paul Rosenfeld, *Port of New York: Essays on Fourteen American Moderns* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1924), p. 168.

[38]*Ibid.,* p. 169.

[39]Seligmann (ed.), *Stieglitz Talking,* p. 28.

[40]From *The Palisadian,* (November 15, 1936) and from the *New York Herald Tribune,* (November 18, 1936), both cited in Cleve Gray (ed.), *John Marin by John Marin* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1970), p. 128.

[41]*John Marin Memorial Exhibition* (New York: The Whitney Museum of American Art, 1956), n.p.

[42]Statements in *Marin Memorial Exhibition,* n.p.; Norman (ed.), *Writings of Marin,* p. 126; Gray (ed.), *Marin by Marin,* p. 44; and *Marin Memorial Exhibition,* n.p.

[43]Cited in Haskell, *Dove,* p. 7.

[44]The first two quotes are from Sherrye Cohn, *Arthur Dove: Nature as Symbol* (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1985), p. 106. The third is from Haskell, *Dove,* p. 136.

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

[46]Gray (ed.), *Marin by Marin,* p. 136.

[47]Cited in John Baur, *Nature in Abstraction,* (New York: MacMillan, 1958), p. 6.

[48]Ferguson and Carr (eds.), *Essays,* pp. 19 and 209.

[49]Wicher (ed.), *Selections,* p. 26.

[50]Haskell, *Dove,* p. 135.

[51]"John Marin by Himself," *Creative Arts,* 3 (October 1928), p. xxxix.

[52]Wicher (ed.), p. 24.

[53]Letter to Stieglitz, n.d., in Katherine Hoffman, *An Enduring Spirit: The Art of Georgia O'Keeffe* (Metuchen, N.J.: Scarecrow Press, 1984), pp. 32-33.

[54]Letter to Stieglitz, August 21, 1927, in Herbert J. Seligmann (ed.), *Letters of John Marin* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1970), n.p. First published in 1931.

[55]Hoffman, *An Enduring Spirit,* p. 13.

[56] *Georgia O'Keeffe* (New York: Viking, 1976), opposite plate 100.

[57] Ferguson and Carr (eds.), *Essays,* p. 179.

[58] "Georgia O'Keeffe: A Second Outline in Portraiture," 1936, in Gail R. Scott (ed.), *On Art By Marsden Hartley* (New York: Horizon, 1982), pp. 104, 105.

[59] "The Modern Honors First Woman: O'Keeffe," *The Art Digest,* 20 (June, 1946), 6. See Also *Georgia O'Keeffe,* opposite plates 12 and 13.

[60] Haskell, *Dove,* p. 44.

[61] Seligmann (ed.), *Letters of John Marin,* n.p. The First letter dates from 1928, the last two from 1919.

[62] Ferguson and Carr (eds.), *Essays,* p. 43; and Wicher (ed.), *Selections,* p. 67.

[63] Hartley, *Adventures in the Arts* (New York: Hacker, 1972), p. 7. First published in 1921.

[64] *Ibid.,* pp. 43, 47.

[65] "Copley's Americanism," ca. 1930, in Scott (ed.), *On Art,* pp. 172, 175.

[66] "American Primitives," n.d. in *ibid.,* p. 191.

"George Fuller," 1937, in *ibid.,* p. 245.

[68] *Ibid.,* p. 248.

[69] "American Values in Painting," in Hartley, *Adventures,* p. 55; and "On the Persistence of Imagination: The Painting of Milton Avery," in Scott (ed.), *On Art,* p. 205. See also *Adventures,* p. 70.

[71] *Adventures,* p. 40.

[72] From notes written ca. 1909, in *Feininger/Hartley* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1966), p. 61. First published in 1944.

[73] Letters to Stieglitz, May and February 1913, in Eldredge, "Nature Symbolized," in *The Spiritual in Art; Abstract Painting 1890-1985,* p. 115.

[74] From Exhibition Statement at Little Galleries of the Photo-Secession, 1914.

[75] Statement by Herbert Ferber in *The Tiger's Eye,* 2 (December 1947), p. 44.

[76] Harold Rosenberg, "The American Action Painters," *The Tradtion of the New* (New York: Grove Press, 1961), p. 25. The article first appeared in 1952.

[77] Hartley, "America as Landscape," *El Palacio,* (December 1918), p. 340.

[78] *Ibid.,* pp. 341, 342.

[79] Hartley, "The Poet of Maine," *The Little Review,* 6 (July 1919), p. 53.

[80] Letter from Marin to Stieglitz, in Seligmann (ed.), *Letters of Marin,* n.p.; and Rosenfeld, *Port of New York,* p. 99.

[81] Letter to Rebecca Strand, November 22, 1931, in *Marsden Hartley: Soliloquy in Dogtown* (Cape Ann, Mass.: Cape Ann Historical Association, 1985), p. 13.

[82] Henry W. Wells, *Selected Poems of Marsden Hartley* (New York: Viking, 1980), p. 3. See also Haskell, *Marsden Hartley* (New York: The Whitney Museum of American Art, 1980), pp. 83, 84.

[83] From "Cleophus and His Own," n.d., in Scott (ed.), *On Art,* p. 51.

[84] *Ibid.,* pp. 114, 115.

[85] *Ibid.,*

From "Is There an American Art?" ca. 1938, in *ibid.,* p. 199.

[87]*Ibid.*

[88]"Impressions of Provence From an American Point of View," Scott (ed.), *On Art,* pp. 143, 144.

[89]Letter to Hudson Walker, October, 1941, in Haskell, *Hartley,* p. 123.

[90]Cohn, *Dove,* p. 99.

Hans Breder and the Auras of Video

By Herman Rapaport

At times one feels the distance between performance art and video is quite incremental, and in Hans Breder's *Pictura Minuta: Portraits of the Urban Poor* (1981), shot in Oaxaca, Mexico, there is the suggestion we are witnessing the "performance" of a documentary, which is to say, a simulation of anthropological, feminist, political, sociological, and commercial portraiture marked by artistic transformations: the reassigning of color values, the embedding of images, the asynchronicity of sound. Certainly, *Pictura Minuta* produces a disturbingly realistic "affect" through the contrast of what appears to be the conditions of everyday life in Oaxaca and the ready-made clichés by means of which people frame or talk about themselves. There is little related to us by the video that we have not heard before in documentaries about life south of the border, and, given this fact, the lives of the squatters of Oaxaca will appear as minute, instantaneous, minimal, which is to say, as *pictura minuta*.

However, the people who narrate or perform stories in Breder's video have much the opposite perspective, for they do not see life as fragmented into a series of minute shots or views of the urban poor. Rather, they see their lives as rich and strange, lives capable of unfolding in very complex

and dramatically charged ways before the camera eye. For the figures who speak to us in the video, things are not minimal but hyper-real. And it is in this curious doubling of minimal and hyper-real performances that Breder's video produces rather startling effects. It is from what at first appears a perspective conditioned by mass media about poverty in Latin America that a de-construction takes place, as the urban poor, those subjects who are supposedly never in the know, begin developing theories about everyday life. What an anthropologist like Clifford Geertz would call "local knowledge," then, begins to counter "global knowledge." And yet how is this deconstitution to occur if not from within the vocabularies and performances of global knowledge itself, from within the parameters of what these people believe such knowledge to be as they have experienced it on television?

The hyper-realization of the minimal, this is what Breder's technical manipulation of the visual resources of television achieves, as if the performance of the image were in collaboration with the deconstruction of global knowledge. But it is an evocative realism, since the emphasis is placed on minutely depicted objects which are thereby magnified. This zeroing in on the minute as minimal has the curious effect of focusing on fragments which accede to plenitude, as if one were looking at everything and nothing, at both gigantic wholes and tiny bits and pieces. Linda Nochlin notes that such contradictions are typical of female artists in the early seventies who are concerned with developing a realism whose "closeup vision" produces a sense of the hallucinatory and the concrete fused in the image. Breder's *Pictura Minuta* has many feminist resonances—in the video, women speak openly about their oppression—and it is in this context that we see the extent to which Nochlin's perceptions have been furthered in a medium that she did not consider in "Some Women Realists."[1]

Unlike a painting which presents a static surface—one thinks, for example, of the work of Estes, Cottingham, or Kleeman—video allows for a much more ephemeral and less reified image. In fact, Breder's work is an attempt in large part to dis-articulate the image, to saturate it with what some French critics have been calling "les points de perte," or what Jacques Lacan has called *aphanasis* (fading). It is as if in the midst of the exaggeration of the real one experiences the hallucinatory in terms of a fading or bleaching of the image. In the work of hyper-realists like Estes, this fading occurs simply because there is too much detailed information being relayed to us from the canvas all at once. Everything is too sharp. And this, of course, is characteristic of a camera eye which achieves this end by means of the zone method. However, in Breder's video, the aphanasis of the image occurs through the performative action of assigned coloration which has the effect of hollowing out forms, of dilating the sense we have of volumes. Breder shapes the material, perhaps violently, and the faces of the subjects appear much like plastic film or masks—harsh, liquid, iridescent—their surfaces reminding one of a viscous substance made up of luminous particles. It is as if the substance of the faces were stripped away, as if there were only masks of the speakers, as filmy as the presentations of self in which media is reflected. And it is here we notice what Walter Benjamin

might have called the auras of video.

These auras are very reminiscent of the kinds of impressions one receives from listening to the music of Karlheinz Stockhausen, and particularly from *Hymnen*. For like Breder's video, Stockhausen's music is composed out of the stuff of media, in this case, shortwave radio transmissions. It is as if we could talk about a genre of art which one could call "electronic sculpture." For one finds elements within a medium are being shaped technically from within the medium itself rather than being superimposed onto something else or simply translated out of the medium. And in this way one finds the "aura" or "presence" of the represented is worked through by the artist. Particularly interesting is the fact that both Stockhausen and Breder are concerned with shaping materials "freely" within inter-national contexts. Stockhausen's taping of national anthems and his lyrical distortions whose sound shapes are extremely hard on the ear bring us a fragmentation of reality that is informed by a hallucinatory deconstitution of theme, pulse, orchestration, and context, something that the medium of shortwave radio is itself engaged in doing, given the aleatory ways in which the sound waves are "propagated" in the earth's atmosphere. In Breder's *Pictura Minuta* the same capacity for the hallucinatory occurs when trivial or common subjects are distorted within a medium that is by its very nature capable of distortions. Like Stockhausen, Breder allows himself to tape messages, slogans, clichés, narratives without intervening. However, he is not reluctant to "shape" or reperform these materials in order that the potential violence of the medium is exposed even as the passive condition of the transmissions are preserved.

It is recognized that television brings reality closer to people while subjecting reality to aphanasis. This occurs through the inaccessibility of the things themselves whose absence is perceived as a function of the immediacy in terms of which they are seen. "Day by day the need becomes greater to take possession of the object—from the closest proximity—in an image and the reproductions of an image," Walter Benjamin wrote in 1931.[2] The reality effect of an object, Benjamin argued, was a function of the duration of an image. And to reproduce an object through the proliferation of images is to change our consciousness of its duration, to increase its duration or durability, and thereby destroy the aura of the object's uniqueness. This idea is perhaps borrowed from Marcel Duchamp who meddled with the aura of the *Mona Lisa*. Nevertheless, Benjamin writes,

> The removal of the object from its shell, the fragmentation of the aura, is the signature of a perception whose sensitivity for similarity has so grown that by means of reproduction it defeats even the unique.[3]

Through the photograph we have foreknowledge of objects, as if they had telepathically appeared to us in dreams and fantasies before we actually see them. This pre-familiarization with objects gives them not so much an after-life but a before-life which suggests that they exist spiritually outside of themselves until our presence on the scene gives back to them the bodies which photographs have taken away. And it is in this sense that objects

in an age of reproduction take on auras which derive from the mass production of an object's aspect.

Television is the animation of those ghostly auras which mark the depletion of the unique, the exhaustion of the real. Breder's *Pictura Minuta* is particularly interesting in that the aura of the narrators is de-familiarized in the same sense that Stockhausen's treatment of national hymns results in a radical transvaluation of their auratic or aural ambiences. Through sculpting with electronic media, the auras of the mechanical age of reproduction are themselves affected and subject to artistic manipulation. Hence the auras of electronic music or of video are a measure of the degree to which the (de)spiritualization of the image—a (de)spiritualization which is always subject to metaphysical recovery (this is quite obviously Benjamin's major point)—is de-constructed and brought into a much more materialist context, one in which the aura is less a mere effect of reproduction than it is part of the praxis of representation.

In the history of contemporary art, we find that especially figures like Cage, Stockhausen, Anderson, Long, Blanchard, Kienholz, and Breder are very sensitive to the aura as something that can be determined from within the aphanasis of an object or construct. Indeed, Charles Newman is mistaken when he says in *The Post-Modern Aura* that with the inflation of reproduction there is a depreciation in the value of what is represented, meaning that in post-modern art the very concern with the mass produced image is itself a measure of the worthlessness of such artistic practices.[4] Rather, it is important to realize that post-modern artists have begun working with what Jacques Derrida calls the structure of the trace. Richard Long, for example, is well known for his countryside walks which are unrecoverable except as a trace structure of performances whose effects on the landscape are so minuscule, at times, that even the artist would be at pains to call attention to them. In this sense, the work is at every point de-presented in its very presentation, its existence minimally reflected as a wake of signs which are but residues of the work itself. Here the aura of the work is constituted in the ephemeralities which condition its *desoeuvrement.*[5]

Pictura Minuta has some of the elements of such trace works in the sense that Breder's video is itself but a residual structure of interviews, a trace structure in which the traces have been positioned to heighten the inflation of the minuscule without leading to its depreciation, the kind of depreciation elicited by pop art of the 1960s. "With my dog of a life, I never thought I would be on T.V.," a young woman says in *Pictura Minuta*. Such statements are peculiar within the contexts of this video because they are part of a bric-a-brac of assertions, and, of course, we are close in such instances to the work of Robert Bresson, a film-maker who distinguishes between actors and models, preferring the latter, because:

> Model: His *permanence:* always the same way of being different.[6]

The model is never himself but exists on screen as a trace or aura which never asserts itself as having definite existence. In fact, the model is but a performance of selfhood which is not to be conflated with the notion

of being at one with oneself. For the model is always one who is dis-placed, the one who is not what is being presented, even as an actor is one who is a self acting another self. And this is precisely the condition of the squatters which Breder's video communicates, that of the model whose existential condition is that of a *retrait* of an *entre en arret.*[7] These are Heideggerian terms which are apt with respect to contemporary art, since it is the notion of the subject or self which has been demystified and reinterpreted in the *ars povera* of a withdrawal of being in terms of which a certain permanence is manifested in what Bresson calls "the same way of being different." Throughout Breder's video the portraits of the urban poor are precisely this: a permanence which is always different, fleeting, contradicting, lying, posturing, positioning, rationalizing, narrating. Who are these people? It is this question which *Pictura Minuta* implicitly raises, pointing out that, in fact, the who must be recovered from the traces of personality and of habit. That even when one investigates the lives of a living culture, it is as if one were always forced to examine the debris, traces, auras. As if character itself were by its very nature presented and de-presented in the aphanasis or *retrait* of its capacity to appear. . . .

For the sake of completion, let us briefly review some moments of *Pictura Minuta*. The video begins with a shot of the square in Oaxaca, iridescently bleached colors of blue, green, yellow saturating our gaze. And then we shift. Suddenly a woman in her forties, obviously the worse for wear, is giving an oral history of her grandmother. It is already narrated like legend: a pilgrimage is being made to the Virgin of Juquilla.

> The Virgin Juquilla has made many miracles. I can't explain where the Virgin of Juquilla gets her power. One is born with faith and the belief that she has power. We have almost a blind faith in the Virgin.

So the grandmother of Maria Elena has made a pilgrimage with a sick child strapped to her back. They have walked many miles; the sacrifice is enormous. And, of course, the Virgin delivers. The prayers are answered. Yet,

> When my daughter was about four years old I begged the Virgin not to let her die and that I would take my daughter to her so that the Virgin could see her. My daughter grew up and I wanted to take her to the Virgin but I did not keep my promise. I was always pregnant or had to work and so I could never do it. And then my daughter died.

The vicissitudes of everyday life are suddenly rationalized by the metaphysics of the Virgin's anger. But, too, there is the insistence in Maria Elena's voice that the people of today are fallen. They do not have the metaphysical faith and strength of the ancestors. Today life is a trail of broken promises.

Breder cuts the oral history and returns to the view of the square with its bleached colors and the harsh unforgiving tolling of bells. The church is calling and everyone is just walking by at his own pace. Whatever the church means, it is subordinated to the tales told by a vernacular, everyday culture. We cut back to Maria Elena. But now her voice is more distorted, the echoes of the asynchronicity calling attention to a certain hollowness and persistence. The oral history now treats Maria Elena's married life and

the knowledge which is the truth of motherhood as passed down from the past.

> My grandmother and mother told me that to be a mother is to be like a dog. But I would rather be a mother than a dog.

Life is a burden of pregnancies and beatings. To be a mother is to bear pain and then relate it proudly to a camera. The husband is a monster: killer of other men, keeper of a stable of mistresses, beater of his wife. Given these burdens, how and I to be blamed for what I am? This seems to be the deep structure of this testimony, that to have survived, given the brutality of this life, is enough. Ask no more from me.

Again, a presentation of the square and its bells. And then an interview with a man. It is his role to tell us what a father is.

> A father, to be a real Father, must know himself what type of person he is himself. If not, he is going to fail. Being a father is like making a drawing. You must already know what type of drawing you would like to make. I think a father must think quite well before becoming a father. Before he decides to become a father, he better think about it. If not, he better stay a macho. The head of a family worries about his family. The macho has many families . . . one here, one there, one over there. He does not worry about the education of his children. He worries about his machismo.

It is a texture of tautologies mixed with the idealism of knowing what to do before one does it. And this telling is filtered through the juxtapositions of family images, particularly that of a little girl who is jumping up and down, who is playing the id to the father's superego, and is dancing, a dancing that if she were sixteen would already be very seductive. And yet, it is but a nervous energy which the little girl manifests, a boredom with childhood. Perhaps more importantly, this nervousness calls attention to the vacuity of clichés about responsibility and foresight, social attitudes that people perform knowing full well that they cannot be practiced. Here, once more, we see the personage as a model who performs certain lines without, in fact, acting them out, as if the speaker were but a shadowy miming, an apparatus of gestures whose presence are an index of the extent to which such gestures mark a de-presentation. The notion of drawing itself becomes intriguing in this context, as if at a metatextual level Breder were suggesting that art, like family planning, is an ideal borrowed from elite culture which the urban squatter can only turn into gestures that elide everything except their being performed as pure gesture.

The video cuts back to the square and then to a last interview with a woman named Rosa. Young, but already hardened, Rosa likes to think of herself as a feminist with unconventional ideas. "I like feminism. I like liberated women who try to upgrade themselves. Women have always worked." Rosa wants a settled existence. But for her that means not having a family. Living with men is all right. But she does not want to bring children into the world. Marriage only means being beaten and betrayed by men. Worse, it means endless pregnancies and exploitation. Rosa says she wants to be independent. She wants money for herself and thinks it is fine for

a woman to work in order to support herself. But what she really wants is to be kept by a man. The problem, as Rosa sees it, is that women are being asked to support the men, whereas it should be the men who are supporting the women. This is what she really means by holding "unconventional ideas." Marriage, in Rosa's view, is the legitimation of a system in which women are asked to support men. "I don't want that kind of life." The "radical" clichés of feminism, then, are being used here to support what is, after all, a typical bourgeois view marking what Rosa sees as liberation. And, indeed, from her perspective, being a housewife with an affluent husband would signify great personal liberation from the kind of poverty she must endure. Particularly interesting is how various discursive lines of thought are blended in a thoroughly false performance of feminism, what Theodor Adorno called a negative dialectic, or, the alliance with positions which delimit precisely the opposite of one's real allegiances. Rosa, then, is herself as a young woman but a false construction, a texture of gestures which are confused, misaligned, distorted. And it is in this texture of gestures that we begin to see a trace-work of culture as it is mediated through the "authenticity" of this young woman of the urban poor.

In discussing *Pictura Minuta* in this way, it appears that Breder's video is anything but the kind of reportage one finds in books like *Working* by Studs Terkel, though, in fact, a dimension of the video is to bring out something on this order. However, Breder allows the medium of video to merely perform that sort of documentary without being at one with it. For the oral dimensions of the video are a heteroglossia of discursive formations which are being performed by the urban poor: the religious confession, the news interview, the testimony of victimage, the anthropological supplying of information, the political message, the psychological fable of one's life, the international communiqué, telling-it-like-it-is, and so on.[8] These modes of address are filled with many genres which the informants themselves know only dimly, and almost certainly from having watched commercial T.V. Thus the tonalities of feminist accusation, statist conceptualization, and down-home reportage filter into the vernacular thought of the poor. And Breder's success is in showing how a dialectics is engaged whereby purely subjective accounts are entirely derived from the modes of media objectification. It is in this sense that such accounts are re-performances of something never made present but whose traces can be felt in the form of a cultural fall-out.

The auras of video—they are, like radiation, an aftermath. In part, I am suggesting that the "reality" of the urban poor is not only "imitation" of television but a presencing of self constituted out of the residues of what are the auras of media presentations, mediated auras of personality, events, images, attitudes, fantasies. It is not only the artist but also the urban poor who know how to situate or compose themselves within a phenomenology of the aura, a composing which Breder recomposes, re-adjusts, but for the sake of showing to what extent his "subjects" are already in the act of such self-constitutions. It is this complex and dialogic structuring of the auras of video that defies the idealism of knowing what to draw before one draws. Breder, then, allows us to become self-conscious not merely of the

presentation of things on television but the ways such a presentation concerns the performance of a trace work of gestures and discourses. This is a trace work, at once minimal and hyper-real, which conveys an image always already disembodied or alienated from the modes of its production, what we might call the de-constructions of television.

Notes

[1]Linda Nochlin, "Some Women Realists" in *Super Realism,* ed. G. Battcock (New York: Dutton, 1975), pp. 64-78.

[2]Walter Benjamin, "A Short History of Photography" in *Classic Essays in Photography,* ed. A. Trachtenberg (New Haven: Leete's Island Books, 1980), p. 209.

[3]Benjamin, p. 209.

[4]Charles Newman, *The Post-Modern Aura* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1985).

[5]This term is used by Maurice Blanchot in order to indicate how artistic works are deconstitutive and deconstructive. See *L'entretien infini* (Paris: Gallimard, 1969).

[6]Robert Bresson, *Notes On Cinematography* (New York: Urizen, 1977), p. 23.

[7]Martin Heidegger, *What is Philosophy?* (New Haven: Twayne, 1958). See also Jacques Derrida, "The Retrait of Metaphor" in *Enclitic* (1977). The *retrait* is at once a presentation and a concealment, a protrusion and a withdrawal.

[8]Mikhail Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination* (Austin: University of Texas, 1981). Bakhtin, who was himself out of favor in the Soviet Union for many decades, has written literary criticism based on the assumption that an author is not an originator of languages but a juxtaposer of various linguistic styles that belong to various segments of a culture: authoritarian, vernacular, academic, slang, business, etc. The work of art brings these discursive formations into dialogue and it is through dialogue that we become aware that these formations have points of view that are not merely expressions of individuals but of collectives.

Nexus, Plexus, Fidibus—
Still, The Nineteenth Century Doesn't Add Up For Us!

By Rudolf M. Bisanz

Review of Robert Rosenblum and Horst W. Janson, *19th-Century Art,* Prentice-Hall, Inc. and Harry N. Abrams, Inc., New York, 1984.

Revisionist treatments of Nineteenth Century art on a panoramic scale commenced in earnest with R. Zeitler's colossal *Die Kunst des 19. Jahrhunderts* (1966), followed by J. Schultze's diminutive *Art of Nineteenth-Century Europe* (Engl. ed. 1970; see my reviews, *Art Journal,* 31/2 and 33/2, respectively). But a comprehensive American study has long been overdue. Therefore, Mr. Rosenblum's stated intention of rectifying our knowledge of art in the past century in accordance with recent scholarship and revisionist criticism in, what he calls, "an up-to-date, one volume survey," should be welcome news. But for all its undeniable virtues as a major study, revisionist zeal, seeming inclusiveness, scores of "new" artists, bountiful original plates, and essayistic assurance, his contribution suffers from certain conceptual and structural flaws as a "survey." These cast a measure of doubt on his study's presumed role as a successor to the standard compendia by F. Novotny, G.H. Hamilton, and J. Canaday, for example, and similar handbooks or college texts on the period. Since the longer and controversial sections on painting (by Rosenblum) and the much briefer, uncontestable sections on sculpture (by Janson) differ from each other in their basic approaches and styles, it is best to discuss them separately.

Rosenblum's past work in iconology, his basic method here, may be known to readers from his winning *Transformations in Late Eighteenth-Century Art* (1967) and *Modern Art and the Northern Romantic Tradition: From Friedrich to Rothko* (1975). He now states, that *his* Nineteenth Century art will be "totally internationalist. . . a United Nations approach to Western Art." He wants the art "reshuffled by thinking of it in terms of an active involvement with historical events." Intending to avoid the forced integration of the varied functions of art that occurs when it is approached from a single point of view, he consistantly shifts his perspective. And he advocates the substitution of a historicist scenario for the common Twentieth Century aesthete's habit of reading Nineteenth Century art as a lockstep sequence of movements constantly "prefiguring" movement and culminating in Modernism. At issue here are the 1) thematic-iconologic plexus; 2) internationalism; 3) the event-originant (i.e., historically necessitated) social studies context of art; 4) the shifting interpretational perspective; and 5) historicist aesthetics. In short, methodology is at issue. The application of various methods by the author in the "survey" is crucial to his book and a controversial issue. It deserves detailed analysis.

As many of the thematic chapter headings indicate—"The Image of the Ruler," "Poetry and Piety," "Interiors: Domestic and Erotic," etc.—paintings are shuffled and collated into an arbitrary number of competing thematic jurisdictions. Again and again, a work of art is introduced for no other reason than to disclose an aspect of an *a priori* thematic purpose. Instead of functioning, in balanced fashion, as one among numerous methods of inquiry, iconology all too often becomes both the subject and the object of inquiry: a gridlock system. The work of art itself, regardless of its other qualities (if any), is significant only to the extent that it exemplifies a special intellectual construct. Separated from this often arbitrarily arrived at construct, the particular work often makes an anachronistic, dislocated appearance within the book. It becomes a purely random event.

In the previous two books mentioned, the methodological models that Rosenblum seems to be following are H. Beenken's influential *Das 19. Jahrhundert in der deutschen Kunst* (1944) and W. Hofmann's trend-setting *Das Irdische Paradies* (1960; Engl. ed. 1961). In these and similar special thematic-iconologic studies, whose scope and aim had a much more modest range—they never laid claim to the status of "surveys" or "tex-tbooks" of a whole period in world-art history—this methodology seemed productive enough. But in Rosenblum, the same approach, with its inevitable rush to mark "motivating" points, seems inappropriately compressed and headlong. Conversely, the process of integrating the specimen—the proper term for a work of art in this context—with its matching, unifying, and fulfilling hypothesis, can be vexatiously slow. The result is an eccentric mixture of elimination and prolixity. Stretched over some 400 pages and distended over a period of 13 years, several continents, dozens of countries, and many hundreds of "specimens," Rosenblum's procedure proves inadequate to the task as well as manipulative and restrictive. No doubt rewarding for initiates—it abounds with many treats—Rosemblum's text, the very model of "applied methodology," all too often simply breaks down as a meaningful instrument for ordering, classifying, and systematically revealing—thus cohesively "surveying"—a whole period in art history.

As to the second issue, internationalism, nothing could be more desirable than to break the deadlock of Francocentrism in accounts of Nineteenth Century art, and deal with artists of all nations on an equal footing. Agreeably, therefore, we find in this textbook painters from very many countries. Surprisingly, however, they are not ordered by nationalities. Instead, they languish in segregated "thematic" compounds. This arrangement suggests an insensitivity to the distinctive identities of national schools of art in a century when, for better or for worse, nationalism reigned supreme. It was in the Nineteenth Century that growing ranks of national governments helped define institutions and social and cultural patterns of organization in their respective jurisdictions. They put their stamp of national identity on the art academies and on the various bureaucracies fostering the public art they sponsored. Moreover, they exerted an equally strong, if indirect, economic pull or psychological influence on the private lives and professional attitudes of artists, regardless of whether the artists

promoted or opposed such establishment authority. Above all, nationalism affected the cultural and spiritual life of a country by stimulating native literature, historical studies, folk customs and ethnic traditions, etc., i.e., nationalist interests, strongly mirrored in the visual arts of many countries. Certain internationalist tendencies to the contrary—and Rosenblum does not elucidate them adequately—blithely to underrate or even ignore these fundamental nationalist concerns by erasing national boundaries on the world map of the Nineteenth, of all centuries, is historically wrong. To do so within the basic organizational framework of an art "survey" hardly raises the historical consciousness of the Nineteenth Century artists and its art, especially not among the general readers and students who will read this book.

Thirdly, we have been told by Rosenblum that we must think of art "in terms of an active involvement with history." Rosenblum seems to do this routinely, but looked at more closely, the painting-as-historical-specimen, or as politico-cultural "icon," simply displays a more elegant thematic-iconologic plumage then usual. The artist is not seriously shown to have belonged personally to a nation, region, tradition, or to have had a psychology of his own. Despite some exceptions to the contrary, the artist is not shown to have been shaped by a continuous chain of relevant "historical events." Instead, and in classical social-determinist fashion, Rosenblum degrades the artist into a passive conduit for the transfer of historical events—wars, revolutions, changes in regimes, economic upheavals, etc.—to canvas. By way of this social determinist nexus we learn about certain French "historical events," but very little about others in other countries. Even less responsibly, less well-known paintings of other countries are often "keyed" to or explained by comparison with favorite stand-bys. This contradicts Rosenblum's own assumption that art is necessitated by historical events, and his internationalism. Also, he may assume that the reader is familiar with the various artists' lives and various nations' histories, but this may be an over optimistic assumption, considering the abundance of "newly introduced" painters and countries and the beginner state of the "survey" uger

Regarding my fourth point, eclecticism of perspective in the analysis of a work of art can be very productive, and showing itself to be in many instances here. But one wishes that this eclecticism had been less random, and not exclusively in the service of *a priori* thematic motifs. Virtually every other painting is discussed on a different basis, ranging expediently from social or economic or Marxist to military-historical and on to psychological, psychoanalytical and even feminist viewpoints. The result is often confusing. What are Rosenblum's critical priorities? What is the necessity of any given perspective for any given work of art? Rosenblum's extreme relativism, together with his almost complete equivocation about the artistic merit of any of the paintings he discusses makes his book critically indifferent and insignificant.

This brings us to the fifth point. Rosenblum's aversion to the exlusivistic, formalistic aesthetics of Modernism (e.g., J. Meier-Graefe, R. Fry) and opposition to classification according to style and movement (e,.g., H.

Wölfflin, W. Friedländer) is pervasive. He sets out to reform erstwhile reformers by likening his choice of paintings to such well-thumbed and inclusive, pre-Graefian and pre-Wölfflinian, turn-of-the-century panoramic reviews as R. Muther's and L. Benedit's. Unfortunately, in practice, while he eliminating both systems of well-defined categorial rules and critical standards, he offers no discernible new system of evaluation of his own. This leaves it up to each individual reader to decide for himself or herself if any given painting is good, bad or indifferent, or why some other painting was not chosen to make the point. As for movements, two shoot out incongruously as chapter headings: the Nazarenes and the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood. This seems to reflect today's relativism of values with avengeance! Does Rosenblum advocate art history by personal choice? A related problem is the lack of definition given to artists' oeuvres. Only paintings that are actually illustrated are discussed. In the select few cases where an evolution of personal style is implied, bits and pieces of the oeuvre are scattered over many chapters, cancelling the intended benefits.

Can the discussion of a painting, without consideration of aesthetic and critical standards, and in, at best, an uncertain relationship to movement, style, and oeuvre, still yield meaning in art history? It probably can and does, if this book is understood as a collection of erudite essays for specialists, and if the reader's critical acumen and prior knowledge is taken for granted applaud the spirit of innovation that underlies the book. But also feel that a less subjective, experimental, dogmatic, and intellectualizing approach, and more practical balance between old and new methods, would promote better clarity, order, and continuity in a "survey."

Despite all these flaws, the patient, well-prepared reader who braves the learned thematic crosscurrents of Rosenblum's chapters, will discover much treasure. And some jetsam. Here are a few samples of the latter. Among scores of others, J.F. Lagrenee and Ph. Reinagle are typical for making an insignificant art that serves a presumably weighty thematic-iconologic plexus. Their elevation distorts the survey. A.J. Carstens' *Birth of Light* (Kunstmuseum, Weimar), appearing here as a manifestation of liberation from "space-time-coordinates" and a spiritual neighbour of H. Fuseli, "proves" a thematic point but casts him incorrectly as a neurotic Romantic of "floating spaces." In fact, his larger oeuvre suggests the opposite: classically integral spaces and contents. Incidently, he was legally Danish not German, and active in Rome; and he does not belong in a digression on English art. Because of the same plexus, we are introduced to Heinrich Olivier, a very minor painter. We get to see his perfectly dreadful *Holy Alliance* (Staatliche Galerie, Dessau), but miss meeting his brother, Ferdinand Olivier, an important painter and founder of a leading landscape school. In the same vein, in the unclear chapter titled "Retrospection and Introspection: The Congress of Vienna and the Late Goya" (!), we glimpse the mediocre *Coronation of Charles X* (Versailles) by F.-P. Gérard, but none of his better works, e.g., his Portrait of Mme. Récamier (Carnavalet, Paris), one of the most ingratiating *chef d'oeuvres* of Nineteenth Century art. Contrary to what we read here, Ph. O. Runge definitely did not advocate a new religion (compare his writings and my *German Romanticism*

(1970)). To liken, as is done here, and in one of Rosenblum's previous publications, the intent and purpose of his imagery to E. Munch, does a disservice to both.

To omit M. v. Schwind and L. Richter, among other important artists, from an account of Biedermeier, and to append such an account to French, Belgian, English, and Italian art, as Rosenblum does, not only destroys the heartland but also the historical meaning of that term and movement. C. Wolff dangles precariously out of touch with S. Gessner, etc., and a sustained Swiss tradition of nature lyricism. Similarly, H. Robert falls out of the context of the Eighteenth Century Italian tradition of a G. P. Pannini and G. B. Piranesi. Again, J. A. Koch, the foremost master of the heroic landscape, strays importunately from his Roman milieu. Moreover, he is not sufficiently differentiated from Ph.J. Valenciennes. P.H. Revoil and F.F. Ricard are honored as fellow originators of the troubadour style. Inexplicably, the same is not done for the Neoprimitive F. Pforr, who was the virutal inventor of that style. J.M.W. Turner's late abstracting style, as exemplified here by *Snowstorm* (Tate), is not presented as integral to his oeuvre. One of the worst of very many such cases of "dangling" and disassociation is Rosenblum's sandwiching of F.G. Waldmüller, Austria's greatest and early Realism's foremost grand master, between Sir E. Landseer and W. Mulready (!). This literally catapults him out of his proper nexus. Nor do we learn anything about his significant oeuvre and Realist theories (see my *Major Schools of German Nineteenth-Century Popular Painting,* 1980). The proper line of division between French Realism and Naturalism (see G. Weisberg, *The Realist Tradition,* 1980) is now drawn here, showing Rosenblum's neglect of the current state of the problem. In this connection, his perception of gleaners, as in J.-F. Millet's *Gleaners* (Louvre), as "rural equivalents of urban beggars" rather than beneficiaries of regulated feudal privileges originating in the Middle Ages, squares neither with the sociological nor the historical facts of that venerable custom.

G. Courbet's style cannot be explained out of social considerations alone. He share his rural bourgeois background with many others, including his fellow realist J. Breton, whose interpretations of peasants, however, are manifestly different from his. In short, membership in a social caste does not mean sharing the same style. A Feuerbach, separated here from all that he cherished and loved during his life, makes a brief (15 half-column lines) and totally inconclusive appearance in the thoroughly disjointed chapter on "Escapist Modes, etc." So much for one of the era's greatest Neo-Romantic and symbolist idea painters (see my article, *Art Journal,* 33/3). E. Manet, L. Gérome, J. Tissot, and T. Eakins are all repetitiously and vaguely characterized as revealing "their personal temperaments" in their paintings. The last mentioned, believed to disclose a "particular national tradition"—we are not told which—seems unique inasmuch as no one else is shown to have this trait, in keeping with an internationalist perspective. The great M. Liebermann's Dutch subjects, as so often with other art, are hurriedly mentioned, but no conclusions are drawn about the intent and aims of the artist's important "sociological paintings." Similarly, W. Leibl, a foremost Realist, does not emerge as an artistic presence. How could he,

squeeezed as he is into a discussion of his "opponent" P. Gauguin (!), a foremost Symbolist. Rosenblum remarks the important connection between Romanticism, Symbolism and Surrealism, but misses an equally important and more continuous stylistic transmission linking Neoclassicism to Neo-Romanticism to *pittura metafisica,* via an unbroken teacher-student chain and evolving tradition from Poussin, to J.A. Koch to F.W. Schirmer, to A. Böcklin, and on to G. De Chirico and beyond—to Surrealism. Let these examples suffice as a small sampling of specifics.

Now, from a series of hermetic, illustrated tales on history, social and otherwise, to something different. Janson also essays "the other 19th Century"—the slighted art of the academies, salons, officialdom, church, commemoration, etc.—of many countries in addition to the well known ones. But unlike Rosenblum, he structures his approach according to traditional art historical "survey" methods. Yet, in the process, he easily manages to include numerous original critical accents, introduce scores of forgotten sculptors, and balance innovative with tried, objective standards of presentation and aestheic evaluation. Similarly, he achieves a wise balance between national and international traits and between economic, socio-cultural, and psychological as opposed to aesthetic and formalistic origins in the makeup of art. The writing styles of the two authors, both excellent, are also markedly different: Rosemblum's, expansive, belletristic, flexible; Janson's economical, direct, natural. Both are "great reading" in their respective styles. The incompatibility of the two separate essays that have been brought together here even extends to the respective selective bibliographies. The one on painting deviates from the plan of the text in its main topics and chronology and, even more discordantly, in classification by movement. Nor is it consistently alphabetized. The one on sculpture (compiled by D. Gariff) is harmonious, orderly, serviceable.

Janson's survey of sculpture is divided, though not necessarily organically, according to the four parts of the book: 1776-1815, 1815-46, 1848-70, 1870-1900. His presentation follows an agreeably predictable course and is organized strictly by country, sculptural category, movement or group, style, and artist, paying special attention to revealing many individual oeuvres. Since they are not smothered by overlong descriptions or over-whelmed by boundless analyses, which is often the case in Rosenblum's treatment of painting, the individual exhibits are allowed to speak for themselves. They succeed in doing so charmingly. We may ask why, if J.L. Gérome, G. Doré, and E. Degas are honored as painters turned sculp-tors, the same has not been done for H. Daumier and P. Renoir. We may wonder why Art Nouveau has been neglected, where, in addition to A. Gilbert, such sculptors as H. Obrist, A. Maillol (represented here by a Neoclassic work), P. Roche, and R. Larche might have been meaningfully included. Or we may puzzle about the choice of the early *Young Man* (Nationalgalerie, East Berlin) to represent A. Hildebrand, when one of his later, more abstract *terra cottas* would better exemplify his seminal theory of pure form. Despite these problems, Janson's fluid and cohesive analysis, an abridgment (by J. Hargrove) of a longer text that was published later, succeeds admirably as a revisionist "survey" of its subject. We are grateful

that the late author was able to complete this, his final work and thereby set a capstone to his vaulting achievement in the history of art.

Contributors

Matthew Baigell is a Distinguished Professor of Art History at Rutgers University

Rudolf M. Bisanz is a Professor of Art History at Northern Illinois University

Michael Brenson is a writer of art criticism for the *New York Times*

Herman Rapaport is an Associate Professor of English at the University of Iowa

Shaw Smith is an Assistant Professor of Art History at Davidson College

Art Department
State University of New York at Stony Brook
Stony Brook, NY 11794-5400

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