Art Criticism

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Art Criticism

Table of Contents

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Editorial Note

The current issue of Art Criticism *explores the social produc-tion of art, a problem all the more pressing in view of the seeming overproduction of art. There is in many quarters of the art world an emphasis on the production of art, with no sense of the rationale for such production—with no compelling sense of the necessity for new art. The articles here explore the problem from three quite different perspectives. Alan Wallach looks at it from a Marxist perspective, Matthew Kangas offers a case study of a particular instance of artist-society cooperation, and Donald Kuspit examines the effect of the media on the creation of style.*

Continuing its attention to woman's art, this issue of Art Criti-cism *contains an article on Romaine Brooks by Sandy Langer. The treatment of Brooks is part of Langer's effort to develop a homosexual criticism. Also, in line with our ongoing attempt to make our readers aware of the conditions and ends of modern art criticism, we have published Jack Spector's report on the current state of criticism—a not uncritical state of the field report.*

The issue is rounded out by an article on realism by Nickels, on formalism by Rudolf Baranik and a re-review of George Boas's writings by Robert Neville. Nickel's article attends to recent advances in the theory of realism, Baranik's deals with similar advances in the theory of formalism, and Neville reviews a whole way of philosophical thinking about art, involving an-thropological concepts.

L.A., D.B.K.

1

On Some Problems of Contemporary Art Criticism

By Jack Spector

Ever since the 1960's American art criticism has been in a state of crisis: much art falls outside its competence; critical theories have splintered into dogmatic and parochial positions and critics cultivate their narrow field of taste and perception with no interest (other than defensive) in positions on the other side of the fence; and a narrowly conceived formalism that took shape in the 1940's and 1950's continues to haunt young critics despite its irrevelence even antipathy to the art of the late 1960's and 1970's. Certain interesting and significant questions emerge from this state of art criticism, which I should like to discuss here, among them, why art critics find themselves drawn to the issues of formalism while young advanced artists have moved onto new ground involving "content" in ways inaccessible to or ignored by the formalist critics, and what options may be opening or have already opened for criticism that

3

could bring it into vital relation to the new art.

The art of the early 1980's and consequently the art criticism associated with it impresses the observer with its variety. The blanket term "pluralism" has been applied to this mixture of survivals, revivals, renovations and innovations. The fact that no single type of criticism now dominates—as the alliance of formalist art and avant-garde criticism had in the 1960's—has depressed formalists and encouraged those interested in the rich variety of art with significant emotional and intellectual content. The flood of new modes of art making has entailed for criticism a return to questions neglected by the leading critics of formalist art concerning the motives and biography, the intentions and reception of the artists and their art. Hermeneutic and psychoanalytic approaches, ignored for decades by avant-garde critics now find an important representation and other disciplines like history and sociology long neglected by modern critics have again entered their discussions. Even the radical political criticism of art has suffered once more though in a form unlike earlier Marxist models.

In order better to comprehend the current state of art criticism we should understand why these questions were so long set aside and how formalist criticism emerged and came to dominate the most advanced art of the 1950's and 1960's in the United States. The divorce between content and form, an issue of great antiquity, crystallized most sharply for modern critics in the 19th century French movement of art for art's sake. This tendency that originated in Kant's aesthetics and within Romanticism, rejected the emotional intensity and the political and biographical content of much Romanticism in favor of a technical virtuosity and emotional coolness.

The criticism of modern art in the United States (as in Europe) had for a long time tied itself to a vision that equated the avant-garde and France: the attention to medium and apparently cool indifference to external events seemed quintessential elements from the French tradition of avant-garde painting that passed from Manet through Cezanne and the Post-Impressionists to the Cubists. The affirmation of this attitude and the adoption of its premises permitted young American critics of the 1940's successfully to crystallize the values of a nascent American avant-garde.

In the 1930's it seemed to most American critics that nothing could shake the primacy of the French avant-garde, neither German Expressionism nor the panEuropean trends of Dadaism or Surrealism—surely not the apparently derivative art of their own country. For Americans "modernism" meant, indeed, escape from provincial regionalism to an international perspective which in turn meant on one side French modernism, on the other international political movements, in particular Commun-

4

ism. Some of the most intelligent and sensitive critics of the 1930's felt that socialist "grassroots" progressivism and artistic modernism shared common aims and purposes (despite the adamant hostility of official Soviet Communism since the N. E. P. to all modern art as reactionary and bourgeois) and could lead to a popular modernism. A turning point crucial to an understanding of subsequent attitudes of the intelligentsia occurred with the discrediting of Soviet Communism through the Moscow trials of 1936-38 and the pre-WWII Nazi-Soviet pact. After such events none of these critics dreamed of harnessing modern art to Marxian internationalism, but rather insisted on an elitist view of modernism now perceived as incomprehensible to the lowbrow taste and thought of the hinterlands. The paranoia and divisiveness of the post-war McCarthy era completed the "reeducation" of Marxian oriented art critics, turning them from political activism to the less risky fields of aesthetics, scholarship, or art exhibition. This holds true especially for two of the major "first-generation" American critics of modern art, Clement Greenberg and Harold Rosenberg.

Greenberg launched an assault on the lowbrow enemy in his well-known essay "Avant-garde and Kitsch" of 1939. Here the critic distinguished sharply between an aesthetically useless subject matter and the formal problem that really counted, and adumbrated in his remark that the "medium is today the public content of the abstract painter's art;" Macluhan's tag of the 1960's equating medium with message. The German emigre Hans Hofmann who, like Kandinsky, admired both Picasso and Matisse, educated Greenberg's generation, providing it a vocabulary of form and a taste for dynamic abstraction devoid of recognizable subject matter. By 1949 Greenberg could name the powerful new trend of abstraction "American Style painting" and with prophetic righteousness point to its superiority over foreign as well as domestic varieties of abstraction. (One might make an instructive comparision, with obvious qualifications, to the disillusioned ex-Marxist James Burnham's post-war position: after 1945 he wrote popular and outspokenly jingoist books urging that America strive for military domination of the entire globe.) Quality as he intuited it became the sole criterion of "ambitious" art, to the exclusion of everything else as extraneous. Paradoxically the exclusion of political (and other content) became the basis for a new politics of artistic chauvinism; for the denial of content and insistence on apparent decorativeness suited the purposes of the federal government (though as always bureaucrats were slow to perceive this) which especially wished to promote a brand of homegrown American culture in opposition to Communist social realism on the one side and European abstraction on the other. Greenberg became the high priest of formalism, having

usurped the position of leadership from his brilliant contemporary Harold Rosenberg. Rosenberg, who came from a similar cultural background, remained slightly longer attached to Marxian ideas, which he relinquished in the 1940's. In his famous parable of "coonskins and redcoats" he graphically illustrated his notion that the uncouth but canny power of the American avant-garde would triumph over polished European abstraction as the Revolutionaries had in the 18th century. In the 1960's and 1970's he assumed the role of cultural mentor to the middle-brow liberals who read the *New Yorker*. With subtly developed chauvinism, Greenberg and Rosenberg, each on his own level, contributed to United States cultural hegemony, reversing the old relation to Europe.

Greenberg and his epigones established canons of taste through which they judged levels of quality and degrees of ambition. The logic of this rigid formalism demanded a constant watchfulness to expel or deflect contamination from bad or non-art: the essential principle was purification—of politics, of psychoanalysis, of history, of literature, of biography. Like all inflexible ideologies this aethetic ideology entailed its purges of counter-tendencies. Certainly formalism had undeniable value as a coherent, systematic doctrine and it served an important educational function in insisting on the contemplation of the sensuous object, and here formalism approached the disillusioned hard headedness of positivists like I. Berlin and A. Koestler. (Ironically it finally became a source of puritanical—albeit "aesthetic"—avoidance of sensuous experience.) The formalists of the 1950's derived a sense of epic grandeur and affirmative energy from their reaction against American provincialism and jaded, exhausted European sophistication. However, some of those who had followed the triumphal parade of the "heroic" Abstract Expressionists began to doubt their relevance. This denial of their elders created a complex, ambiguous position for themselves and for the American avant-garde: Rauschenberg, Johns and John Cage turned for kinship and support of their ideas to non-American models in Dadaism, European philosophy or Zen Buddhism. At the same time, all of them integrated American-made objects into their work. Their attitude mixed a serious commitment to their art-making and irony toward the heroic stance of the Abstract Expressionists; sensitive appreciation of the materials (which they handled with virtuosity) and apparent indifference to the shibboleths of "high" or "ambitious" art. The heady brew of art and life they created fell outside the strigent boundaries of American formalism. Critics like Leo Steinberg in the late 1950's already turned around by Rauschenberg's collages, discovered how incapacitating had been the criteria of Greenberg for understanding not only the masters but for all contemporary art not

6

formalist in Greensberg's sense. Not coincidentally at this time a contemporary French artist who retained figurative allusions, Dubuffet, found appreciation among some advance American critics chafing at the formalist bit.

The 1960's fragmented the problem of content into a number of issues (with a consequent irony): the medium upon which formalists had concentrated became a sloganized "message" even as Pop subsumed the commercial, trashy and trivial content of New York advertising and of comics under a sophisticated manner responsive to the most advanced painting. The divergence of form and content resulted in a vacuum once filled by the expressive personality. Now the artists could hide behind masks of coolness and impersonality. The ironic treatment of sensuous objects, ultimately descended from Duchamp, lead to a form of anaesthesia and a progressive retreat from the object: Minimal art rejected complexity and richness of surface and mass; technological art concentrated on light and motion, thereby disintegrating sculptural physicality; and some (e.g. Ad Reinhardt) claimed the end of art. An erotic art devoid of tenderness or loving interaction was produced either with the cold naked flesh of two figures or anonymous orgies of many, or with self-absorbed androgynes. The term "dematerialization," born with Cubism and often used after Cubism, was fixed by Lucy Lippard as a label for these diverse trends, whose *reductio ad logicum* was Conceptualism, which carried the Platonic formula in which Greenberg called art a "representation of a representation" to an abstraction of an abstraction. (The extraction formula of "A of A" had a certain vogue in the 1960's. Leo Steinberg in 1968 praised David Antin for his description in 1966 of Warhol's pictures as "images of images".) The Conceptualists' utter disdain of everything but the incorporeal pleasures of mental motion led eventually to two impasses: deadly dull tautology, in which clear ideas were merely reformulated analytically, and paradox epitomized in *Artlanguage's* doomed efforts in 1971 to escape from Russell's paradox on the inclusion and comprehension of sets, or J. Collins' poignant question—echoing Godel's Proof—about *Artlanguage's* "investigation into the art of semiotic signals": "Can a system discover itself, or is there a lacuna?"

We can now see that each extreme adumbrated emergent trends—the one to a solipsistic autobiographism which refuses to clarify or communicate and which apotheosizes the poetic suicide, the other to the frank disportings of the absurd or "psychotic." The advanced artist of the 1960's (especially the Minimalists and Conceptualists) struggled with formalist and anti-formalist issues, often to the point of producing dry theories and a calculated, ironic art. The attack on form led both to the negation of the ancient notion of form as the shaped

7

object (as in *bildende Kunst* or plastic art) and the reduction of form to the severest geometry of rectilinearism and planarity. Both derived from Cubism and resulted in an emptying of "interiority" or mass and emphasis on the surface. Significantly, the "philosophy of surface"—phenomenology—which some critics had earlier linked to Cubism, provided a sustenance for the theories of some critics concerned with Minimal art. Wittgenstein's theories of language (which shared basic positions with Ayer and the logical positivists) supported this public, unmystical attitude. He insisted on recognizing the limits of language as applied, e.g. to philosophy and art, activities disposed to unclarity, and refused to accept as meaningful talk that exceeded these limits. The critics who drew on formalism but wished to transform it and enlarge its perspective, agreed with the positivists' emphasis on the experience of the art. Susan Sontag, drawing on the writings of Barthes, wrote *Against Interpertation* (1964) which seemed new and fresh to a cultivated public long out of touch with French thought on modern art and literature. Only immediate experience counted, and the resort to the memory of earlier experiences seemed as "passe" as it had to the Italian Futurists. The mocking of art history ("chronology") and above all the sense of symbolic content became the sport of advanced artists.

Robert Morris (1965) in particular, following the example of certain ideas of Cage and of a performance of Rauschenberg, made sport of a famous passage by Panofsky which analyzed art into three levels that descend from the public and familiar to the deepest content with "iconological" links to the cultural "Weltanschauung" of the period. Panofsky's example of a man raising his hat, a typically civilized European gesture, must have seemed ideally vulnerable to Morris, who drank water and made other meaningless sounds to distract from the sense of the passage, which his voice—on tape—presented to the spectators. The English conceptualist John Latham (1966-67) attacked with subtle irony a more familiar authority—Greenberg's *Art and Criticism*, which had become a "Bible" for the formalist critics. Latham arranged a meeting of friends each of whom chose a page of the book. After chewing on the page, each spit the product into a flask, where it was immersed in acid, coverted to sugar, neutralized with sodium bicarbonate and finally fermented with yeast. When the book, which belonged to a library, was recalled, Latham presented it as a liquid in a flask. To the obvious gag about digesting serious matter or rumination that will turn to a form of "spirits," one should add the more subtly humorous allusion (doubtless missed by most of the participants) to two passages in the Bible—one in Exodus 32:20, in which Moses burnt the Golden Calf, crushed it till it was fine, scattered it on the surface of the waters and made the people drink it; the other in Ezekiel 2:8-

10, 3:1-3, where God makes the prophet eat a book, whose words then inspired his speech. These attacks on "the word," on content, and on the possibility of interpretation of art had important support from Wittgenstein's late writings. His assertion "about that which one cannot speak one should remain silent" became the linch-pin for divergent trends, the one making criticism into an art, the other making art into a language which could address only the public and visible aspects of art. Wittgenstein here added a dimension to the issue of silence as statement (Joyce's "silence, cunning and exile") and as an alternative to traditional form in music (from the long silences or monotomes of Satie to Young's silent performances). Cage applied silence to music in an effort to arrive at objectivity and unemotional impersonality. He wished apparently to fuse Western Dada negation with the Eastern (Zen) affirmation of the word: "Yoga," he wrote, "Yoking or, rather, making non-existent the ego." The difficulty of such an enterprise appears full-blown in the equivocal position of Ad Reinhardt, great nay-sayer ("art is not..."), who boasted that he was making the last paintings possible, a thoroughly Western Romantic assertion of ego and individuality (the last in a series can claim a certain uniqueness). We shall return to the "death of art" theme presently.

The intensified hostility of critics in the 1960's compared to the 1950's to the biographical or psychological study of art seemed then to be a gesture of defiance and independence of extraneous factors in the line of formalism's belief in the autonomy of art. In fact, this tendency perfectly corresponded to the mood of the decades after the 50's, a period of suspicion and detachment. We find evidence for all the characteristics of profound alienation highly intensified among the cultural elite: the passivity of spectators powerless before critics; absence of meaning or interest (impotent persons have little curiosity) except in the superficial (the fad for "camp"); absence of norms and a cultural estrangement that provoked an insatiable rebelliousness; social isolation and loneliness (the minorities—cultural as well as racial—became "martyrs," and symbols of the general alienation); and self-estrangement. In the absence of warm parental authority figures, the "youth generation" identified with the ever-handy images of screen stars. Males could feel personal (masturbatory) intimacy with Marilyn Monroe through the screen close-ups, and indeed the movie-goer provides the essential model of alienation: each person intensely involved with the same screen reality and generally indifferent (with obvious exceptions) to their neighbors at their side. No figure active from the late 50's and 60's better exemplifies the tension between public and private selves than Norman Mailer. A macho boor with delicate feminine sensitivites, a politically

involved personality thrusting himself and his art into public view *(Advertisements for Myself,* 1959), he walled off the private parts of himself behind the expansive volumes of his novels. The poem *Dead Ends* pronounced by a homosexual character (compare Oldenburg's cigarette piece, *Fag Ends* with its limp penises) developed a theory of narcissism as a cause of cancer. (Mailer's views on sexual and literary freedom and health in terms of unblocked energies has a clear relation to Reich's theory of the orgasm to which one can find a number of buried allusions. A comparison of Mailer's theory of cancer and Sontag's in *Illness as Metaphor* would be of interest.) There occurred in the 1950's and later two main types of solution to the impasse of alienation and "loss of self" (the title of Sypher's stimulating book). Some artists and their public felt not only that they could release their stress in thoughts of suicide but that suicide had valued qualities, conferring a magical aura—a simulation of self-control in the face of emotional impotence. Their search for authenticity and self-transcendence recalls the French existentialists' (one is free to choose to live or commit suicide, to become engage or to withdraw). Others followed the model of Paul Goodman in a quest for a non-Marxian type of community. Modern theories continuing and developing the line of Durckheim *(anomie),* Weber and Simmel (mass industrialized society as leading to formalized, impersonal socialization) and Fromm (the sales personality, the false consciousness of the alienated person) have attempted to cope with the problems generated by the modernization of individuals and groups in our society.

A curious reflex of this loss of self and the emphasis on formal values is the obsession with communication in art. For some, advanced art has become a language, even though it has nothing to say. Perhaps there is left only the shell of avant-gardism—the sense of "breakthrough" in the old cliche. The "breaching" of levels of style—high/low—became indeed the criterion for literary discourse (poetry) among the Russian formalists like Mukarovsky, for whom breaking the aesthetic norm is the very essence of that norm. Acceptance of this lability of the levels of style would obliterate the scheme of value judgments worked out by stringent formalist critics. Hence, the fascination of postformalists with the linguistic theories of the Prague School of the Russian formalists, notably of R. Jakobson. Since the 1930's Jakobson has declared that language is above all a structure, a relatively autonomous entity only secondarily integrated into the rest of human endeavors. Instead of being a material entity, language for Jakobson is semiotic—derived from a collective consensus of individuals. An important school of American functional anthropologists took an analogous position toward the existence of fixed human traits, and certain "literary anthro-

10

pologists" in France, above all Levy-Strauss, applied these ideas in developing a "structural anthropology." The crucial issue for Jakobson's semiology as for its application to art concerns the tension between the *code* or system and the unique and single act of speech, the *message*. We find an example of the relation of semiology to the art of the 60's in Barthes' 1964 analysis of an Italian sauce ad into three kinds of information: linguistic (the words of the ad), coded iconic or symbolic (images and their formal properties that suggest attractive features of the sauce), and uncoded iconic or literal (the picture of the sauce bottle). We observe significant differences from Panofsky's similarly tripartite analysis in Barthes' omissions of hierarchy (everything is art and nothing is art) and of references to a larger world-view. In contrast to the grand old humanist, and like the semiologists and anthropologists Barthes takes a more prosaic and positivistic position, without concern to evaluate the quality or importance of his example. The structuralist concern with the immediate and contemporary marks its radical rejection of history and of the hermeneutic tradition seeking depths of meaning in the iconography of art, a tradition that originated in Christian theology and nurtured the researches of great art historians like Riegl and Panofsky.

The rejection of history in the art and criticism of the 1960's paradoxically contributed strongly to the notions of the "death of art" and of the end of "modernism": novelty without context had destroyed the sense of a progressive, historically evolving avant-garde. A leading and typical interpreter of the art criticism of the 1960's and early 1970's, Pincus-Witten, flits over the intellectual surface of culture, and instead of penetrating into the artwork or having a dialogue with artist or work, speaks monologues before it, and even dares publicly to contradict the "errors" of the artist about his own work. (During the 1960's and 1970's, with the surge of linguistics among the avant-garde, certain critics regarded their profession as the quivalent of artwork on some of which they themselves had collaborated.) Egregious instances of farfetched or obscure theories grounded in ignorance of language and superficiality can be found in his writing as well as in Jack Burnham's; e.g., Pincus-Witten insists that Duchamp's *Objet-dard* provides the source for Johns' *Target*, which, he feels, became the complement for the ironic Frenchman's dart. Johns, he says, "...claims he knows no French, though to mouth the word 'dard' surely calls the English word 'dart' immediately to mind." Evidently the critic relied on printed words, and failed to pronounce *objet d'art*, in which *art* no more contans a 't'-sound than *object* does. (The pun is not on the relation of two dentals, but on the equivalent sounds in French of *d'art* and *dard* owing to the unpronounced last letter.) Moreover, the *shape* of Duchamp's *dard* is by no

11

means like a dart for throwing at targets. When there are surely more complex and richer sources for a mind like Johns', such a fargetched theory, proclaimed over the artist's objections, demands refutation.

The denial of a historical dimension to art takes a subtle form in the writings of some critics who refer to older art. Leo Steinberg, an eloquent Renaissance art historian, opposed Greenberg's limited view of the old masters, but as he became increasingly more involved with modern criticism (and formalism) he began to apply criteria not always suited to the older art. This leads to novel but discontinuous perceptions resulting in at best incomplete description. Emphasis on content allowed him to appreciate older art more fully than extreme formalists, and his effort to bring to bear on art history the freshness of modern criticism follows many excellent examples, of which he cites only the sharpening of Meyer Schapiro's sensitivity to Romanesque art through his perceptive study of modern art. Two serious problems result from Steinberg's othewise worthwhile effort to reinvigorate art history: a loss of historic continuity and a narrow perception of the artist. Both problems occur in his study of Rodin, whom he lauds for equipping "sculpture for the modern experience" by his "anxious questioning" of "how and where his sculptures can possibly stand," by his use of repetitions and by his use of fragments that "forced a reconsideration of the nature of sculpture." By applying to Rodin criteria important perhaps to sculptors of the 1950's and 1960's, and by neglecting Rodin's relation to his contemporaries and immediate successors, Steinberg creates a gap in the development. A problem of restrictive interpretation results from Steinberg's exclusive concern for Rodin's bronzes, which he considers the best part of the oeuvre. Unfortunately, Steinberg has chosen to ignore the *caveat* of Albert Elsen that the neglect of the carved stones distorts the picture of Rodin's art. One can only wonder whether future critics will continue to revise the interpretation of Rodin's sculpture on the basis of different criteria.

A great admirer of Steinberg's approach to Rodin, Rosalind Krauss *(Passages)*, likewise leaps across the decades to connect the artist directly to the hottest problems (as she sees them) of the 1960's. (She does not bother to refute or integrate dialectically the widely accepted position of Golding and others that Brancusi, Duchamp-Villon, and the Cubist sculptors advanced by *rejecting* major features of Rodin's and Rosso's sculpture.) Like the criticism of her model, Krauss's writing—even her extensive study of David Smith—suffers from a narrowness of focus that distorts what it includes by excluding too much. She applies Steinberg's repetition-idea to the *Gates of Hell*, in which she sees a breakdown of narrative relief—"the linear

string of events" due to the representation of certain figures. Her analysis climaxes with a purported demonstration that the sculpture of Rodin at its best no longer derives from prior experience, and that meaning doesn't depend on "a set of sensory memories but is invented freshly and uniquely each time it occurs for me." The point of all this appears when she introduces as an authoritative source the phenomenologist Husserl and draws a parallel between Husserl's philosophy and Rodin's sculptures which "are about a lack of premeditation...." She likes the fact that Husserl "questioned the notion of a self that is essentially private and inaccessible (except indirectly) to others." (Krauss and her cohorts, consistent with their disjunctive presentation of other artists, have denounced the Picasso show currently at the M.O.M.A. for surveying the whole oeuvre of one artist. They reject not only the idea of a historical or developmental coherence in any artist, but of the singling out by a museum of any individual as a "genius." Moreover, with a taste obviously conforming to formalist standards, they depreciate all the work produced after the end of the great Cubist period in the early 20's.)

Husserl's critique of the private Romantic self appealed to French literary philosophers. In a frenzy of skepticism, as theough pursuing Husserl's phenomenological reduction to a limit of world destruction, the Parisian Deconstructionists of the *Tel Quel* group led by Derrida and others seek to strip off the flesh of symbolism and mythology and all forms of humanism, to leave the dry bones of fact. The undoing of quality, and individuality also corresponds to the pseudo-democratic goal of levelling all institutions (the concept of "entropy" was in vogue in the 1970's) that began with the "dematerialized"—but spiritually empty—conceptualism of the 1960's. This condition evoked parallel "diagnoses" from critics of divergent position and with different values—the one welcoming the destruction of the comforting mythology of the bourgeois (Barthes, *Mythologies*, 1970 preface, calls for a "semiologie" which finally would become a "semioclastie"), the other more constructively would demanding that psychoanalysis study the " 'pathology of normalcy', the chronic, low-grade schizophrenia which is generated in the cybernated, technological society of today and tomorrow" (Fromm, in the 1970 preface to his book *The Crisis of Psychoanalysis*).

This radical levelling was rebuked already by Dostoievsky in the *Notes from Underground* of 1864. He complained about the prevalence of the feeling of shame at accepting our flesh and blood individuality: "...we do our best to be some theoretical 'average' man. We are stillborn...Soon we shall invent some way of being somehow or other begotten by an idea..." An extreme form of this process emerged in the late 1970's in the

form of a militantly radical call for a "schizoculture" by a group of French Post-Dadaists who drew on diverse sources (Barthes, Derrida, Lacan, *Tel Quel, Lettrism*) and wished to make *rapproachment* with N.O. Brown, John Cage and other avant-garde theorists. Perhaps the most creative formulation of many of these ideas had come already from Dubuffet in the 1950's and 1960's when he took up an "anticultural position" that sided deeply with the savage, the pre-literate primitive and the madman, and that insisted on the concrete immediacy of art as opposed to the bloodless abstraction of language (his "texturology" anticipates the "signature material" of the late 1960's). The current form of radicalism contains little of Dubuffet's broad sympathy, and indeed constitutes less a retreat from than an aggression *toward* life, though its political content is often detached, generalized. The violence of the 1970's, in contrast to the mobilized anti-war protests of the 1960's, expresses in high degree the lack of self and the anomie of the decade: altruistic motives of self-sacrifice and martyrdom are combined with a will to obliterate the opponent, as in terrorist groups. Unlike older anarchists, modern terrorists lack the blurred but affirmatively Utopian vision, e.g., of a Kropotkin. "Expression" among artists like Beuys, Acconci and Burden has become self-mutilation (an inversion of their projected assaults on society), not only of the body but of the face. As the American poet William Carlos Williams remarked: "This thing that terrifies us, this face upon which we lay so much stress is something they have always wanted to deform, by hair, by shaving, by every possible means. Why? To remove from it the terror of death by making of it a work of art."

No contemporary artist better illustrates the relation between personal deformation and the magical deflection of death than Joseph Beuys in his early period. Beuys, traumatized by his war experiences, healed his emotional wounds by re-living them: he re-educated himself step by step, passing from a radically absurdist *Fluxus* anonymity to a public and powerfully self-advertised role of teacher (anti-teacher) and artist (anti-artist). The exploitation of his body and senses for bizarre effects bordering on fraudulent posturing has as little to do with self-revelation or autobiography as the onanistic art of Acconci or the art-political aggression of Lynda Benglis' published nude photo of herself with a dildo. One might apply the fashionable term "body-ego" (introduced by Lucy Lippard) to these acts of exposure which merely skim the surface or skin of the artists.

Sadly, the characteristic art of our time has drifted on the acidic flood of skepticism and debunking: the "real" has often seemed what resists the thrust of the artist's statement. Attacks on institutions seem valueless, blind groping—acts seeking messages. (Ironically, concern for communication and ability to

transmit instant messages matches a loss of interest and a disintegration of meaning bordering on Surrealism. One thinks of the fading message sent from an airplane by wireless, at the end of Breton's *Nadja,* a message whose only understandable phrase was "something's wrong"—"Il y a quelque chose qui ne va pas"). This condition of meaningless communication, voided self, dematerialized object and loss of focus climaxes a long attack on humanist meaning and Romantic content, and perhaps paradoxically accounts for the persistence of formalism despite the constant efforts to annihilate it or, better, to drown it in a mass of non-formalist theories. For the indispensable ingredient to formalist theories—the doctrine of the autonomy of art (and secondarily of art criticism)—offers an island of seeming constancy and certain order removed from the flux of life and reality. Thus, the very feature damning formalism in the eyes of many critics, at the same time seems attractive to those same critics.

At a deeper level we may ask whether the current vogue of demythologizing and disillusion which has brought us a variety of realisms and sustains the restless urge of the avant-garde for novelty implies the abnegation of Western culture as some critics believe or merely reflects an anxious moment in the long history of Western thought and sensibility. (Panofsky, speaking from the vantage point of a humanist, castigated modern art historians: "To call them (certain crude per-Carolingian works) 'expressive' would not have been possible before an extremist interpretation of Riegl's *Kunstwollen,* aided and abetted by psychologists and educators, began to treat the art of children and madmen *pari passu* with modes of expression labeled 'primitive' but perfectly adult, sane and even sophisticated.") Assuming the latter to be true, we may pose questions that (it seems to me) may help characterize this unhappy phase in the following areas:

—Pluralism: Does this new variety of styles, forms and modes in art in America mark a turn toward wider sympathy and a consensus of acceptance or merely a more acute stage in the disintegration of the arts, comparable to the political and social cacophony that has long mocked the vital and harmonious ideal of e *pluribus unum?* Are its sources a renewed, healthy individualism in the arts, or merely a reaction against the art political structure or the power of the surviving formalist critics, the musuems and the New York art market. Or finally, can the failure to date of critics to agree upon a *lingua franca* of criticism merely result from their self-centered protectionism?

—Psychoanalysis: Is there a place for the psychology of art of any sort at a time when many critics reject not only the notion of latent impulses, meaning or feelings, but of the "self," and when resistance to a psychology of art has come

from various quarters—phonomenology with its concentration on surface linguistics in its emphasis on impersonality, even the new hermeneutics of Gadamer and Ricoeur that interprets the text in its universal meaning for an ideal reader. (Formalist critics and many Marxists as well, had long ignored psychoanalysis as irrelevant or bourgeois, respectively.)

Until quite recently the fate of the psychology of art hung together with that of the expressive object—the denial of a "self" made the employment of expressive tools irrelevant. An intensified interest in Oriental aesthetics has accompanied this attitude of silence and void. The Chinese Tao states it concisely: "idea present, brush may be spared performance." In the West, too, this viewpoint has emerged occasionally, as in the notion that great artistic ideas need not be realized in art ("Raphael without hands"). Paradoxically, Romantic ultra-expressionism turned into a negation of physical expression: the notion of Hegel that in painting, which he considered the Romantic art *par excellence,* the idea wholly overpowers the matter or form (leading to the death of art) turned in Croce's hands into the protoconceptualist theory that art is pure spiritual activity requiring no material externalization. In the 60's, the whole question of "expression" received ironic treatment (if any) by critics who responded to the Pop world of instant satisfaction and on-off technique (cf. George Brecht's proposals).

In the 1970's, many artists again felt a need for expression of inner states. A change toward anxious self-examination bcame apparent, perhaps in tandem with prospects in America of increasing decline in the standard of living of the middle classes (the end of optimistic expansionism with the shrinking of the GNP, increased unemployment and automation of industry, loss of cheap energy and the worries about pollution and ecological abuses). Not coincidentally, interest in the socially conscious art of the 1930's has begun to revive. And some of the emphasis on coolly technical and unemotional art has also lost its edge among some critics. The standard formalist history of Cubism and hence of abstraction that made Manet its earliest point of reference is being re-examined: on the one hand some see Manet as involved in current 19th century issues even when he seemed to be purely concerned with style and form; and on the other, some perhaps sensing a revival of imagination and emotion in art would like to "break the Manet barrier" and speak sympathetically of Romanticism, so long maligned. (While Michael Fried, a student of the 19th and 20th centuries has typically avoided the Romantics—in addition to Manet and contemporary abstraction he has sustained an interest in Neoclassicism, and in the academic artist Couture, Robert Rosenblum tried some time ago to combine his interest in 20th century abstraction with his admiration of 19th century

northern Romanticism.)

To the enrichment of the image and role of the artist implicit in these changes there corresponds a new relevance to the psychoanalytic viewpoint. In the ferment of the last 15 years some "schools" of criticism have all but disappeared (e.g., Charles Maurron's *psycho-critique* which has few forceful advocates today even in France) and others remain contested (psycho-history has produced some, but not many, studies—especially in the Renaissance history of attitudes to the child—acceptable to the scholarly consensus).

The multiplication of biographical statements, publication of diaries and exhibition of personal sketches by artists in the late 70's would seem to support a renewed relevance of psychology. The powerful manifestation of self-centered Narcissism in art at a time when "ego" as a term is shunned by artists and critics alike, poses compelling problems in art criticism. Similarly, the revival of personal expression along with Surrealist fantasy torments those critics used to coping with a less confusing polarity of formalism/Dadaism and their off-shoots. Moreover, the Narcissistic self-regard has made the regarding of objects outside the self (as Freud remarked, 1914) uninteresting or even distasteful. The difficulty felt by critics in writing about art appreciatively stems from this self-centering and has resulted in a plethora of two kinds of art writing: theory (often obscure monologues out of touch with the thought of aestheticians) and self-centered essays on artists which betray a failure to contemplate the works discussed. The plague of these latter writers, verbose and presumptious (a type of critic that flourished in the 60's and still persists, regards criticism as art) should not obscure the value of the sensitive personal essay: one can only encourage critics capable of recording their appreciation of works they admire. (We can find a number of literary models combining personal history and sensitive probing or appreciation—Erickson on Gandhi, Sontag on her trip to Hanoi, Levi-Strauss' *Tristes Tropiques.*) Among art critics dominated by the ironic mode few have retained the gift of admiration, and indeed one may wonder whether one could find much to admire in the world they inhabit.

Inevitably, in such times of alienation, of schizoculture, of general malaise, some psychoanalysts will perceive art as a means to restore lost integrity and to heal the artist's loneliness. (We may observe a stark contrast between the holistic emphasis of critics influenced by the English School of Psychoanalysis, including the followers of Melanie Klein, such as the art critic Adrian Stokes, and the French Deconstructivists.) The revision by the ego psychologists of Freud's starkly disillusioned and uncompromising conception of the unconscious and of the id's power seemed to the pro-Marxian analyst Fromm an example

of bourgeois conformity. Indeed, the emphasis on the unconscious by the Deconstructionists guided by French orthodox analysts—Lacan himself claims to hold to Freud's own ideas—has recovered a radical dimension in Freud neglected by analysts well adjusted to bourgeois society, and whose rejection of class conflict parallels their belief in a conflict-free region of the ego.

The major recent effort to synthesize psychoanalysis and Marxian sociology come from Germany, notably the Freud Institute in Frankfort (Adorno, Horkheimer), although a tradition of Freudian Marxism persists in France as well (cf. the issue on "Freudo-Marxisme et Sociologie de l'alienation" in *L'Homme et la Societe,* 1969). The most discussed German analyst, Karl Lorenzer, has tried to develop a materialist theory of socialization. While some of his writing seems to rehash issues already discussed by sociologists and anthropologists and his terms occasionally border on the obscure, Lorenzer has effectively persented the mother/child relation in terms of the child's acquisition of culture, especially of language. (His discussion of the tension between the private language of the patient and the general language, and the need for interpretation to bring them to terms, borders on Gadamer's hermeneutics.) His critique of the psychoanalytic concept of the symbol has led him to a "metatheory" based on the "destruction and reconstruction of language" that might profitably be compared to the linguistic analyses of the French Deconstructivists. On the other hand, Lorenzer does not wish to destroy "humanity," but like the English school would rather affirm the "humanization of labor." "The 'moulding' body processes of the mother are of no other kind than the moulding grips of the worker." Like other radical analysts, Lorenzer advocates not a *Lustprinzip,* essential ingredient of a bourgeois consumer mentality, but a *Realitat* or *Arbeitprinzip* of productive labor. Curiously, Marxist humanism may be approaching agreement with its old enemy, bourgeois elitist humanism, in what looks like a Romantic ecology. (Admittedly the most anxiously repressive and bureaucratic "Marxist" regimes such as Soviet Russia's have abused their environments through reckless over-production. The stagnation of individualism in art has accompanied the withdrawal of consumer satisfactions.) We find some of that Romanticism in the writings of the English Marxist John Berger, opponent of abstract art and an adorer of the peasant as embodied, e.g., in Millet's *Sower;* and more importantly, in America among artists busily translating the artificial environments and the staged Happenings of the 1960's into "real," natural environments. Earthwork conceptualists like Robert Morris have fashioned ecology into a rationale to beat the system by winning lush federal grants. In distant echo of the social works

programs for artists of the 1930's, government officials (atoning for theair collusion with big business?) assign them the task of making "art" out of industrial or social wastelands.

—Semiotics: of what value to art criticism is the field of semiotics? In the preceding discussion we observed that in the 1950's French formalist-structuralist writers like Barthes already were applying De Saussure's semiotics to art criticism. In the United States interest in French semiotics grew steadily among scholars of literature in the Romance language departments of some large universities (hence, the almost complete neglect of American semiotics in the line of Peirce and Mead) and Structuralism displaced the vogue for Existentialism in the 1960's and later. An earnest effort to apply semiotics to the criticism and history of the art of the 1970's was made by Rosalind Krauss following the lead above all the Barthes. Her useful periodical *October* (a title derived from her interest in Eisenstein's film on the October revolution, a film which provided the subject for an extensive semiological analysis by a group of French scholars in 1972 who studied its "Ecriture et Ideologie") publishes translations of French semiotic criticism she considers important. The residues of formalism of Barthes doubtless contributed to the ex-formalist critic's views as expressed in her two-part essay on "Seventies Art in America" *(October,* 1977). Her emphasis on the medium of photography also fits her earlier formalist interest in the flatness of bas-relief as information-yielding, as does her ambition of sweeping the "pluralist" art of the 70's into one large and comprehensive generalization. In fact, she summed up the art of the decade as based on photography as document.

Photography became a central issue for art criticism in the United States in writings of the early 1970's published in *Artforum* and other periodicals that derived from the views of the anthropologist Levy-Strauss, whose books (eg., *Tristes tropiques*) integrated documentary photography in the study of language, myth and imagery. Not incidentally, Levy-Strauss' ideas had their greatest impact on formalist art criticism in France through the discussions in the circles of *Tel Quel* of textual images and photography. The distinguished film critic S. Kracauer (1960) contributed to the discussion by designating a troubling area between reality and art where he placed film (and by implication photography): if it "is an art at all, it certainly should not be confused with the established arts..."

Krauss, borrowing from Barthes, adds a new ingredient to the discussion by considering the photograph (and by metaphorical extension the "traces" she finds in some sculpture of the 1970's) to embody a "message without a code." Barthes (and Krauss after him) took these terms from the great linguist Roman Jakobson's definitions (analogous but not identical to

Saussure's) of code as "the system" and the message as "the unique act of speech." To the photograph considered as a unique message unbound to systems of consensus of meaning she applied Jakobson's category of the "shifter" (called an indexical symbol" by Peirce to designate "empty" signs like the word "this," whose meaning has to be filled by pointing), a category in which meaning cannot be defined without reference to the message. With Byzantine cleverness, Krauss makes the use of the "collapsed shifter" (a self-referential use of the sign as a quasi-tautology) in the "autistic" productions (as Annette Michelson terms them) of Duchamp the antecedent for the art of the seventies.

Without considering all the details of Krauss' discussion, we can nevertheless make certain observations about her method. Her claim that an exhibition of installation pieces at P.S.1 in the mid-seventies "had the effect of surveying much of the work-that is being produced by the current generation of artists" seems arbitrary and at the very least questionable in view of the richness and diversity of the period. Her borrowings from linguistics—especially her allusions to Jakobson's specialized psycholinguistic analysis of encoding and decoding impairments in aphasia—have a specious precision; and since she ignores the historical context (as she had in her earlier criticism) her argument jumps discontinuously from early Duchamp to the 1970's with no effort to study the evolution of Duchamp's use of semiotic devices (if any) or to distinguish his impact over the decades from the 20's to the 70's. Like Barthes, she ignores the rich diversity not only of painting and sculpture, but also of photography (whose history, both as medium and as influence on other arts she ignores), which in the hands of some photographers adheres to code-like conventions (angle of shot, developing, distance and lighting effects, framing, etc.). Certainly Barthes and she would have to demonstrate the implausible hypothesis that *all* photography not excluding manipulative is documentary. Krauss' reliance on semiology alone, to the neglect of the historical and political, may well frustrate her efforts to comprehend the latest trends. One wonders whether she will follow other post-formalist theorists into a preoccupation with academic realism.

The emphasis by art critics like Krauss on photography in the 1970's corresponds to their powerful interest in realism (an interest shared by modish art historians who have tried to force all American art into a realist mold), strangely interlocked in turn with its apparent antinomy, a conceptual art. (The full history of the interplay among photorealism, documentary photography and conceptualist photography has yet to be written.) The realism that appealed to art critics had to do not with manipulated or Surreal imagery, but with straight, under-

stated photography—a realism of surface. Straight photography appealed partly as a "literalist" mode in keeping with the presumed literalism characteristic of American as opposed to European art. The coincidence of American literalism and photorealism with French semiotic and/or structuralist criticism, has occurred in a climate of emotional malaise and emptiness that seems to have become chronic. Critics often seek out desperate themes touching the emptiness of self, the loss of a moral center and of altruism, and even the old "death of art" motif refurbished by Barthes (his "zero degree of writing" suggests the impotence and futility of gesture, both moral and intellectual as in Beckett) and by Derrida (his theme, the *fin de l'homme*, pronounced at the beginning of the 70's was revived this summer in a French colloquium).

The use (or abuse) of semiotics is characteristic of much of contemporary French structuralist art criticism. Michel Serres' essay on Carpaccio (1974) recklessly superimposes mathematical and symbolic categories onto the Italian master's art—e.g., his *St. George*—with self-indulgent exploitation of the work. Serres, in short, soliloquizes before the art instead of contemplating it. Those who care about actual art, who enjoy looking at it—e.g., the collectors, the connoisseurs, museum curators, some critics and art historians—are appalled at the willful blindness of these theorizers who, rather like the conceptualists, pay less and less attention to the art object. (Is it an adequate response to put appreciators of the art object into one category and decry the bourgeois possessiveness of the conservative establishment? One may question whether the structuralist theorizers empathize more with the artist's innovativeness and creativity.)

By contrast certain Prague School semioticians (Jakobson, Trubetzkoy, Mukarovsky) paid attention to the concrete object of their study—folk song, poetry, theatre, even visual art. The formalism of the first years of the school that Trotsky (1923) severely castigated yielded to a dialectical approach incorporating non-formal factors to such an extent that by 1929 Volosinov could write *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*, a semiotic analysis from a Marxist point of view. Even the principle of autonomy (mainly of poetry) was augmented by the principle of the informational or factual content (mainly of visual art and literature), and important essays have appeared demonstrating the relation of literature to ideology. In the same line is the description by Mukarovsky (1934) of "art as semiotic fact," as a sign mediating between creator and audience or spectator, a position tangent on one side to Gadamer's hermeneutic, on the other to German *Rezeptionsasthetik* (now making inroads into French periodicals) and American reader response criticism.

21

Prague semioticians have furthered the effort to understand the pictorial sign not only in the usual terms of resemblance, but of the symbolic character of thematic elements through the role of contiguity. As Veltrusky observed (1973): "The part of 'codified contiguity' in associating the *signifiant* and the *signifie* in a picture cannot be overestimated. In some instances, social convention is the only basis of this association. Such is the case of the so-called symbolism of colors and of graphic symbols..." (one wonders whether even photography—pace Barthes and Krauss—may not be susceptible to analysis in terms of *coded* contiguity or whether there is an analogy to Eisenstein's "juxta-position" principle of the 20's). Jakobson, who distinguished two types of aphasia based on a dysfunction of linguistic pro-cesses of either similarity or continguity, transferred this anal-ysis to the terms of the old rhetorical distinction between metaphor and metonymy, and used it to characterize major art styles—Romanticism, Symbolism, and Surrealism versus Cubism and abstraction. (J. Laude has applied to African sculpture on analysis that borrows from the semiotic "code" & from struc-tural anthropology.) Perhaps one day we will be able to syn-thesize this semiotic notion of contiguity and the psychoanalytic concept of the dream symbol (e.g., in *The Inter-pretation of Dreams*) into a tool at once linguistic and psychoa-nalytic, and capable of illuminating diverse works of art.

The most solid and valuable contributions to the semiotic analysis of art have come not from the critical speculation fol-lowing Barthes (whose *Elements of Semiology* of 1964 was called by the semiologist Matejka in 1974 "witty, although somewhat abstruse and controverial"), but from art historians, notably Meyer Schapiro and Hubert Damisch. Schapiro, art critic as well as art historian, has coupled open-mindedness to the new and a rare erudition. At once sympathetic to and crit-ical of the diverse modes of psychoanalysis, Gestalt psychology, Marxism, iconology and semiotics, he has composed masterful essays integrating elements from each, in appropriate propor-tions. Like other radicals of the Depression, Schapiro, while remaining abstractly sympathetic to Trotskyism, gradually evolved after the 1940's away from his youthful preoccupation with Marxism; but unlike most of his generation he retained the best of that Marxism in his later work: one of his most important abilities, indeed, is to winnow the enduring from the changing modes of contemporary thought. His essay on the "liberating quality of avant-garde art" (1957) reunites what ex-Marxist formalists had sundered—form and historical context. With the demise of the avant-garde, at least in the terms in which Schapiro knew it, this essay has lost its polemical imme-diacy, but it endures both as a vivid document of its period and as a timeless formulation of the value of modernist creativity.

While Schapiro was as attentive to the historical context and dynamics of art as Marxist critics, he never lost sight of the independent value of the art object. Doubtless his profound grasp of the thought of Riegl and of Wolfflin helped him avoid socio-historical reductionism. Their similar position that art evolves through an internal, autonomous process, entered into a dialectical exchange with historical materialism in Schapiro's thought. In a different dialectic, his criticism of contemporary art and his art history reciprocally inform each other. Thus, his essay "Style" (1953), while ostensibly treating only the history of an aesthetic term or (like Munro in 1946) its systematic analysis, reflects those aspects of the then-prevalent style of Abstract Expressionism on which he then wrote enthusiastically.

Schapiro produced in the 1960's significant work on the semiotics of art (ignored by Kleinbauer in 1971 in his discussion of Schapiro's career), which freely draws on the excellent models provided by the Prague School analyses of art in the 1930's. As in all his writing he avoids the obfuscations of Barthes and his fellows, and in the tradition of Dewey's discussions of art, he penetrates without jargon: like a miner, he carries his illumination at every depth. With magisterial sweep and rich illustration his essay on the semiotics of the visual field (1969) surveys the problems of "field and vehicle in image-signs," demonstrating how these elements of visual art take on a varied character under the impress of historical conditions. At once sensitive to the work of art itself and to its historical-psychological context, he has developed a method akin to semiotics that avoids the pitfalls against which Mukarovsky warned in 1934: "Lacking a semiotic orientation, the theorist of art will always be inclined to regard the work of art as a purely formal structure, or, on the other hand, as a direct reflection of the psychological or even physiological states of its creator or direct reflection of the distinct reality conveyed by the work or direct reflection of the ideological, economic, social or cultural situation of the milieu in question." As though to culminate his decades-long effort to demonstrate the content and meaning of abstract art, he shows that non-mimetic elements (e.g., frame, format and directedness) contain an implicit semantic, even representationsal significance. (cf. Lawrence Alloway's observation in an essay of 1966, "circles have an iconography, images become motives with histories.")

Hubert Damisch provides another important application of semiotics to art history in his major book (1971) on the sign-roles of the cloud in painting. While Damisch started from the circle of Barthes and *Tel Quel,* he has remained at once clearer and more profound than others of similar background such as Pleynet. His book has the virtue not only of following essentially the good model of the Prague School, but of incorporating

with real understanding the great literature, French and non-French, of art history (Male, Panofsky, Riegl, Schapiro).

It will be interesting to see in the coming years whether critics will follow these exemplary historians and make more solid application of semiotics and whether young art historians will likewise turn to these salutary models.

Fashion, Character and Sexual Politics in Some Romaine Brooks' Lesbian Portraits

BY SANDRA L. LANGER

While the homosexual in literature has become an accepted part of literary history and criticism, the same cannot be said of art history or its criticism.[1] Although many of the artistic personalities who have contributed to Western culture have been gay, the potential role of this orientation in their choice of images remains generally unexamined. Lesbian artists, in particular, have been neglected in this regard.

In recent years some attention has been devoted to the life and work of lesbian artist Romaine Brooks (1874-1970).[2] This interest in Brooks, however, has not yet led to serious critical examination of her lesbian portraits, some of which have been dismissed simply as portraying women "in male attire."[3] The purpose of this essay is to consider a series of intricate problems of interpretation posed by these portraits, adopting an explicitly feminist critical methodology. My central contention is that

the language and perspective of traditional art historical scholarship both presents and perpetuates a superficial and distorted explanation of Brook's work. In this context, two interrelated arguments will be advanced. First, the notion of "male attire" will be criticized in terms of Brooks' own understanding of her rejection of feminine fashion. My purpose in so doing will be to suggest that such terms obscure rather than illuminate artistic intent. Second and following this, an attempt will be made to reconsider these works by bracketing out the concept of male attire in order to suggest a deeper understanding of their complexity.

For a number of remarkable women, among them Romaine Brooks, Una Troubridge, Natalie Barney and Elisabeth de Gramont, lesbianism was a way of life. Brooks herself rejected the morals and ethics of what she considered a repressive male culture. Her concepts of freedom, work and love could not find realization through a heterosexual matrix. She and her friends knowingly defied the taboos of patriarchal society, recognizing its limitations and choosing to adopt a style of fashion that had traditionally been identified with men. Nonetheless, the idea which she rejected, that women should dress to gratify men not to imitate them, has led patriarchal writers, male and female, down the primrose path to cliched conclusions based on acceptable stereotypes. Nowhere is men's power more evident than in the roles assigned women. Deviations are frowned upon and rigid role playing is reinforced through the idea of proper attire for the sexes; clothes perform the function of an identity kit. Women who wear "masculine" clothing are seen by the patriarchy as a corrupting influence on their less strong minded sisters. To be well dressed, socially acceptable, and feminine is to please men, not to usurp their power by challenging it in either art or life.[4]

Examination of Brooks portraits in "male" dress reveals that the power of naming has more than a little to do with how we interpret works of art and how even feminist thinkers may be deterred from questioning the status-quo. Fashion and dress are, simply stated, matters of power and control when it comes to women. Recognizing this has nothing to do with womanliness, Brooks and many of her friends chose not to confine themselves to male defined ideas of feminine styles. It was never a question of masquerading as men, as even some feminist scholars have suggested, but instead an awareness of the function that clothes had in identifying power. Rather than becoming men, Brooks and her set established a new standard of freedom in relation to fashion which was eventually to claim a measure of revolution for us all.

An investigation of several lesbian portraits by Romaine Brooks reveals much about lesbian society during the first de-

cades of the twentieth century. For women such as Brooks, Natalie Barney, Renee Vivian, Radclyffe Hall, Una Troubridge, Renata Borgatti, Elisabeth de Gramont, Gertrude Stein, Alice B. Toklas and countless others, lesbianism was a way of life. Men reacted to their choice with mixed feelings often laced with hostility as in the case of an irate and apparently frustrated Frenchman who at one of Barney's socials" whipped out his penis and flapped it at the assembled lesbians calling out, 'have you never seen one of these?' "[5] Evidently this display of masculine grandeur did not persuade them.

As women identified women, Romaine Brooks and her circle did not fit the steriotypic caricature of homosexual women presented in most heterosexual and patriarchal literature. This presentation generally falls into three catagories; erotic titilation, ridicule and repression. The first category deals with entertainment. In the visual arts two prime examples would be Courbet's *Sleepers* (1866) which is aimed primarily at the stimulation of a male audience and Egon Schiele's *Two Friends* (1913) which invites the male spectator to indulge in a voyaristic fantasy.[6] The second classification represents a more nebulous but equally disturbing characterization which can be found in contemporary writers such as D.H. Lawrence or films such as "The Killing of Sister George," where lesbians are shown as bizarre and grotesquely adjusted human beings.[7] The third lies in the interface between the first two in that it oppresses the lesbian woman by presenting an image that no healthy self realizing human being of either sex could happily identify with.[8] Anita Bryant's "Save Our Children" is an expression of this perspective. Moreover, the typical image of lesbians contained in all three often reflects rigid heterosexual male and female role definitions. The dyke/butch is defined as the surrogate male/husband while the femme/wife becomes the female in this fantastic vision of lesbian life and love dreamed up by the heterosexual world. Thus the patriarchal ideal still rules the heterosexual (and even some homosexual) ideas about lesbian relationships.

Even such an astute observer as Simone de Beauvoir presents paradoxical notions regarding explications concerning lesbians. "To define the "masculine' lesbian by her willingness to imitate the 'male' is to stamp her as inauthentic. The chief misunderstanding underlying this line of interpretation is that it is natural for the female human being to make herself a feminine woman; it is not enough to be heterosexual, even a mother, to realize this ideal; the 'true woman' is an artificial product that civilization makes as formerly eunuchs were made.[9] While realizing this de Beauvoir fails to see that it is not civilization which is to blame but patriarchal ideals. She goes on to theorize of the lesbian:

Even when she has a good figure and a pretty face a women who is absorbed in ambitious projects of her own, or one who simply wants liberty in general, will decline to abdicate in favor of another human being; she perceives of herself in her activities, not merely in her immanent person; the masculine desire that reduces her to the confines of her body shocks her as much as it shocks the young boy... She adopts a masculine attitude in part to repudiate any appearance of complicity with such women; she assumes masculine attire, manner, language and she forms with a feminine companion a couple in which she represents the male person.[10]

While on the face of it this seems like a positive feminist analysis there is much here that is debatable as we shall shortly see.

Another feminist thinker, Charlotee Wolff, reinforces some aspects of these hybrid heterosexual views expressed by de Beauvoir. "In the twenties and thirties, many lesbians dressed in a quasi-male uniform. They were still at that period so uncertain of themselves as to imitate men. The accent on lesbianism appears to be on false heterosexuality.[11] Similarly, de Beauvoir is a bit more insightful, if equally astray, when she suggests "It is difficult to state with any certainty, for example, whether the lesbian commonly dresses in mannish fashion by preference or as a defense reaction. Certainly it is often a matter of spontaneous choice. Nothing could be less natural than to dress in feminine fashion."[12] Both women fall into the common heterosexual assumption that lesbians want to emulate men and male dress. This, however, would not appear to be the case with Romaine Brooks and her friends. If some of them chose to dress in more severely styled attire it was perhaps less to "repudiate any appearance of complicity" than out of a recognition of the function fashion played in defining rigid social roles. Meryle Secrest, Brook's biographer, states that the artist dressed in masculine type clothes because "This was the way she liked to dress, either in very conservatively cut jackets and skirts or, whenever she was among friends and could be informal, a jacket and pants."[13] Thus it would appear that fashion, choice and character are inextricably linked in the life and art of this artist.

Brooks came of age in an era where many lesbians had adopted conservative dress and few of her set bothered themselves about what was considered appropriate to their sex by polite society. Wolff suggests that they "never raised the question of whether to hide or not to hide, but showed themselves in their true colors without making anything of it. They can be found among artists, writers, and professional women. The outside does not bother about their private life when their

merits are outstanding. Gertrude Stein, Natalie Barney, and Reness Vivian are examples"[14] These claims, however, do not seem to be supported by the circumstances of either these women's lives or their work. For example, the relationship between Stein and Toklas was ignored by a number of literary scholars to such a degree that her poetry was considered far more mysterious and inexplicable than it ever was.[15] In the case of Natalie Barney, the open style with which she insisted on living her lesbianism necessitated her living abroad her entire adult life. For Troubridge and Radclyffe Hall it assured ridicule and notoriety. For Romaine Brooks it assured obscurity until almost 1970. That these women became expatriates and social outcasts (vis-a-vis polite society) tells us more than a little about the repressions of patriarchal society. Moveover, that Romaine Brook's life style has yet to be integrated into considerations of her work tells us a good deal about heterosexual society and its inherent homophobia.[16]

From the beginning, Romaine Brooks was in revolt against family obligations, society and, to a lesser extent, her youthful indecision. She commented "in many ways I had the mentality of a ten year old school boy: frank and candid to a degree, but with a personal code that made small distinctions between what is generally called vice and virtue according to religion and fashion."[17] Already the artist identifies with the freedom of the male, rejecting the morals, ethics and patterns of behavior polite society expected of females. Let us recall that at the turn of the century women still had received only token equality. As late as 1893, they were still not admitted to the life drawing classes at the Royal Academy, and thus their chances of pursuing a career in art, let alone excelling in it, were severely limited. In 1898 Brooks was the only female student at the state school in Rome. Despite family difficulties and patriarchal oppositions she persisted in her determination to be an artist. Her emerging feminist consciousness can only have been reinforced by this experience. Her reaction toward one of her primary male tormentors was assertive, and consisted of finally smacking him in the face with a book when he had made one obscene gesture too many. This took place after months of patient endurance. Another evidence of her growing consciousness is her account of fighting off a male client who commissioned a portrait from her only to try and rape her when she delivered it.[18] It is evident that Romaine Brooks resented being an object of men's lusts, and her hostility and rage were to play an important part in her feminist attitudes years later. As late as 1921, her consciousness of male oppression was such that she wrote her sister about her niece's impending marriage, demanding "...how could you let your daughter be sold into a life of slavery?"[19] This, of course, is not the comment of a woman

unaware of sexual politics. The artist's life style was not something visited on her like tornadoes, flash floods, hurricanes and other freaks of nature; but was instead a deliberate rejection of the choices offered women by the prevailing social patterns. Brooks was a woman who wanted to live as she pleased, who was not interested in outward shows of propriety, and who, instead wished to be liberated from all overriding social impositions.

During her brief marriage to John Ellingham Brooks she took actions which were to shape the rest of her life. During this time she noted that she "...decided to forgo the many hateful perogatives of my sex, the complexity of female clothing for instance, it would now be possible to live the simple life garbed in male sports attire."[20] Not only did she forego imposed ideas concerning dress but also cut off her long hair, went to Our Boys Shope in London and arrived home decked out in baggies, cropped hair and gun boat shoes. Her husband, homosexual or no, was predictably horrified and declared no 'wife' of his was going to make him a laughing stock. Shortly after this incident she managed to divorce him and from that point on declared her total emancipation from further patriarchal impositions.

In 1904, she took a small studio in St. Ives, where she developed her characteristic style of painting. Here she dressed as she pleased in clothes of her own design, severely tailored and "mannish" by conventional standards of her day. Her lived-in world in both art and life became one of black, white and gray. Natalie Barney commented "She never did anything to put herself in a position of notoriety except for her taste, which was exceptional, and her appearance," which as one can see from her *Self-Portrait* of 1923 was decidedly unconventional.[21] In 1910 she had her first solo show at the prestigious Durand-Ruel gallery. She exhibited thirteen paintings, all of women and young girls. Her identification was complete and virtually unwavering. Her style of life, dress and art were a matter of choice and of a piece.

In summary it appears that Brooks choice of style was a symbol of personal emancipation from the strictures of feminine roles. On the basis of this it would seem logical to apply this understanding to a reconsideration of her portraits of lesbians in what has previously been characterized as "male attire." In each case an attempt will be made to contrast the conventional view of these women with the broader understanding implied by a rejection of sexist language.

Romaine Brooks has been labeled a "thief of souls" and no where is this more evident than in her portraits of lesbians who cross dress. One of the earliest of these is *Renata Borgatti at the Piano* (1920) Borgatti was the daughter of the famous Wagnerian tenor, Giuseppi Borgatti. She studied piano in Bologna

and Munich, and was well known for her recitals of works by Debussy and Bach. She was also a great favorite of Romaine's. An acquaintance observed that Renata:

> was an extraordinary woman, a pure freak of nature. She shouldn't have been made a woman because for all intents and purposes she was a man, and she treated women exactly as if she was one. She looked rather like a young Liszt and I haven't met a woman yet who was not ready to fall into her arms, if Renata wanted her.[22]

This idea of biological determinism, in Borgatti's case, is echoed by Compton Mackenzie, who satirized her as:

> a man some unkind fate had given a woman's body; doomed to suffer from unrequited love, since the masculine side of her nature was so dominant that she sought women as she found them, without waiting for those more tempermentally akin to herself. Her feet are large like a man's and her clothes flung around her without regard to the fashion of the moment.[23]

Obvious here is Mackenzie's idea of genetic inheritance. His observations are those of a socialized male of the era who notices not the uniqueness of Renata's artistic talents but instead her unfeminine physical attributes and lack of female conformity when it comes to style. In 1919, Romaine Brooks had a brief affair with this handsome and talented woman; but by 1920, the date of the portrait, she wrote Natalie Barney saying she was trying to avert another visit from Renata. While Brooks portrait of Borgatti reflects the particular community of opinion, straight and gay, regarding Borgatti's looks and personality, the artist adds her own unique insights to it. With the most subdued means, Brooks conveys a brooding intensity which permeates the canvas. Piano and figure become one with each other; an ascetic in retreat. There is no attempt to separate artist from art nor woman from man. Instead we are given a totally androgynous being oblivious to anything but the silent music of this compartmentalized reality. The painters uncanny perception in presenting a symbolic alter-ego in the piano represents an empathetic response to artistic dedication. Borgatti here is not "a man some unkind fate had given a woman's body," but an autonomous individual, an artist immersed in concentration, caught in a private becoming.

This revelatory dimension of Brooks' portraiture is independent of the attire of the sitters. This insight is typical of all Brooks work, including her own *Self-Portrait*, an exercise often considered to be most indictive of a painter's honesty. Secrest

31

sees Brooks' self image at forty-nine as "the survivor of a holo-
caust...her face a mask of scars. It was a soul locked in its own
despair, in private mourning for itself."[24] Yet Compton Mack-
enzie's wife, Faith, saw Romaine as "a figure of intriguing im-
portance, because for the first time I met a woman complete in
herself, isolated mentally and physically from the rest of her
kind, independent in her judgments, accepting or rejecting as
she pleased"[25] Compton, too, paid homage to Romaine, albeit
with masculine tougue in cheek, in his fictionalization of her as
the notorious lesbian Olimpia Leigh "Olimpia Leigh was a com-
poser and Greek scholar, famous for having set almost all of
Sappho's poetry to music, perhaps the greatest female creative
mind since Sappho."[26] While appreciating her intellectual gifts
for a "female" Mackenzie couldn't overlook her physical ones
either, even if his description is laced with ridicule:

> Like a nightingale with shapeless wings wrapped
> around a little body. That was exactly the effect of
> Olimpia in her draperies. But her body though little,
> was not shapeless and her throat, though tawny as
> the nightingale's was beautifully modelled, and her
> eyes as dark and bright..." She had a low, thrilling
> voice, : burning eyes"; she had "the air of a
> crouching nightingale." To be loved by Olimpia
> Leigh even for five minutes gave any young woman
> who cared about it a cachet not obtainable since the
> days when young women could boast of being loved
> by the mighty Sappho herself.[27]

Doubtless neither Brooks nor the other women she knew
seemed to have thought of her as a "crouching nightingale."
Her self portrait reveals quite a different vision. She presents
herself in one of her tailored suits which were by now her
normal dress. In her starkly striking self evaluation, as in her
rendering of Borgatti, the artist is predominantly concerned
with character. Although in an earlier self portrait of 1912 she
had shown herself as a wind swept feminine romantic in a By-
ronic mood, in this work of 1923 she purged herself, presenting
instead a contained intensity, disciplined by uncompromising
reality and relieved only by a characteristic irony. We are shown
a small, dark, arrogant and mocking cynic who retains beneath
an elegantly tailored facade traces of both poet and child. Her
eyes are direct, but guarded. The shadow cast by the brim of
her foppish hat further intensifies the impression that this is an
artist who looks out at the world from some private retreat. Her
black suit is severely simple and conservative. She is meticu-
ously turned out, a figure of imposing authority. Her neck and
face are exposed and she wears a tiny red flower which glows

like an ember in her lapel. A slightly flattened cityscape suggests an abstracted urban reality, perhaps an inner consciousness, which nonetheless Romaine dominates in majestic isolation. While Secrest's reading of the portrait as a "soul locked in its own despair" has merits, another interpretation is possible. Brooks might rather be seen as presenting a strong willed, independent and defiant personality, consciously aware of its assessed strengths and weaknesses; boldly revealing all to the sensative and knowledgable viewer. Perhaps if we allow for fanciful speculation, it might be seen as a little on the make.

Adelyn Breeskin, the organizer of the Brooks exhibition "Thief of Souls" suggests that Romaine "looked at both herself and her environment with a detachment that ill concealed the passion and imagination that was schooled in restraint by the cruelty of her early experience."[28] While no one would contest Breeskin's point, she appears to have underplayed the influence of Romaine Brooks' lesbian lifestyle in forming her characteristic attitudes regarding herself and the society she lived in. It would seem to me that Brooks set herself apart both in rejection of conventional heterosexual relationships and in her choice not only of lesbian lifestyles but that of open relationships as well

The importance of considering the relationship between Brooks' lesbian lifestyles and her portraits is perhaps best illustrated by her portrayal of Una Troubridge. Elisabeth (Lilly) de Gramont, one of her sitters and a friend, wrote that Romaine's models "may confess themselves to her, but without listening to them she confesses them far more truthfully on canvas, revealing their soul or lack of it."[29] No where is this more evident than in the portrait of *Una, Lady of Troubridge* (1924). This is one of Brooks most arresting, baffling, and controversial works. No behavior could have been considered more scandalous than that of Una, Lady Troubridge when she left her husband for Radclyffe Hall in 1915. The sittings for this uncommissioned portrait, more than a dozen of them, took place in late May of 1924; they are carefully noted in the margins of Una's diary.[30] She says nothing of her conversations with Romaine. Nonetheless the two lesbians might have discussed a number of topics of mutual interest ranging from art to spiritualism.

Secrest states "It was obvious to those who saw the work the following year...that Romaine had meant the portrait as a caricature."[31] Strangely, just prior to this comment, Secrest writes that Una perpetually dressed in this manner, wearing "mannish clothes; stiff shirts with high collars, and tailored jackets along with the monocle and earrings that became her trade mark."[32] Although Adelyn Breeskin had described the portrait as one "which reveals the lesbian almost in caricature. She wears

33

a monocle with her long tuxedo-like costume and her short hair. She stands before a table on which two dashshunds which were a championship pair given her by Radclyffe Hall. They serve as a strong base from which rises the very slim figure in this expressive composition," she told this writer, in 1976 she did not think the work a caricature.[33] The need for further examination of such an interpretation is implied by Una Troubridge's biographer Lovat Dickson, who pointed out "In the relaxed atmosphere after the war, anything was accepted, and the sight of rather mannish looking women, some of them wearing monocles, some of them smoking cigars and jeweled pipes, wearing short hair cuts and black dinner jackets and bow ties and dancing with other girls aroused no moral tremors such as were to be felt a few years later."[34] If this is so it appears that any interpretation of Una's picture as caricature should be questioned in light of what we know of both Romaine Brooks' attitudes and the social structure and values at this point in time.

It is evident that Romaine and her friends identified strongly with an ideal which is exemplified by Una's "I was sick to death of ambiguities, and only wished to be known for what I was," in this case a lesbian and a human being trying to live freely in a repressive and punative society.[35] Undeniably, if accounts of the day and personal records may be believed, Romaine and Natalie made no attempt to hide their lifestyle. In fact, all of the aforementioned women in this paper supported the idea and the ideal of females free to make their own choices regarding all things. Romaine and Natalie Barney had early rejected the morals and ethics of an oppressive male-dominated society. Their notions of liberty, satisfaction and eroticism could not possibly be comprehended through a standard heterosexual analysis. Instead one must assess Una's portrait in light of what weknow about gay society during this period and about Romaine's own iconography. It is obvious that the artist herself did not consider tailored attire as "drag" and thus the idea of caricature become highly debatable. Given this hypothesis, let us return to the portrait of *Una, Lady Troubridge*.

The picture would appear to show the essential Una as Brooks knew her in 1924. She is posing in a little Lord Fontleroy suit, the epitome of what a well-dressed lesbian of fashion might wear at home or for intimate evenings among friends. The figure is imperiously thin and tangentially set against a lushly painted french blue backdrop, puntuated by several diagonal planes. The space is cool, tense and shallow. The two dogs, which may symbolize Radclyffe and Una's relationship as a pair, are placed in the lower foreground where Una's rigid form towers above them. The head with its full bangs and quizically direct frontality is a study in perpetual metamorphosis.

Una's protean nature is characterized by a split personality. The receding, unprotected eye, with its emphatic eyebrow and Una's tightly compressed lips, accentuate the sharpness of the cheekbone, which reveals a hostile, suspicious and inflexible personality. Her boney, childlike shoulder and arm are turned away from the world in a vain attempt to shield an obvious vulnerability. Romaine spares her nothing, cutting through the exterior layer she exposes Una's every defense. On the other hand the complexity of her person is revealed by the painter's insights.

The monocled side, however, poses a much different picture. It is softer, more sensual with an intentionally challenging glance and expression; an equally controlling individual to be sure, but with a touch of tenderness, as evidenced by the strong and gentle hand which holds one of the dogs by the collar. Certainly this portrait is one of Romaine Brooks most powerful works. To interpret it as caricature seems to me a gross over-simplification. This tendency appears to be evidence of patriarchal assumptions when it comes to analyzing complex works dealing with taboo subject matter. It is apparent from the intricate nature of Una's character and Romaine's possible relationship with her during this time that there are great difficulties with accepting any characterization of this work as a "caricature."[36] It is worth noting that Romaine's penetrating portrayal was as perplexing to Una, at one time an artist herself, as to anyone else. The painting was so compelling that Una was prompted to ask, "Am I really like that?"[37] Given Brooks' own personal politics and iconography, Una Troubridge's portrait would seem to be a telling character analysis, not caricature. Patriarchal assumptions are contradicted by the painting itself.

It appears obvious that Romaine Brooks' homosexuality very clearly figured her presentation of these two women who chose, as she did herself, to cross dress. Doubtless as de Beauvoir suggests, this was not in mere imitation of the male, but out of a sense of conscious identification with the liberty and freedom men had. Certainly, all of the individuals discussed in this paper were unconventional. It would appear that having perceived of their activities as equally important, if not superior, to those of men, they quickly freed themselves from the roles society imposed upon them. There can be little doubt that this was reflected in their choice of clothes.

Both Simone de Beauvoir and Charlotte Wolff have erred in supposing the choice of male attire merely "spontaneous" or "defensive" for, as Jill Johnson points out, lesbian consciousness implies not only an attraction to members of ones own sex but an acute sense of one's own political identity and lifestyle.[37] Renata Borgatti, Una Troubridge, Natalie Barney, Elisabeth de Gramont and Romaine Brooks undeniably viewed themselves

as androgynous beings—not drag butches. It is clear that recent patriarchal scholarship concerning Brooks work has attempted to pass her lesbian portraits in "mannish dress" through the traditional heterosexual filter with less than satisfactory results.[38]

In conclusion, all three paintings stress a strong sense of isolation. It is, I would contend, a self imposed isolation from patriarchal society. The uncanny insight Brooks brings to her lesbian portraits has as much to do with character as with her own choices, since she was rich enough to choose her sitters. Because lesbian portraits are so rarely referred to in art, her paintings are unique in two respects: first as positive visions of emancipated lesbians; and secondly, as documents, not only in the history of art and criticism, but those of sociology, psychology and politics as well. Perhaps in accepting such terms as "mannish attire," "male dress," "butch," and masculine" as viable vocabulary we have unwittingly participated in a sexist conspiracy which limits our ability to seek penetrating interpretations. This would seem to be especially so when it comes to subjects that have been made taboo by patriarchal attitudes.

In this case the idea of cross dressing and its political implications have given rise to my thesis concerning a feminist critique of existing modes of investigation. In the practice of a feminist criticism I have tried to show that Brooks' portraits are directly connected to her iconoclasm; her work is inseparable from her life. It remains a visual expression of deeply held social, political and esthetic beliefs. She and her friends rightly recognized dress as a profound statement of emancipation and as an immediate and symbolic alternative to the definition which the patriarchy has created for its females. Thus, her paintings may be seen to reflect tantalizing symbolist sensibilities and techniques but with a decidedly revolutionary vision vis-a-vis sexual orientation, character and fashion. Truly, she painted a race of women worthy of asserting their individuality regardless of consequences. During the first decades of the twentieth century she was a feminist radical who was yet to be matched by a lesbian artist of our own decade. In advancing the humanity of these women in the face of a patriarchal society which has yet to admit women to the human race she sets a standard to which all feminists may aspire.

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[1]Arlene Raven "The Lesbian Vision of Romaine Brooks," Homosexuality in Art: Classical to Modern Times (Los Angeles; Abstracts, CAA, 1977), 136.; Donald Posner, "Caravaggio's Homo Erotic Early Works," Art Quarterly, (Volume XXXIV no. 3, Autumn 1979) 301-24.

[2]Meryle Secrest, *Between Life and Me* (New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc. Garden City, 1974).; Adelyn D. Breeskin, *Romaine Brooks, "Thief of Souls"* (Washington: National Collection of Fine Arts, Smithsonian Institution Press, 1971).; Harold Nelson, "The Paintings and Drawings of Romaine Brooks," Diss. SUNY, Binghamton, 1977 (in process).; J. T. Butler, "The American Way With Art" *Connoisseur*, (Vol. 1 no. 716, October, 1971) 136-7.; Charles McCorquodale, "Romaine Brooks: The Fine Arts Society," *Art International*, (Vol. CXVIII 3/4 March/April, 1976) 50-1.; Keith Roberts, "Current and Forth Coming Exhibitions," *Burlington Magazine*, (Vol. CXVIII nos. 874-885, March, 1976)176. There are several other reviews but these seem to repeat what has already been said in the references I have cited. In the case of Nelson's dissertation, which is on going, only time will tell what he has to offer.

[3]Adelyn Breeskin; Meryle Secrest; J.T. Butler; Keith Roberts; Charles McCorquodale.

[4]In this context the reader may find the following useful: Quentin Bell, *On Human Finery* (New York: Shocken Books, 1976); Jane Dorner, *Fashion in the Twenties and Thirties* (London: Ian Allen, 1973); Anne Hollander, *Seeing Through Clothes* (New York: The Viking Press, 1978); Rene Konig, *A La Mode: On the Social Psychology of Fashion* (New York: The Seabury Press, 1973); Helene E. Roberts, "The Exquisite Slave: The Role of Clothes in the Making of the Victorian Woman," *Signs* (Vol. 2, No. 3, Spring, 1977) 554-69; Mary Shaw Ryan, *Clothing: A Study in Human Behavior* (New York: Holt, Rienhardt & Winston, Inc., 1966).

[5]Dolores Klaich, *Women + Women* (New York: William Morrow and Company, Inc., 1973) 43; Klaich also makes the point that the social history of lesbianism has yet to be researched and written. While this remains true, Jonathan Katz has made a beginning with his *Gay American History: Lesbians and Gay Men in the U.S.A.* (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Company, 1976).

[6]Of interest also are Jonathan Katz, Lisa Vogel, "Erotica, The Academcy and Art Publishing: A Review of Women as a Sex Object," *Art Journal*, XXXV (Summer, 1976) 378-85.

[7]Lillian Faderman, "Lesbian Magazine Fiction in the Early Twentieth Century," *Journal of Popular Culture* (Vol. XI, No. 4, Spring, 1975) 800-17; Lillian Faderman and Ann Williams, "Radclyffe Hall And The Lesbian Image," *Conditions* (Vol. 1, No. 1, April, 1977) 31-41.

[8]Charlotte Wolff, *Love Between Women* (New York: Harper Colophon Books, 1972) 200, Neemah Shabazz, "Homophobia: Myths and Realities," *Heresies* (No. 8, 1979) 34-6. In this article Shabazz gives excellent examples, e.g., "To identify with lesbianism is to court five myths which mitigate against this alternative: 1. A woman is a lesbian because she possesses a natural defect ("female negative inferior"), 2. A lesbian is emotionally unstable, sexually frustrated, self-indulgent and morally degenerate ("diviant negative inferior"), 3. A lesbian is antirevolutionary, hates men, suffers from penis envy and is a security risk ("diviant negative inferior"), 4. A lesbian wears men's clothes, is sexually aggressive and physically unattractive ("diviant negative inferior"), 5. A lesbian is afraid of men based on her past experiences and has inner conflicts because she needs a man. ("female negative inferior") 34.

[9]Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex* (New York: Bantam Books, 1961) 383.

[10]de Beauvoir, 383-6.

[11]de Beauvoir, 398.

[12]de Beauvoir, 396.

[13]Secrest, Letter to the author, August 29, 1976.

[14]Wolff, 79. Certainly her contention seems refuted by the ridicule of the British press in dubbing Hall's book "The Sink of Solitude" and this was only one instance of the consequences Hall was to endure for the unpardonable sin of having written *The Well of Loneliness* (New York: Sun Dial Press, 1928). Faderman and Williams make some very thoughtful observations concerning this book and *The Unlit Lamp* (footnote 7 for citation). Klaich also points out the consequences of choosing otherwise in the cases of Vivian, Stein and Barney. It seems Wolff would have us believe that patriarchal society exacted no penalties of lesbians if they were gifted cultural contributors but this simply is not the case.

[15]Klaich, 45.

[16]See Katz, Klaich, Shabazz.

[17]Romaine Brooks' Memories (untitled and unpublished papers)/national/collection of Fine Arts, Washington, D.C. Box 32, 111.

[18]Secrest, 109.

[20]Secrest, 333.

[21]Brooks, Memories, Box 32, 99.

[22]Secrest, 292.

[23]Ibid, 293.

[24]Secrest, 181.

[25]Secrest, 287.

[26]Ibid, 287.

[27]Ibid, 287.

[28]Breeskin, *Romaine Brooks "Thief of Souls,"* 15

[29]Ibid, 25-6

[30]Lovat Dickson, *Radclyffe Hall At The Well Of Loneliness* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons,1975) 103

[31]Secrest, 291. Secrest is mistaken The *Una, Lady Troubridge* (1924) was not shown in London. This was perhaps due to the recent scandal concerning Radclyffe Hall's *Well Of Loneliness*. It may have been that the Baronesse Erlanger, who arranged the exhibition in London, thought it best not to agitate an already irritated situation thereby bringing down society's wrath on Romaine Brooks. No such precautions were taken in other cities where this exhibit was shown.

[32]Secrest, 291. It may be suggested that the idea of ridicule vis-a-vis masculine dress, e.g., pants is refuted by a number of ideas concerning fashion. Wolff asserts "Fashion has come to the aid of both female and male homosexual ...comfort of dress may be lingering protest against the decorative discomfort women had to suffer over the centuries, but if so, this protest is not the monopoly of lesbians" 212. Evidence in support of this notion may be found in Charles Higham's *New York Times*, Sunday, December 26, 1976 column concerning Marlene Dietrich "She wore a monocle everywhere"; Jeanne Moreau's *Lumiere*, whose closing scene features the actress in what might be labeled full drag according to Seacrest's idea of caricature, is yet another example. Finally, the September/October issue of Vogue 1976 and others have presented assorted fashions that could easily qualify as "male attire" by patriarchal application of the term. Certainly, the portraits of *Una, Lady Troubridge* and Romaine's own *Self-Portrait* could just as easily qualify as "caricatures" if this sexist filter is applied to them. In addition, were one not from a social class familiar with

hunting attire Lilly de Gramont could just as well be labeled as dressing in "mannish attire" in her portrait by Brooks.

[33]Breeskin, *Romaine Brooks "Thief of Souls,"* 25-6

[34]Lovat Dickson, 103. In spite of this Dickson himself appears to be somewhat anti-gay. On page 14 he notes "I could remember Una Troubridge and Radclyffe Hall quite clearly. When I first came to London in 1929, they were well-known public figures, frequently to be seen lunching or at the opening of a new play, where they customarily had seats in the front row. In the foyer between the acts they seemed to flaunt their unnatural connection... Una once showed me a picture of them both...who could mistake them for anything but queers?" 18. Thus, Lovat Dickson reveals himself as a totally conditioned homophobic male.

[35]Una Troubridge, *The Life of Radclyffe Hall* (New York: Arno Press reprints, 1975) 82

[36]Fascinating is the apparent mystery concerning what the true relationship between Una and Romaine might have been during this period. Secrest claims there is a letter in her personal files which supports her argument that the Troubridge portrait is a caricature. She also steadfastly maintains that there was nothing going on between the two women. A query to Dickson resulted in the following: "I simply have not got the time now to take Una's diaries out of storage and look up the points you want answered. M. Secrest is entitled to her opinion and I am entitled to mine." George Wickes, *The Amazone of Letters* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1976) 257-8 quoting Truman Capote states that it was common knowledge among the gay set that there was something going on between the two lesbians. Finally, Dolores Klaich suggests that Secrest "called the Troubridge portrait a caricature because she was thinking in classical butch/femme terms, Hall the masculine and Troubridge the feminine..." I happen to agree with Klaich and those who suggest "something was going on." Until more information is forth coming from both Secrest and Dickson I see no possibility of ascertaining with any degree of certainty which of their opinions, concerning both affair and portrait, is the most plausible one.

[37]Jill Johnson, *Lesbian Nation* (New York: Touchstone Books, Simon and Schuster, 1971) 87

[38]Further information on this is available in the Brooks' papers and Jean Chalon's *Portrait Of A Seductress: The World of Natalie Barney,* trs. Carol Barko (New York:Crown Publisher, Inc., 1979). In terms of critical opinions using what I regard as patriarchal filters the following: Keith Roberts is particularly insensitive at Brooks' expense: "In Paris, Mrs. Brooks went in for very discreet interior decoration (black, whites, greys) and rather flamboyant lesbian affairs." Of the Troubridge portrait he opines "At least one assumes that the 1924 portrait of Una, Lady Troubridge, looking rather like a commandant of Stalag 17 entravestle, is not meant to be funny." Or the equally sexist case of Charles McCorquodale who notes "Not unnaturally, Romaine Brooks was at her best when she painted women." One cannot help but wonder if his observations would have been so keen had he not known she was a lesbian? He then goes on to venture this about her Self-Portrait, "Her male attire and amities particulieres were symptoms of a Proustian tragic inversion rather than the showmanship of George Sand. The reptilian fascination exerted by her self portrait—her dark eyes glittering in the shadow of a remorseless masculine hat, grey gloved hand tucked with dry cynicism into a tight but shapeless coat and open necked shirt." It is evident to the thoughtful reader and viewer that McCorquodale works out of a notion of art history and criticism which consists, as does that of Secrest, Breeskin, Roberts and others, in large measure of opinions and value judgments which affect the way a work of art is seen. By labeling it with such descriptively sexist language as "masculine," "mannish," or "male" these wri-

ters reveal their own inherent limitations. As heterosexual and patriarchally dominated society sees so does it inculate its prejudices into scholars who are trained under its eduational systems. What a feminist perspective does then, in the case of these and other such works, is relieve scholars of this burden and enable them to investigate information in light of its concerns. Thus different interpretations become possible and the discipline, through self-consciously aware criticism, maintains its dynamics.

The Social Production of Art:
A Series of Three Articles

The Avant-Garde of the Eighties

Artists on the Design Team: 3 Seattle Projects

Art In An Age of Mass Meditation

The Avant-Garde of the Eighties

BY ALAN WALLACH

Fashion prescribes the ritual according to which to commodity fetish wishes to be worshipped.

Walter Benjamin, Reflections

A culture that constantly refines its means of repression necessarily gives rise to longings for subversion. Hence, the perennial magnetism of *avant-garde.* As the possiblity of cultural opposition diminishes, nostalgia for the fighting avant-gardes of the past increases. There are moments in the history of nineteenth century art to which we now return again and again because they testify to the subversive powers art once possessed: the Realist movement arising in the wake of the 1848 Revolution; Courbet's Realism Pavilion at the 1855 Universal Exposition; the Salon des Refusés; the first Impressionist exhibition.

The nineteenth century avant-garde could truly shock and outrage a complacent bourgeois public because its artistic vision called into question an established order of reality. For this reason, the bourgeois mind reflexively associated avant-garde

with political radicalism and the dangers of revolution.[1]

Twentieth century artists, striving to be avant-garde, took over the trappings of nineteenth century vanguardism. Revolution became a badge of honor, an indispensible feature of avant-garde ideology. Andre Breton wore a worker's cap and corresponded with Trotsky probably less from political conviction than from a desire to be avant-garde. Even today, serious vanguardist claims require above all else a certificate of revolution (hence October).

Because the nineteenth century avant-garde at times effectively challenged the dominant version of reality, the bourgeoisie branded it "revolutionary." Today the language of revolution, indiscriminately applied like advertising superlatives to every real and would-be avant-garde, entirely obscures the question of opposition. Benign, formal revolutions in art, spiced with the rhetoric of revolutionary politics, replace the revolutions of history. Thus, with no sense of shame or incongruity, the author of the most widely-read textbook of modern art can write as follows: "it is questionable whether Courbet ever realized that in his paintings he was mounting a revolution far greater than the political revolution that caused him to flee from France in 1973."[2]

Meanwhile, the history of artistic opposition in the twentieth century remains to be written. Such a history would have to cut through the current ideologies of vanguardism and establish historical criteria for judging the successes and failures of avant-garde struggles. Of necessity, it would emphasize the new historical and ideological conditions twentieth century artists have had to face. These conditions define the limits within which the various forms of opposition have occured.

Such a history cannot be attempted here. I can, however, suggest an outline. By providing a historical measure, the outline may help us in evaluating the current status of avant-garde claims.

Nineteenth century vanguards had little difficulty tearing apart the web of pomposities and obfuscations that made up official culture. Their view of reality easily outstripped the official versions that confronted them. The heyday of avant-garde opposition lasted about sixty years ending with World War I. The war played havoc with the assumptions of official culture— and with those of the avant-garde. Since then, reality has again and again outstripped the most dogged vanguardist efforts. Compare, for example, the absurdities of Dada to the slaughter of Verdun. Or the dreams of the Surrealists to the reality of 1930s Fascism and massive unemployment. In an age of permanent crisis, when holocausts, concentration camps and nuclear annihilation are taken for granted, every artistic gesture is haunted by its probable inadequacy.

42

The nineteenth century avant-garde believed that material and social progress would eventually provide mankind with a better future. This hope, often no more than a vague feeling, sustained its struggle. World War I rendered such a view of the future impossibly naive. The future could no longer be taken as a standard to set against an intolerable present. Thus, twentieth century avant-gardes have had to make do with little more than blind faith in humanity—or blind opposition. Such blindness— the inability to project a convincing alternative to the night- mare of twentieth century history—drastically reduced the scope of their struggle.

This narrower perspective must also be attributed to a cooling of relations between vanguardism and the radical left. In the nineteenth century, the political charges raised against the avant-garde frequently were confirmed by avant-garde practice. Courbet—larger than life in politics as in everything else—symbolizes the equation the avant-garde made between artistic and social progress. Avant-garde sympathy for the left continued through the Bolshevik Revolution. The Revolution elicited an outpouring of avant-garde enthusiasm. The subse- quent failure of the alliance between the Bolsheviks and the avant-garde—a failure that in some measure can be traced to the political failures of Leninism—resulted in a waning of avant- garde energies. As Harold Rosenberg argued, the outcome of the Bolshevik Revolution placed the avant-garde in an impos- sible situation. It could not exist without the radical left but it could no longer abide it either.[3] Cut off from the one possible source of an alternative historical vision, the avant-garde only managed to keep alive a bohemian culture of opposition. And even this culture of opposition could not long outlive its own commercial success. Today there are no authentic avant- gardes, only moments of opposition staged by politically-aware individuals.

What I have called a bohemian culture of opposition flour- ished in the United States for about forty years. It dates approxi- mately from the Armory Show of 1913 to the late 1940s. The history of this culture of opposition begins with a struggle for personal liberation from Victorian custom and prejudice. Its development is marked by an intense opposition to the domi- nant culture and an openness to every variety of artistic and radical belief. Its final phases are played out in an atmosphere of deepening political disillusionment which helps inspire an art of despair and monumental rage.

The demise of the American avant-garde, signalled by the "triumph" of the New York School in the 1950s, involved more than the institutional cooptation of advanced artistic produc- tion. In a number of crucial ways, Abstract Expressionism fulfil- led late capitalism's deepest ideological needs.[4] Still, whatever

the ambivalences built into Abstract Expressionism, it is worth recalling that such artists as Gorky, Pollock and Rothko believed that somehow art had to answer for the horror and misery of the modern world.

The "triumph" of Abstract Expressionism coincided with the wider triumph of the modernist traditions of the European and American avant-gardes. Artistic production during the 1950s and early 1960s was revamped and expanded along modernist lines. This reversal led to the final transformation of avant-garde into its opposite.

Today, avant-garde is a matter of institutional sanctions and art-historical validation. Cultural administrators decide what is and what is not avant-garde. Not surprisingly, what is avant-garde, although "revolutionary," invariably turns out to be politically neutral. But politics would appear to be beside the point, at least up till now. Over the last twenty years, the movements that have won "avant-garde" ratings from the museums and art history textbooks—Pop, Op, Minimalism, etc.—are generally those that have lent themselves to easy transformation into stylish forms of entertainment. Avant-garde is this year's cultural fashion, the appropriate backdrop to a glamorous lifestyle, and like all fashion it requires constant change and renewal. This engenders an unending search for new avant-gardes, a search made all the more urgent by the knowledge that this year's avant-garde rarely proves convincing for very long. (Thus, despite constant effort, the apparatus of cultural administration has failed to extend its official history of vanguardism much beyond Abstract Expressionism. The Museum of Modern Art symbolizes this failure in the way it exhibits its permanent collection: post-1960 art is sporadically shown in a special gallery physically separated from the galleries that define the earlier modernist mainstream.)

Today, avant-garde is a glamour commodity manufactured by the overlapping bureaucracies of art and the media often with the enthusiastic collaboration of the artist-candidates themselves. The process usually requires a ritual hike through the bush (e.g., several years of poverty and media obscurity on the Lower East Side) and an ability to project an aura of daring although in special cases the requirements can be waived. An exhibition called the "Times Square Show," loudly hailed as "the first radical art show of the '80s,"[5] furnishes an example, at once striking and disturbing, of the way the process of vanguard manufacture now works.

The exhibition was held in a decaying Times Square building that until recently housed the "Girlesk" massage parlor. The show's artist-organizers, a group working under the name of Collaborative Projects or Colab, invited over one hundred artists to contribute art that would "comment" on the Times

44

Square environment. Works in the show, ranging from the amateurish to the suavely professional, encompassed an enormous number of styles and tendencies. But if one tendency dominated, it was "Visual Punk," for which members of Colab were already well known.

In the last few years, Visual Punk has been strenuously bidding to become the latest avant-garde. The artists have understood that public dismay is a visual ingredient of avant-garde success but their tactics are unprecedented, at least by comparison with those of past avant-gardes. Punk specializes in racist and sexist insult and a calculated flouting of human values. (Colab gained considerable notoriety when it sponsored a cable TV broadcast in which Tom Otterness—a participant in the Times Square Show—executed his dog.) Punk's apologists claim that racism and sexism give Punk its "radical" edge. One enthusiastic critic defending a particularly odious example of Punk racism so far forgot himself that he maintained such insult that was characteristic of the history of avant-garde provocations, "a history that is inseparable from art's radicalism and vitality."[6]

This is not the place to explore Punk's flirtations with Fascism (typically, one of Visual Punk's advocates takes the *nom de plume* Peter von Brandenburg), its taste for *Schadenfreude*, its close affiliations with the media and the world of clothing fashions (a good dose of Punk can be gotten from almost any 15 second "status" jeans advertisement), or the special virture Punk makes of deep alienation. What needs to be stressed is the fact that the Punk esthetic is already so well-defined that it has acquired a dynamic of its own. In other words, the esthetic now places an absolute limit on content. Consequently, while a few Punk artists voice nebulous leftist sentiments, their artistic practice belies the possibility of adapting Visual Punk to liberal or leftist ends.

The "Times Square Show" was a case in point. Much was made of Colab's "openness" and "democracy" in going out of its way to invite the participation of minority and women artists. Democracy was also extended to members of the Times Square "community ," in Colab's euphemism, who were encouraged to contribute their talents; several strippers did. Colab decorated the building to underscore the original ramshackle massage parlor setting. Visitors climbed creaking stairs pasts garishly-lit restrooms (part of the show) to mingle with members of the Times Square "community" who had also come to gawk at works of art which were off-handedly distributed throughout the building's four floors and basement.

In most cases, the artists' "comments" on the Times Square environment—oversize rubber rats, shattered glass, graffiti, piles of trash, pornographic images that often incorporated sa-

dism and violence—enhanced the tackiness of the setting. Works that offered resistance were usually overwhelmed by the prevailing atmosphere. Even feminist contributions designed to call into question sexist attitudes looked indecisive in the midst of so much Times Square sleaze.

The exhibition thus delivered all that its title promised. The organizers' intentions may have been exploratory or vaguely critical. However, the Punk esthetic, written into the context, guaranteed a different outcome. The "Times Square Show" glamorized the unspeakable social reality it so feebly sought to expose. Bereft of any real protest or alternative, it enforced a reconciliation with late capitalism's most primitive ideologies.

Perhaps this was the key to the unusual enthusiasm the exhibition generated. The "Times Square Show" boosted immeasurably Colab's vanguardist aspirations, providing yet another confirmation of Visual Punk's growing attractiveness in the upper reaches of the art bureaucracy. Henry Geldzahler is reported to have written potential Colab backers praising the group's dedication to "art in the context of everyday life."[7] In a similar appeal, the 42nd Street Development Corporation commended the show for being "relevant and attractive" and for contributing to "the revitalization of Times Square."[8] Even before the exhibition closed, one jubilant critic was noting that the time was not far off when "the grants [would] really start rolling in."[9]

If, as now seems likely, Visual Punk becomes the next avant-garde, then the history of vanguardism will have taken a fateful step beyond the bureaucratically contrived avant-gardes of the 1960 and 1970s. Those parody avant-gardes, like the institutions that sponsored them, kept up a front of ideological neutrality. Visual Punk, despite its occasional disclaimers, will be the first avant-garde of the right. This involves far more than making further shambles out of avant-garde. By actively enlisting art on the side of cultural and social repression, Visual Punk adds another ominous shadow to those already being cast on the 1980s.

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[1]See Linda Nochlin, "The Invention of the Avant-Garde: Franch, 1930-80," in Thomas B. Hess and John Ashbery eds., *Avant-Garde Art*, New York 1968, pp. 1-24.

[2]H.H. Arnason, *History of Modern Art*, 2nd ed., Englewood Cliffs and New Y:orok, 1977, p. 25. The sentiment is now typical as is the bungling of historical fact. Courbet fled France to escape the counter-revolution which had jailed him and imposed an impossible fine for his alleged role in the Commune's destruction of the Vendome Column.

[3]Harold Rosenberg, "Collective, Ideological, Combative," in Hess and Ashbery eds., pp. 90f.

[4]For an account of the ideological function of Abstract Expressionism, see Carol Duncan and Alan Wallach, "The Museum of Modern Art as Late Capitalist Ritual: An Iconographic Analysis," *Marxist Perspectives*, I, no. 4, Winter 1978, pp. 28-51.

[5]Richard Goldstein, "The First Radical Art Show of the '80s," *Village Voice*, June 16, 1980, pp. 1, 31f. For additional information about the "Times Square Show," see Guy Trebay, "Art in the Private Sector," *Village Voice*, June 9, 1980, p. 11; letter from John Ahearn et al, *Village Voice*, June 16, 1980, p. 25; Cindy Lyle, "The Art World's Newest *Enfants Terribles*," *Women Artists News*, VI, nos. 2-3, Summer, 1980, p. 4f.

[6]Douglas Crimp, commentary on Artists Space's "Nigger Drawings" exhibition, *Artworkers News*, June 1979, p. 12.

[7]Cited in Goldstein, p. 32.

[8]Cited in Goldstein, p. 32.

[9]Lyle, p. 5.

Artists on the Design Team: 3 Seattle Projects

BY MATTHEW KANGAS

Emil Gehrke (1884-1979) and Veva Gehrke (1902-1980) lived in Grand Coulee, Washington, near what is the world's largest hydroelectric dam. It was highly appropriate then that the retired sawmill worker and his wife became the two artists to provide centerpiece sculptures incorporating found electrical appliances for a hydroelectric-power substation in Seattle. That project, the City Light Viewlands/Hoffman Receiving Substation (North 107th Street at Fremont Avenue North), was the pilot project for a remarkable series of public works initiated by the Seattle Arts Commission which introduce the participation of jury-selected artists at the earliest stages of planning and construction. Three of those undertakings, Viewlands/Hoffman, the Northwest Center for the Retarded, and the City Light Creston-Nelson Receiving Substation are the subjects of this investigation. The first and second have been officially com-

pleted and dedicated and the third is still underway. Together they offer persuasive arguments for the successful integration of the artist into the architectural decision-making process, and demonstrate how esthetic and social values which artists hold may be interpolated into public viewing contexts where they may be least expected.

Mr. and Mrs. Gehrke never saw Viewlands. Nor were they themselves on the first artist-design team. Their 27 free-standing whirligigs (later dubbed "Gehrkegigs") were contracted for by one of three artist-members on the pilot team, Buster Simpson. The sculptures not only inspired the form and color the rest of the substation would take, they also influenced, in my opinion, the color theories and subject matter of a whole group of young Seattle painters and sculptors, including Andrew Keating and Sherry Markovitz, the other two artists on the team. The coming into contact of Emil Gehrke's folk sculpture and Veva Gehrke's hardware-store, ready-made pastel palette with three much younger, academically trained artists was the first of many unexpected events that arose in the course of the two-and-one-half years that Viewlands/Hoffman took to complete. How that happened, how it all got started, how it worked, and, most importantly, how it affected the art of the artists involved is also part of this story. Collectively, these events strongly suggest the positive role artists can play in planning and executing an urban or suburban environment. Individually, the episodes reveal what a tumultuously frustrating and anguishing process publicly funded art which uses a design team can be.

In 1973, Seattle joined San Francisco, Baltimore and Hawaii in setting aside for art a specific portion of all new capital improvement construction budgets. What soon happened was that a member of the progressive wing of the city's vast architectural community (more architects per capita than any other American city), Richard Hobbs, became dissatisfied with the existing system for providing the art. Usually, a jury comprised of artists, architects, arts commissioners, and a representative of the public agency to receive the new art ruled on entries which supposedly took into consideration the special site circumstances of the new building. This became disparagingly known as "plunk sculpture" or a "plaza plop." In addition to this, in order to assemble a municipally owned collection of two-dimensional artworks or small three-dimensional pieces, two or three members of the city's executive-appointed, voluntary arts commission serve annually as an acquisitions committee for the city's Portable Works Collection. Those works are not chosen by competition but generally selected from the city's commercial galleries. The collection varies according to who is on the acquisitions committee at any given year and the pieces are

circulated throughout public offices and areas such as the large lobby where one goes to pay traffic tickets in the Public Safety Building.

This seemingly high level of consciousness of the visual arts is part of the postwar history of Seattle. Not burdened with many of the problems facing eastern cities, Seattle's middle-class political activists turned in the late 1950s to architectural preservation causes such as the Pioneer Square Historic Landmark District and the internationally acclaimed national historic landmark area, Pike Place Market. These battles between a highly educated mass of *culturati* and vestigial boomtown developers cooled in the early 1970s with victories for the old architecture fans. Philip Johnson duly arrived in 1976 to place his imprimatur on Pioneer Square. Bruno Zivi flew in from Milan to hail the Market as a perfect embodiment of his "architecture as space" theories. All this ferment had been concurrent with the rise of the city's first form of public art: contemporary fountain sculpture. Not quite architecturally integrated, not quite "plaza plop," " 'City of Fountains' syndrome," as it came to be called,[1] led to literally dozens of cast bronze sculptures with plumbing attached.[2]

While initial critical response was almost unanimously favorable, citing the lovely link between the water surrounding the entire length of the city on the east and west and the fountains themselves in the urban interior, it was other artists who first pointed out the timidity and safety of such pragmatic, superficially "useful" art.

The 1968 arrival of Sir Henry Moore's *Vertebrae* in front of the new 50-story Seattle-First National Bank Building ushered in the era of grand "plaza plop" sculpture. This was followed by a succession of One Per Cent for Art (as the program was called) competitions which resulted in a couple of Noguchis (*Black Sun, Landscape of Time*), a Barnett Newman (*Broken Obelisk*), more foundtains (Ted Jonsson's huge Water Department Operations Center Fountain) and some home-grown versions of "plunk sculpture" like Lawrence Beck's Caroesque *Inukchuk* at Upper Golden Gardens.

Meanwhile, during the early 1970s, many younger artists began moving to Seattle, some to take advantage of the plentiful cheap downtown studio space then available, others to attend the University of Washington Graduate School of Art. Half of the design team artists under discussion here received Masters of Fine arts degrees at the U.W.; the others attended different art schools. Sculptors George Tsutakawa and Everett DuPen, perennial recipients of major public fountain sculpture commissions since the 1950s, were on the faculty when Andrew Keeting and Sherry Markovitz (originally from Philadelphia and Chicago respectively) were students there. The senior faculty

50

members' indifference to site-relation and quick willingness to add waterpipes to make blown-up modernist pedestal sculptures acceptable were a strong object lession for their students who would, later on, make their own very different contributions to a philosophy and esthetic of public art. Theirs would be a philosophy of cooperation, too, but one which would meet head-on architecture's arrogant subordination of art with a closely reasoned plea for parity and integration, if not complete autonomy.

Buster Simpson, sometime Rhode Island School of Design artist-resident, graduate of the University of Michigan, former ONCE Group affiliate, moved to Seattle in 1972 after an abortive tenure as co-director with Dale Chihuly at the newly founded crafts school 80 miles away, Pilchuck Glass Center. Of all the artists on the design teams, he seemed best-suited to collaborative work. Certainly the most publicly engaged of artists, much of his early Seattle work took the form of nearly invisible installations in back alleys (*Post Alley Project*) or abandoned lofts (*Selective Urban Disposal Project and Manual*). His experiences in Ann Arbor with improvisational performance groups gave his art a wacky flair which generated many ideas for art in a public context (if not publicly funded) but also made their execution sometimes difficult or impossible because of his playfully uncooperative attitude toward bureaucracies.

His art has been the subject of extensive discussion elsewhere (see Bibliography); I mention him here as a prelude to the idea of how different from conventional studio-dwelling artists those members of the design team are. All began from a studio background, still live in and work in studios scattered throughout Seattle's downtown or lower-income neighborhoods and, with the exception of Simpson, have traditional gallery representation in Seattle and other cities like Chicago or New York. Simpson, more than the others, had a personal esthetic at stake in wanting his public work to have successful political ramifications both for the changing role of the artist in society but, more importantly for him, for the viewing, taxpaying public.

Perhaps the most significant difference between these artists and pre-existing public artists was their experiences as students of the 1960s. That period of social turmoil also generated a strong sense of political responsibility, not to say alienation. For some artists of their generation, it led to a cessation of making art which was easily commodified. The rise of conceptual art and its attendant vogue is inextricably tied to the social history of art in the 1960s; it seemed, at first, to be the perfect way to check out of an unsavory system and yet still continue to make art. The fallacy of that route became apparent for the harder-eyed realists of the period, those artists who were still around

come the 1970s, chastened and disturbed by the Vietnam War and Watergate. These were artists still determined to make art but convinced they could be socially responsible, too, even in a formalist style. The public artists under discussion here by and large emerged as professional artists in the 1970s. Their decisions to undertake so close a cooperation with government, the Establishment, and the tenuous political process called Public Art, was a direct outgrowth of individually arrived at conclusions that, perhaps, in a design team set-up there was an opportunity to perform and create as socially responsible artists and citizens. It might even be possible, they argued, to have the reformative impact so vaunted as a goal for artists of the 1960s, and inevitably, to strike a blow for the re-integration of artists into American society on their own equal, uncompromising terms.

The alternatives, to drop out completely as had their classmates who moved to the state's rural artists' colonies like La-Conner and Lopez Island, or to immerse themselves totally in the gallery scene (as had other friends), working hard for annual or biannual exhibitions, out-of-town shows, and an implicit acceptance of the whole art-as-commodity route, were less appealing than trying something new and unknown. To what degree they were right in doing so cannot yet be determined. What can be demonstrated conclusively, however, is that the experiences not only influenced their studio work in profound ways but that, for some, the public projects became a highly essential and important example of their art.

How will the rise of the artist-design team change the social production of art and the image of the artist in society? The Seattle projects under discussion below are at an early stage but already other such cooperative projects have been announced for the future: a public animal shelter is to be built with an artist cooperating on initial stages of design and development; a $50 million bridge over Duwamish Bay to West Seattle will also incorporate an artist's contributions and is due to be completed in 1984.

Even at this early stage, though, certain things become clear. An expanding social network involving artists, architects, bureaucrats and the public is developing which in itself is a shift away from the traditional studio-bound activities of artists whose work is primarily directed toward an art-buying elite. This means that artists will face public criticism directly as never before. Seattle newspapers have historically been hostile to public art expenditures. The Hearst-owned *Post-Intellegencer* referred to the Seattle Public Library's 1956 plans to include a fountain (and other art) in their new main branch as "communistic"; the reception nearly 20 years later there and in the *Seattle Times* toward Michael Heizer's only publicly accessible

piece, *Adjacent, Against and Upon* (Myrtle Edwards Park), was comparably negative.

The artist-design teams offer opportunities for artists to temporarily evade manufacturing pressures connected to galleries and to introduce unexpected elements into public places. In Seattle, as in most American cities, public works projects have generally been stodgy in appearance. Though these elements may not be as "subversive" or "revolutionary" as one team member, Buster Simpson, described them, they can and do radically alter community observers' notions about what art is and what it is artists do in society.

Adverse media coverage, I predict, will continue for some time, and in fact conceivably increase during a time of economic downturn (i.e., public art as Hearstian whipping boy). This must be met with compelling and articulate arguments expressed publicly by the artists themselves, some of whom may double as public defenders of their own activities. Extensive interviews with the artists under discussion here suggest that this is becoming the case already. Their own political sensitivity to taxpayers' frustrations in an inflationary period has helped offset an arroance that other artists have demonstrated in comparable contexts elsewhere.

Whereas Keating, Simpson and Markovitz spent hundreds of hours with architects grappling over "territorial rights" with architects and engineers, Richard Serra indignantly pulled out of the Capitol mall remodelling project in Washington, D.C. after unsuccessful negotiations with architect Robert Venturi over the placement of Serra's huge sculpture. The point here, according to an ideal artist-design team *Weltanschaung*, is not that Serra was wrong to fight for his rights and refuse to compromise the integrity of his monumental artwork but that, perhaps, he and Venturi were incapable or unschooled in evolving artist-design team precepts which must take into consideration a greater interplay between artist and architect. His withdrawal from the federal project will, in retrospect, appear more important than any subsequent participation might have been. To the Seattleites it symbolized a breakdown of the "plaza plop" esthetic and a signal that if Serra's style of sculpture is to find its way into more publicly funded sites, the ideal of site-integration they are pushing for is still a long way off.

What, then, are the components of an ideal artist-design team set-up? Any such discussion must be preceded by the information, that, in these cases, artists do not become public employees, receive no social welfare benefits from their relationship to the State, and do not receive substantial amounts of money to free them completely from private-sector art production. The long-term (1½-2 years) nature of most of these jobs merely allows the artist to make art without needing to wash

dishes, teach art school, or carry on part-time, non-art-related work. For younger artists (and all artist-design team members so far are under 40), this is a major breakthrough.

Already there is talk in Seattle that only certain artists are properly equipped to cope with the strains of the artist-design team. Yet despite a sense of optimism and social responsibility shared by all, each pointed out to me the importance of not creating a special breed of artist for this work. What is needed is an acceptance of new ideas which might often come (as originally happened) from artists with no prior experience in this type of art production.

That freshness of approach, then, is a major key to keeping the process from stagnating in the future. All also underlined the need to keep options open for all kinds of art being considered, even the monumental object (as with Serra or Robert Maki) because in some situations that would be the most appropriate. The significant shift here is that, with luck, the artist involved actually affects the architectural outcome of the building—not just the art to go in it.

Just as John Cage influenced Buster Simpson's attitudes about a "nonhierarchy" of sculptural materials, so he affected the team-artist's wish for a "nonhierarchy" of authority between artists and architects. The need for an equal level of entry among team participants is real but also a long way off. The professional entrenchments of architects and engineers still overwhelm most artists in the initial period of planning. What this implies is that, gradually, artists will arrive at meetings with a comparable level of professional organization, not wearing suits and ties necessarily but perhaps carrying a briefcase filled with blueprints.

This would, in turn, be followed by a truly collaborative period between artists and architects attaining what one teammate Ries Niemi called a "plateau of mutual respect" in which not only certain aspects of the job were divided up but also a "reciprocal influencing" would occur. This part has long-term ramifications for the architectural profession and, as such, will be a major nut to crack in the process. It might take the form of architecture becoming more sensitive to subtle detailing, for example, rather than being content with sculpture or painting as punctuation to the grand structure.

Part of the reason the artists mentioned below entered into this often harrying process is that each perceived contemporary architecture to be in a state of acute crisis. If artists of the future are able to influence the direction of architecture in this way, they will have not only transformed the way art is made, but significantly altered the shape our visual, man-made environment takes on. This task, for the purposes of historical comparison, is in direct contrast to senior American artists' views on the

role of the artist in society. Robert Rauschenberg's statement about how the artist *should* be irresponsible would be one flagrant example of this difference in views.

Next, a review of the entire social, political, geographic, functional, physical, and economic contexts of the proposal should occur. Here, the artists need to shake loose any of their preconceived notions of what such a project (like an animal shelter) should look like.

This would be followed by a period wherein the overall concepts of the art-architecture amalgam would be worked out, revised and agreed upon. Even at an ideal level, this stage would be dependent upon the personalities of the workers involved. The effectiveness of the artists in having an impact on the architectural outcome would depend upon their own skill at articulating and presenting presuasive arguments to their teammates in the architectural and engineering professions.

Finally, it is essential, according to the artists heretofore involved on the Seattle artist-design teams, to provide enough "flexibility of time" in order to allow a "honing down" or "focusing" of a spacific idea. Though building schedules are costly when not met, it is still essential that room be left for artists' preparation and refinement of their own ideas. This might include the possibility of last-minute "brainstorms" which, if feasible in the broadest sense, should be allowed. It is this "vitality of process," as Simpson describes it, which artists, rather than architects, bring to the project. It must be also linked to a willingness to take risks and a willingness on the part of the artists, under the best of circumstances, to put in added effort.

The absence of this dimension, what Simpson calls the "necessity of an ongoing revolution," leads directly back to the historical role of art in architecture: decoration. If design-team art is to avoid that pitfall as well as that of a homogeneous, W.P.A.-type style or esthetic, it must remain open to challenge, risk, variation, and the hitherto unimagined conceptual leaps only artists can provide.

On the other hand, another ultimate goal, espoused by Andrew Keating, is the idea that, at some point in the future, the government get out of the picture altogether and the private sector take over, hiring artists to work as consultants with architects on private structures or, as Ries Niemi suggests, to design furniture, appliances, toasters, etc. This concept presses for an even fuller integration of artists into society and radically reforms the nature of the art objects being produced. It also proposes theoretically a much farther-reaching effect that art can have on society than that of its new role within the design-team projects.

VERNACULAR ART, MODERN ART AND POST-MODERN ARCHITECTURE: VIEWLANDS/HOFFMAN

Energy is big business in Washington state. City Light is the nation's first and largest wholly municipally owned hydroelectric power system. It and other similar state works projects begun in the 1930s led to the United States being referred to as the "47 states and the soviet of Washington." The churning waterfalls of the North Cascade Mountains had to be leashed for the common good and the immense capital investment necessary came from the public pocket as did, 50 years later, the money for the art that would decorate one of the small suburban receiving substations which "break down" the massive voltage into smaller wattage units. This power is then distributed to homes in the working-class North Seattle neighborhood off an all-American "strip" called Aurora Avenue, part of which is call Viewlands.

City Light is the largest of all the city agencies with its own nine-story International Style building which dominated the midtown skyline of Seattle of the 1950s. It is also, because of its huge construction and capital improvements budget, a major recipient of One Per Cent for Art monies. Indeed, it has its own special art collection within the city's Portable Works Collection and includes paintings, photographs, sculptures and crafts which decorate the corridors and offices of the employees who run the small industry.

In the period before Viewlands/Hoffman, the Laurelhurst Receiving Substation was bombed and extensively damaged by a dissident group later associated with the revolutionary George Jackson Brigade. Not that Sherry Markovitz, Andrew Keating or Buster Simpson were totally unsympathetic to the need for radical change in American culture or unaware of how much City Light, as a monolithic bureaucracy, represented a resistance to such change, probably part of the reason it was selected as a bombing target. But, as Sherry Markovitz later recalled, "If we would've protested, or not participated at all, it (Viewlands) never would have happened." The decision each artist made to go ahead and apply to work on the pilot design team was made individually and involved a hope that working as artists rather than revolutionaries, they might have their own effect on society. Throughout the project, it should be pointed out, their efforts to poll community members on their wants for the substation were consistently thwarted by CL's Public Relations Department.

Be that as it may, the jury composed of architect Richard Hobbs (of Hobbs Fukui Associated, the firm awarded the design), painter Miro FitzGerald, CL liaison G.R. Bishop, arts commissioner and videoartist Norie Sato and Oregon sculptor Lee Kelly, chose Keating, Markovitz and Simpson out of 80 appli-

cants. As Keating would later write, "All parties involved had a different conception as to how the artists would function in the process. The substation is a result of a process involving compromoise and education on all sides. The divergent attitudes toward materials, scale, bureaucracy, and social/environment responsibilities represented the challenge of this project."[3]

Simpson's "discovery" of Mr. and Mrs. Gehrke and his desire to inject a strong, vernacular content into what he feared would become "another modernist monument" became the earliest item the team agreed on. The team itself was made up of the three artists, Hobbs, Bishop, David Rutherford (project architect), S. Douglas Smith (also of CL), and Thomas A. Berger the landscape architect. The early commission of the 27 windmills which used recycled percolators, eggbeaters, hardhats and other found objects, had its effect on the rest of the design. After the architects were convinced of the Gehrke idea, they made the exterior, Fremont Avenue side, a "soft wall" of chain-link fencing so that passersby could see through the fence to the artwork inside the compound. A major snag soon occurred which would further alter the design. CL executives insisted that a protective covered walkway surround the sculptures as they were deemed an "attractive nuisance" which officials were sure would attract vandals. The $28,000 for this non-artwork came out of the One Per Cent for Art budget and severely hampered from the beginning how much else could be done.

Little did Mrs. Gehrke's hardware-store salesman realize that the unmixed, muted pastel shades he was shaking up for her to paint her husband's charming "doo-dads" would influence a whole group of metropolitan architects and artists. What Keating referred to in a television interview as a "mass 70s palette"[4] was already waiting for the woman over 80 who since 1965 had been collaborating with her husband on whimsical contraptions they placed in their yard. Her choices were not at all arbitrary. Taking advantage of availability and discussions between them, both had long agreed on the restful properties of primaries and their pastel counterparts. These were what Simpson described as "toilet paper shades" and were subsequent inspirations for his own three-colored, plastic-encased toilet paper rolls made to commemmorate the project for its 1979 dedication and distribution there.

The link between health and color goes back to Goethe and his eccentric latter-day follower, Rudolf Steiner. The quotation Sherry Markovitz chose for one of the four commemmorative signs she made out of photo-transferred porcelain enamel as part of her activity on the project was taken from an extensive taped interview she and Keating held with the 93-year-old artist in 1976:

Doctors have seen long, long ago that a pretty bou-
quet with different colors can do more for the sick
and discouraged in hospitals than medicine does.[5]

The homey sentiment concealing a rather sophisticated color
theory set the tone for the rest of the project.

The artists next convinced their colleagues to paint the huge
transformers in corresponding yellow, blue, green and pink
colors. These shades also formed the color scheme for the four
enameled porcelain danger signs Andrew Keating made to be
placed just inside the "soft wall." Using single male figures in
the process of being electrocuted or with electrical outlets for
eyes, for example, Keating followed the engineer's advice to do
something "fun and arty." (They were duly approved by the
State Chief Electrical Inspector.) The danger-sign men are des-
cendants of Fernand Leger's muscle-bound workers of the late
1930s and the result of Keating's own immersion in Leger's writ-
ings on publicly accessible art which could still vaguely main-
tain modernist precepts. Those ideas and that artist would
continue to influence Keating's next public art project, the
Northwest Center for the Retarded, and his studio art (already
concentrating on single male-figure depiction) as much as Mr.
Gehrke's therapeutic chromaticism would influence his own
colors.

The major components of Viewlands/Hoffman's art, a huge
400-foot-long, wrap-around concrete backdrop wall, did not
take form until the concrete had already been poured. Unsuc-
cessful at persuading the architects of Simpson's suggestions to
experiment with plastic Visqueen as surface-liner for the con-
crete forms, the three artists agreed among themselves to hand
over the design of the mural to Keating. The painting job was
shared by the three team artists, sculptor Merrily Tompkins and
Robert Hendrickson, former studio assistants to Kenneth No-
land. More a "wall treatment" than a painting or super-graphic,
more a "solution to a problem" than an artwork, Keating's shift
to pragmatic architectural jargon also reflected at this point
how much he had caught up with the architects, realizing the
necessity to present them with agreed-upon proposals of an
artists' "united front," rather than, as Simpson had tended to,
come to meetings with a panoply of possibilities more akin to
Gyro Gearloose than a "professional" team member.

The 31-year-old artist's emergence as official spokesman for
the artists was the result of his patience during myraid meetings
earlier in the year. With the architects' insistence upon "sche-
matic design stages" followed by "pre-construction" and "con-
struction phases" slated to begin on schedule, Keating knew
that unless he and his colleagues became able to work ac-
cording to the architects' and CL's exacting deadlines, they
would be unable to complete their projects at all. Furthermore,

he was perhaps more fully aware than they that the pilot nature of Viewlands/Hoffman, were it to not work out, would preclude any future collaborations of the sort. There was also the issue of being in too far to pull out.

That being the case, he came up with a large-scale drawing of an abstract color pattern (using Gehrke's colors) to play off the vertical and horizontal lines left by the wooden concrete forms. This would subtly echo an alternation grid system describing the overall electrical plan of the substation. An explanation of this and the color patterning code would appear at the far, publicly accessible end of the wall.

> Lines and arcs were drawn over the concrete seam grid. Shapes created by the interaction of the two systems were painted using pairs of colors in different quantities...The use of a system also relates to the idea of art (artists) working in the system (bureaucratic/governmental and architect/client)[6]

Keating's thoughtful explanation does not describe the modernist routes of his design, however. System, yes, but one more redolent of, in my opinion, LeCorbusier's accomplishments at the Marseilles Unites d'Habitations or of Mondrian's carefully proportional grids. Given the pastels to which Keating added a brighter yellow matching the CL repair trucks, the mural also recalled Corbu and Ozenfant's shades, but on such a scale and in such a setting, that modernism seemed to be parodied.

This brings up the question of artists as decorators and the reluctance some have felt about the value of such projects which presumably turn artists into mere decorators. Local criticisms of this sort by "plaza plop"-oriented artists have been indirectly aimed at Viewlands.[7] Here we get to the crux of whether public art projects can more fully involve artists in decisions about social environment or relegate them to being tacked-on commodity producers. This is an example, also, of the healthy, rousing, intellectual controversies the artist-design team idea and its realizations have generated in Seattle. These are subjects as likely to be hashed out by citizens standing in front of the Henry Moore as by arts commissioners over lunch at LeBistro.

The significant fact is that artists have undertaken the risk of being called mere "decorators" in the hope of perhaps extending the province of effect their art may have in a more articulately planned environment. Historical analogies quickly come to mind for such cooperation: Ghiberti, Giotto, Michelangelo, Willaim Morris, Whistler, and on a more recent, if mundane level, Cynthia Carlson.

Sherry Markovitz's other signs were memorials to Eugene Hoffman, the substations' namesake and former CL chief, and

Thomas A. Edison. Keating and Simpson, doubling as poets, even wrote "matching" poems for the plaques which displayed photographs of Mr. Hoffman in the old Diabolo Dam turbine tunnel and of Edison (see Appendix).

"Thinking symbolically and functionally" is how Simpson once described his working method on Viewlands. That seeming contradiction and his considerable achievement at overcoming it by fusing symbol and function demonstrates a unique but sensible attitude for such endeavors. He saw that the Gehrkegigs in motion symbolized another form of energy, wind, and that their kinetic quality contributed in great part to their beauty. This was a lesson he turned to his own studio work, incipiently there before, but made lasting by Mr. Gehrke's example.

It also led to the final stage of his involvement at Viewlands: public seating. The ensuing "rage" over chair design by artists that occurred after Simpson's *Chainlink Chaise* and *Chainlink Chair* (made for Viewlands) were exhibited in his and Keating's two-man show at the Seattle Art Museum became another part of the legacy of the artist-design team. It eventually led to his organizing the 1979 "Seat and Read" exhibition for *and/or* in order to contain all the subsequent proposals and prototypes.

Chainlink Chair, an oversize parody of aluminum-tubing lawnchairs, replaced aluminum with concrete-filled steel conduits and metal "cushions" with chainlink fencing (salvaged from the "soft wall" construction). Vandal-proof because of its extreme weight and durable materia, *Chainlink Chair* has a matching "hassock" of coiled chainlink aluminum and a poured-over concrete cushion. Its companion-piece, *Chaise Lawn Chair,* is fashioned from "decommissioned cedar power-pole crossbeams" segmented together by industrial bolting and decorated with glass fuse caps. Simpson sees this portion of the project as ongoing and foresees that the Gehrkegigs will have to be eventually repainted, repaired and, in some cases, replaced.

On June 18, 1979, Deputy Mayor Bob Royer dedicated the artwork and CL Superintendent Robery Murray dedicated the substation. It has since won the Washington State Concrete Association's Excellence Award, an Honor Award from American Institute of Architects (Seattle chapter) and a national design award from the American Public Power Association.

RECYCLED ARCHITECTURE, PUBLIC ART AND THE RETARDED AS ART AUDIENCE: N.W.C.R.

If the objectives of preceding architectural monuments were the predominance of the Beautiful over the useful, it is undeniable that, in the mechanical order, the dominant aim is *utility*, strictly utility. Every-

thing is directed toward utility with the greatest possible severity. *The tendency toward utility does not, however, impede the accession to a state of beauty.*[8]

—*Fernand Léger*

Keating's studies of Léger had convinced him of the possibility of making something beautiful and useful even within the confines of the compromises ahead of him on the next design team he was to join, that for the newly remodeled Northwest Center for the Retarded (1600 West Armory Way). Another Hobbs Fukui job, the jury was composed of consulting architect for the exterior Galen Minah, King County supervising architect Wayne Barclay, a representative of the retarded students' parents' association, Seattle Arts Commission Art in Public Places coordinator Richard Andrews, and sculptor and ceramist Clair Colquitt (who would later be appointed to the Creston-Nelson Substation design team).

This time, Keating was chosen to work with sculptor William Whipple. Because of his previous experience on Viewlands, Keating ended up being the spokesman for the duo and, besides, he was more interested than Whipple in having an impact on the architectural decisions made. Whipple was left to build a series of moving sculptures, plan a painted "wall treatment," design and execute a low-relief sculpture for the "clients' lounge," and make five "display boxes" highlighting various aspects of daily living the semi-independent handicapped and/or retarded workers were attaining to. Both he and Keating remained in consultations early on about the special nature of the audience and then eventually separated to work on their own individual projects.

The former Thirteenth Naval District Supply Depot buildings were being converted to a sheltered workshop and special education-preschool with federal, state, county and city funds to better accommodate the 284 clients who range from mildly to profoundly handicapped. It also houses offices of a consumer advocacy group for retarded citizens and their families and the national headquarters of a teachers' group, the American Association for the Education of the Severely/Profoundly Handicapped. The entire complex initially consisted of a half-dozen buildings, two of which were extensively altered during the remodelling phase.

In perhaps an internationally unprecedented move, Keating persuaded the team to let him choose all the colors for the buildings' exteriors *and* interiors. Luis Barragan is the only architect whose work NWCR came to resemble with its paint-chip rainbow from cool yellow, peach and blue to green and rose. Each building is a different color and the overall effect is one of a fanciful World's Fair or a Barragan residence in Mexico City.

61

Despite a last-minute effort on the part of the architects to dissuade Keating from sticking to his Gehrke-inspired color scheme, the work went ahead. The major structure, Samuel Holenberg Memorial Recreation and Instruction Center (Building 276), contained a gymnasium, cafeteria, classrooms, bathrooms, hallways and stairwells. Keating adapted his alternating, modular color system from Viewlands to solid colors and chose vinyl asphalt tile hues, mosaic tile shades (and plumbing fixtures), as well as colors for elevator doors, alcoves, and the regulation gymnasium floor. Disregarding architects' persistent suggestions of coordinated, supergraphic treatments, Keating's distinguishing artworks for the building were a four-panel plexiglass diorama of human heads in profile for the cafeteria and a companion, four-wall foyer mural which extended onto the monumental inverted U-shape portal the architects added to the porch.

Keating's initial proposal of four paintings for the eating area were turned down by NWCR Director James McClurg on the grounds that their "childlike, bizarre" subject matter tended to confirm non-handicapped viewers' stereotypes of the retarded. The subsequent diorama (painted in Gehrke pastels) continued Keating's treatment of the human figure (so prevalent at this time in his studio work) and effectively neutralized McClurg and the parents' association's objections.

The mural is the artist's major large-scale achievement to date. More in keeping with the imagery in his paintings thatn the Viewlands mural, it combined Keating's use of the human head with his growing tendency toward abstraction. On the north and south walls, a large human head outline is seen in three-quarter profile (taken directly from a classical anatomy text) and surrounded by a rectangle. An upper horizon line of blue continues around the room, connecting all four walls. Without specific facial features, these "New Image" heads were subject to Keating's increasing experimentation with perspective. Flip-flopping parallelograms are part of a concealed pattern of smaller shapes ("noodles, ellipses, circles") which fill out the wall's surface, each in a different set of colors. These, in turn, continue onto the west entry wall of glass windows and out onto the interior wall of the portal.

On the east wall is a "negative image" of a head with stylized swallows (seen frequently in the adjacent railyard) inside and around the head. The birds appear on all the walls and increase in number nearer the ceiling which is solid blue, like the building's exterior. An electronic, viewer-participation sculpture by Robert Teeple is in one corner of the room.

The pale shades and simplicity of readily identifiable shapes integrate rather than segregate the intended audience of clients into the public at large. That is, by following a reductive

route (common to much contemporary art) instead of an overly complex one, Keating was able to break down his own stereotypes of the "special" concerns of the multiple handicapped (e.g., sight impairment) and create a work of art which had broad appeal and demanded subtle perception. Inside the room, walls seem to expand and contract according to the amount of natural light coming through the second-story clerestories and give off, on the whole, a restful, serene feeling.

For building 250, Keating made a set of eight framed color zerox prints of the materials used by the clients in the workshops (e.g., electrical cord, toy assembly parts, etc.). These are displayed in the building's entry lobby along with Wipple's *Rotating Rectangle* and *Twisted and Untwisted Rectangle*, two large acrylic-and-fibreboard wall sculptures which change shapes as viewers ignite an electric motor controlling each.

These were Whipple's first abstract works. His other NWCR projects were more in keeping with his Karl Wirsum-derived imagery in wooden cutout sculptures. *Mount Rainier's Revenge*, a low-relief, two-part piece, shows (perhaps prophetically) the Cascade peak in eruption on one side and surrounded by familiar Seattle landmarks on the other (e.g., Boeing jet, sailboat, Smith Tower, Rainier Beer bottle). He also made five "mini-dioramas" based on daily living skills: *The Meal, Going Someplace, Dreams, Wage-Earners,* and *Don't Be Too Serious.* The subjects were approved by the parents' association and represent the artwork most closely addressed to the clients.

Corridor is nearest to a supergraphic. Whipple painted four five-foot hand positions on a hallway wall. Each hand depicted a different concept from the American Sign Language (enjoy, work, corner, to) with the word or letters beneath each symbol.

The entire complex was dedicated October 16, 1979 at an annual luncheon honoring state legislators with the artists and architects as special guests. King County Executive John B. Spellman made special mention of the artwork in his official remarks.

ELECTRIC HUMOR: CRESTON-NELSON

For Clair Colquitt, former NWCR juror and chief artist on the Creston-Nelson Receiving Substation (South 51st Street at Creston Avenue South) design team, Keating and Whipple's project ended up being "too subdued." His own collaboration with sculptors Ries Niemi and Merrily Tompkins could never be described that way. Taking electricity as a uniting theme ("to glorify and enhance what electricity is doing for people"), the trio elected to plan the new substation with humor in mind, something all their "post-Funk" work already shared. Presenting a united front to the jury, the artists began with a barrage

of witty suggestions for the form the structure might take: a model of Hoover Dam, a solar-powered experiment, a barnyard with transformers disguised as silos with ducks and chickens, etc. The jurors included Keating and Markovitz, CL's Bishop, arts commissioners Anne Gerber and Jack Baker (a sculptor) and the project architect Garrold Malcolm of Benjamin McAdoo Associates.

Unsuccessful at persuading Malcolm of those ideas once they were selected, Colquitt settled for a series of connecting pathways around the hillside of the substation with three "theme sculptures." The path follows an "extension-cord plan" with the artworks at successive "light bulb outlines" along the way. In addition to designing a huge gate in the shape of an electrical outlet for the walled-in area containing the transformers, Merrily Tompkins is constructing a four-foot high bust of Nikola Tesla, the most controversial figure in the history of electricity. This will be placed into the hillside so that the lawn forms the Croation scientist's hair. Cement, mosaic tile and chickenwire are the media. An educational plaque written, designed and constructed by Tompkins will be nearby.

Colqitt, known primarily as a ceramic sculptor, turned in the mid-70s to automobiles. These contraptions have a ready appeal and have been featured in county fairs and musuems across the country as well as the 1977 Artpark at Lewiston, NY. For Creston-Nelson, he is building *Electrical Abuse Sculpture*, a large, three-prong electrical connector "totem" of tinted green pink, beige and black concrete.

Ries Niemi at 25 is the youngest artist to work on a design team. He is at work on a "decorative bench" (shades of Simpson's Viewlands chairs) which will symbolize the breakdown of electrical power at Creston-Nelson. Beginning with three big lightbulbs on a concrete pylon symbolizing the transformers inside, the piece's seating area is between that and fifteen smaller lighbulbs suggesting the branch circuits which distribute into the neighborhood. It is further supplemented by 100 tiny outlets representing home usage. Constructed of aluminum and concrete, it will be in a sheltered area on top of the hill between CL's Project Weathervane (a tract house converted to solar power for demonstration purposes) and its parking lot.

Closer in esthetic to Simpson than Keating, the three artists, according to Colquitt, "were inspired by the failures of Viewlands. I like to put art out on the streets. I like people to see the stuff."

As to the neighborhood response, which has generally been unfavorable thus far, Colquitt is philosophical, a necessary stance given his overtly populist views: "The part of the community that's active is active in the respect that they can get improvements for their neighborhood for putting a substation

in there. They don't think about art at all. But I hope the actual impact will be great—maybe it's for children. When I was growing up, there were local landmarks where we would meet, like 'Let's meet at the big head!' Art can become part of that experience."

The team has also hired glass sculptor Charles Parriott to create *Humdrum,* a $10,000 parabolic dish of fibrous concrete. Thirty feet in diameter, it will reflect sounds of overhead wiring to the person standing in its center.

One-third of Creston-Nelson is complete and a late 1981 dedication is anticipated.

CRITERIA FOR THE ARTIST-DESIGN TEAM

How is this hybrid of art and architecture to be judged? It becomes apparent that conventional object-oriented criteria are inadequate. And yet how far into the realms of social criticism should art criticism go? Not too far, in my own opinion. That would be to descend into the province of Eva Cockcroft's defense of inner-city murals being successful artworks merely because the group dynamic arising out of workmaking projects brought the participants closer together.

Even so, the broader base of social involvement on the part of the artists on the architectural design team must somehow be brought into consideration. What, then, would be the steps for analysing the success of this different type of artist's product? Public approval, to begin with, is an untrustworthy gauge—at first. Sometimes the form the art might take could be so startling and innovative as to initially enrage the average viewer. The lower-income area surrounding Viewlands/Hoffman has come to terms with its power substation even though early response ranged from indifferent to negative. The city's currently most popular work of public art and one widely applauded by the national architectural community, by the way, is a carved, life-size concrete sculpture of men, women, children and a dog waiting for a bus under a real, ornamental-iron pergola.

My discussions with the artists involved have led to the following proposed set of criteria. These should not be seen as definitive but gestural, raising possibilities for ways in which good may be distinguished from bad.

1. Unlike gallery art, design-team art is tied to Function. The crafts-training heritage of some of the artists already prepared them for this hurdle. Therefore, the first question to be asked is "Was the function of the setting fulfilled?" Is the power station, for example, impeded or enhanced by the introduction of art-items and ideas into its overall plan?

2. Was the base level of the architecture improved? That is to say, was the influence of the artists on the architects notable?

65

This means that if artists are to maintain a stance of not only subtly influencing architecture but sharing that wider, reformative impact which architecture can demonstate more openly than art, then the effect the artists have on the structure must somehow be different than merely adding decoration.

3. In addition to contributing to the job's function, did the art-element go beyond that into the area traditionally reserved for art, namely, its ability to make people more aware of the world around them? Here the threat is that the art become so intimately integrated into the design that it loses all its own autonomy. In the opinion of some design-team members, this would not be a bad thing to occur. I feel that there is a fine balance to be maintained between contributing to the architectural plan and giving in to it entirely. By architectural standards, the best art has always been that which subsumed itself most completely into the building. The different in Seattle is that, sometimes, it's hard to tell the architecture from the art. It looks more like art, less like functional architecture. Does a huge transformer painted pink look at first like a utility component or a big funny pink sculpture? This is one way art can—and must—go beyond Function.

4. Once upon a time, the most the artist could hope for was that his or her sculpture would fit into the architectural site and not be relegated to embroidery on the architectural dress. A revision of that criterion for the design-team projects might be expressed, "Is the artwork site-*integrated*?" This implies an interplay of art and architecture throughout the project, not just in the front plaza but in the halls, windows, even perhaps down to the color of the plumbing fixtures, as Andrew Keating demonstrated at NWCR. Site-integration will replace site-relation, that holdover of Minimalist object sculpture, as a more accurate gauge of whether the art is good. This, in turn, is again connected to the idea of art influencing the character of the site itself. Only when enlightened architects are prepared to give up some "turf" (as did Hobbs and Fukui) can this criterion be fulfilled.

5. Besides the internal integrity of the site, does the project relate to the surrounding community? Here, both architects and artists impinge on society in another real way. Nobody really wants dog-pounds or power stations built in their neighborhoods, but the conscientious, canny artist-design team can enhance neighborhoods and offer paradigms of art and architecture to its closest public.

6. This is linked to the question, "Is the spectrum of art enjoyment broad enough to please a reasonable portion of the surrounding community?" Obviously, formalist object sculpture has been a bitter pill for many communities to swallow. It is not by coincidence that most of the artists chosen in Seattle for

design-team work have dealt in their own work more with re-presentational than abstract imagery. Viewlands' mixture of an abstract mural with signs and windvanes provided a happy medium for this question. The brutal intrusion of a hydroelectric plant with all its built-in monumentality has been mitigated by humor, color, and kinetic motion. Naturally, a certain latitude toward one style or another, depending on the artists, must be allowed. Generally, though, this criterion might help to forestall a deadening, singular public art style or "look" from gaining in prominence.

7. Does a greater art-meaning emerge than that of spot decoration? For example, is there a theoretical relation between the objects created, the general form the projects take and the function they serve or comment upon? Mr. Gehrke's windvanes provided a pleasant commentary on a different form of energy, wind. The Creston-Nelson sculptures deal with electricity and presumably get viewers to thinking about a kind of art that can criticize issuers that directly affect them in their homes nearby. This is one way artists can resist architectural pressures to serve Function totally; the trick is to balance an overtly modernist approach to art-objects against one which unduly diminishes the place of the art in the plan.

8. Is the outcome vandal-proof? Lawrence Alloway's dictum about public sculpture's needing to somehow survive vandalism or not being good public sculpture to begin with might be extended here to include the necessity of making art which will weather and age gracefully, have a limited lifetime in some cases, or "decay" into a different kind of artwork (like the grass "hair" on Nikola Tesla's head at Creston-Nelson). Vandalism is a threat facing all public art but is only a part of the problem facing outdoor art or art with which the public constantly comes into contact. It is not unreasonable to provide for the maintenance of public art but few American communities including Seattle have worked out how this should occur. Should arts commissions oversee it, for instance, or the sponsoring public agency?

9. Was there something innovative that emerged out of the artist-design team process? A shift in the architectural plan? A difference in the objects made? An impact, even, on the attendant technology of the project (e.g., windows in the kennels)? Otherwise, why involve artists at all? Time and again, they have brought a unique way of thinking and looking to the public works projects under discussion here and this is what has separated them from professions which traditionally have dealt with graphics, design, interior decoratin, and landscaping. The right to innovation must be fought for by the artists. Once that is accomplished, the critic might ask "But how is it new and to what end has innovation improved the project as a whole?"

10. Finally, was the overall process successful? Was progress made towrd a rapproachment between architects and artists? Was progress made toward achieving what was initially outlined at the conceptual stage of planning? Was a flexibility and variability factor maintained in order to allow for changes which occurred during the process?

CONCLUSION

The alienating pressures of captalism which affect the social production of art in the United States are not utterly unavoidable, as some would hold. While it may be that the Seattle situation is special in that it has grown out of a relatively enlightened citizenry and comparatively sophisticated arts administration bureaucracy, the fact remains that the artist-design team principle can be adapted to other cities as well as to developing societies searching for methods to incorporate artists literatlly into the building process of new nations.

They year alone, for example, Viewlands/Hoffman and NWCR have been visited by American and Canadian architects, critics and social theorists.

The prospects for the future seem bright. As long as there are artists who care to involve themselves in these undertakings, put in the long hours, partake in a pioneering program to alter the mode of art production in this society and actually seek to change the way artists are perceived by the American public, these efforts shall continue. The sociology surrounding this program might not at all necessarily follow the route I have suggested in this essay. Nor might the yardsticks eventually used to judge it parallel the criteria I have tentatively offered here.

Even at this preliminary phase, however, the results are impressive. It is too soon to accurately measure the broader social ramifications of this idea. It may be that such activities are more easily implemented in small population centers like Seattle—or Casablanca. As they stand, however, Viewlands/Hoffman, Northwest Center for the Retarded and Creston-Nelson—and the story of the artists who made them—offer tangible challenges to deterministic critics who argue that a cooperative, socially progressive arrangement between artists and society cannot be worked out to the mutual benefit of both.

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[1]Author, "Since the World's Fair: Sculpture in Seattle, *Northwest Arts*, Vol. IV, No. 10, May 26, 1978, p.4.

[2]The majority of these were by George Tsutakawa, James FitzGerald, Everett DuPen, with notable exceptions at Seattle Center and Freeway Park (Lawrence Halpern Associates).

[3]Andrew Keating, "On Viewlands," *and/or Notes*, forthcoming.

[4]Interview with author, KCTS-TV (PBS), University of Washington, Seattle, June, 1979.

[5]Andrew Keating, Sherry Markovitz, Alene Course, "Conversation with Emil Gehrke," *Rundy's Journal,* Issue 12, 1980 (Chapel Hill, N.C.).

[6]See No. 3.

[7]Parks Anderson, "The Question of an Ideology of Public Art," *"Seattle Arts,* Art in Public Places Supplement, June, 1980.

[8]Fernand Leger, "The Aesthetic of the Machine," *Bulletin de l'Effort Moderne I,* 1 and 2, January and February, 1924.

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Anonymous, "Can We Harness the Wind?" *National Geographic,* December, 1975, P. 826 (Gehrke illustration).

Anonymous, "Murals, Whirligigs, Tunnel at Viewlands/Hoffman Substation," *Seattle Arts,* Vol. 2, No. 11, June, 1979, p.1.

APPENDIX

Poems by Andrew Keating and Buster Simpson for
Plaques by Sherry Markovitz at Viewlands/Hoffman

1. "9/20/39   In Diabolo Scroll case viewing through stay vanes to wicket gates which control flow of water to turbines."

2. "11/11/77 In Viewlands Stroll cage viewing through static chain to mill vanes which abide to surface flow."

Art In An Age of
Mass Mediation

BY DONALD B. KUSPIT

Democracy has ever been the form of decline in organizing power.
Freidrich Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*

How do we get to see and really experience art? It is certainly not by going to galleries and museums, in search of a direct relationship with original works. This is confirmatory, after the fact of the art we have known and come to love, a vindication and verification of it—the assurance that it exists, in however attenuated, objective form, i.e., as a specific, one might say terminal, object. To really see and experience art we look for it in its mass media image. We open an art publication, we look for a report of its existence, an account of its range of effect, its ability to refer beyond itself while remaining itself—this is its strength, its substantiveness. This seemingly secondary, derivative, imperceptibly yet undeniably "subjective" source, is in fact the primary source of the work of art. Indeed, it is only in its media filtered form that the work has any facticity, it is only by having its singularity passed through the mass media—in a

70

rather undialectical or only naively dialectical way—that it acquires the aura of individuality, the tone of ultra-unique, hyper-individual inner life. Only publicized in the mass media does it seem to have a secret. Only when its finiteness is expanded by the infinity the mass media utopianly promises does it have a meaningful existence. Only when it has been infinitely extended by mass display, charged by the consciousness of a multitude, is it truly powerful, a reservoir of energy that can resist the entropy of its own objectivity, the degeneration brought on it by its own matter-of-fact givenness.

In the mass media, whether in the form of a text or an image, we see a reproduction of an original work of art, a mimetic rendering of its being subject to all the vicissitudes—particularly that of irony—of such a rendering. But this reproduction becomes the original in our consciousness, arouses in us all the frenzy and obsession of the engaged will, all the argumentative, loving energy of commitment. The really original work is all too neutral in its originality, all too uncritically given in its uniqueness. When its identity is made to hinge on its unique originality, it becomes an all too narrow, confining self-identity. Only the work of art that comes to us as the "emanation" of a mass media context sparks us into true wakefulness of its possible identity and the possibilities of our own. Only the mass mediated work of art, the work of art fattening into significance on the culture media of mass distribution, is truly disinterested, having the aesthetic value, almost erotic allure, of truly transcendental or ideal reality. In sum, the work is truly an aesthetic text when it comes to us in a mass media context. Its organic nature—our recognition of its creatureliness—is evident only when we see it as an occurrence within a mass media environment, which not only nourishes its growth, but makes it catalytic in the growth of other creatures.

We go to see the originally original work of art to free ourselves from the force of its flow into the world, to disengage ourselves from its context—to achieve an unpressured relationship to its reality, i.e., a mythical relationship to its immediacy. This relief we mistakenly call contemplation, which we assume leads us to the true transcendence of the work. But its true transcendence is its mass distribution, its essence is its mass identity. The originally original work of art is the residue of the mass distribtion context, more precisely, its uniqueness is the dregs of that context, a kind of bland precipitate crystallized out of its dense solution. We store it in a museum, where it is on view like a corpse in a funeral parlor, as if to bring it into another realm of being, or rather as if we take it to signal the possibility of that realm, i.e., to promise us release from bondage to our own realm of being, finally from our own troublesome coming into being. In the museum we can never imagine

that the work had its own becoming, which is why, moment-arily, we can imagine it as redemptive. In the mass media we can never forget its becoming, the expansion of its identity as it is publicly appropriated. The work of art's dignity in its museum paradise seems trivial, a kind of negative definition of it, com-pared to its positively heroic character as a mass media celeb-rity. We finally come to prefer to see it as mass media produced, not simply reproduced, for we realize that its entire power of displacement, its whole effect on us, depends on the politics of its display. It is by taking its chances in the politics of display that it truly becomes a creative risk—critically forceful, socially ef-fective, i.e., acquires a "moral" dimension (or perhaps only flavor) beyond its materiality and formality. We value the work of art only insofar as, through its mass distribution, it runs for office, makes an appearance in a campaign, submerges all its interests in its self-interest. Its desire to be "elect," to hold "office" (be official)—to legitimate its self-interest by its perfor-mance before the masses (whose imagined unity integrates the work in its own eyes)—frames and gives coherence to the issues of style and communication with which it is ostensibly occu-pied, and which superficially give it individuality and meaning. But in fact it finds its identity—its "authentic" style, its power of communication—through the politics of mass mediation. This not only determines its property value but its critical recogni-tion. Indeed, its production through its distribution in the mass media is its critical recognition. The real critical feat of art is that it circulates through society—that it stays in the swim of society, whose currents not only give it its momentum but create that final magical effect which is finally what art is all about, viz., make it seem to live beyond its means, to have more means at its disposal than appears possible, make it seem to have a sur-plus of possibility that makes it seem actual and useful, and truly art. The magic of art is that it seems to be able to survive—to come into being—on next to nothing, a little flourish or flair of being, a little excess which is never used up. It is mass media-tion that creates that magic—that is the art behind art, the real source of art's coming into being, the history behind its history.

This article is about the effect on art of mass mediation, an effect until relatively recently unconscious and now perhaps too obvious a fact of art's life. My basic contention, which I can demonstrate only in limited detail here—I am more interested in laying out the principles that determine the shape of the work of art which has mass mediation as its major horizon of expectation, its secret immanence—is that modernity begins with mass mediation, and modern art is art that incorporates or realizes mass mediation in its identity, that in effect lives only for mass mediation or has its existence only through mass media-tion. This is more than acknowledging that the expectation of

mass mediation—the simple assumption that the work of art exists for an audience—conditions its production. Such an assumption assumes the intervention of a commonly held ideology between the being of the work of art and the being of the audience. The shared ideology does the work of mediation, becomes the matrix of relationship between the work and its audience, the source of communion which nonetheless allows each its independence, the realm of discovery which permits for aesthetic perception and appreciation. This is the case in all traditional art—in the context I am trying to establish, the very definition of traditional art. But in modern art there is no ideology, only mass mediation—the belief in mass mediation as such is the ideology. In this sense, from Impressionism on, through Post-Impressionism and Cubism, and perhaps climactically in Dadaism, there is a progressive purging of ideology from art, even if it is ostensibly in the name of an alternate ideology, a new belief system, a more urgent dogma. This occurs even in the seemingly regressive—from the perspective of eliminating, whether by obviating or precluding, ideology— movements of Futurism and Surrealism, not to speak of the subtly regressive aspects of Constructivism, Suprematism, and De Stijl. By proposing an alternate ideology to the socially prevailing one—an ideology which can be realized only in art, not in social life—the very principle of ideology is undermined. That is, belief, while seemingly being redirected, is in fact neutralized, or at least subtly weakened or confused—put in conflict with itself, and so forced to defend itself. It loses legitimacy, particularly when it comes to operate only in the art context, finally becoming—after being drawn away from all socially real objects—a belief in nothing but art, thus subsumed in an art for art's sake credo. Undermined in its psychosocial specificity and simply reinforcing a finally naive or uninformed—unjustifiable, unself-justifying—belief in art, belief can bind itself to no ideology. Every ideology pales beside the fact of belief's commitment to art, which finally becomes nihilistic in effect if not in intention. Belief centered only in art is ultimately non-ideological, a blind commitment to an idol which, just because it offers a merely alternate, not truly binding ideology, seems to have clay feet. In this context, the open acceptance of art as non-ideological—perhaps most explicit in the anti-humanism of neo-peinture pure—prepares the way for its mass mediation, and the acceptance of its mass acceptance as the only source of its identity and power. Unadultrated—uncompromised, one might say—by ideology, by expectations of reasons to be believed in, i.e., by the assumption of ideology as the ground or via media of relationship to art, belief in art can become entirely a matter of its mass mediation. Works of art compete for space in the media, yearn for a collective identity—a fully pub-

73

licized identity, a totality which is created by mass mediation—
and in their very being assume a facility or efficiency of form
that assures them mass mediation.

The question is how art's mimesis of mass mediation works,
shows itself stylistically. What are the aspects of mass mediation
that are appropriated by art? How does the work of art demo-
cratize its style sufficiently to be easily mass mediated? This is a
pragmatic question—a question about the way the work's prag-
matic end affects its semantics and syntactics. It is *not* a question
of describing the work's fall from the grace of autonomy into
false consciousness of itself—consciousness of itself as at home
in the world, at one with itself because it has a place in the
world. It is rather a question of instrumentation, ways in which
the work of art achieves distributive efficiency, and as such
fundamentally appears—makes a fundamental appearance,
giving it the familiarity or habituality that makes it seem inevit-
able in its existence. This may also be a kind of false conscious-
ness of it, but only if that inevitability is assumed to mask
absoluteness of being.

What must be mimicked is the sublimity of the media—those
aspects of the media that make it sublime, seemingly infinitely
extensive, a truly mass mediation, i.e., creating a seemingly lim-
itless "mass." These aspects are, simply, speed and spread, i.e., a
sense of instantaneous access to limitless information, a sense
of an eternal flow of information which can be dipped into at
will, and given a momentary shape by the spontaneity of that
will. The media give us a sense of easy access to an easy flow of
information, the ease of access guaranteed by the ease with
which information can be formulated—the ease with which
reality can be reduced to information, which in part depends
on the ease which with reality can be laid out, "flattened."
Abstraction, which began as the difficult task of flattening a
naturally "rounded" reality, in the name of its "inner truth,"
i.e., as a way of mediating its felt significance, has become a way
of reducing reality to information—or of codifying reality—and
quickly mediating information (not reality) in a formulation
which is progressively streamlined into a formula. Ideally, this
formulation includes the original sense of uncertainty that
came with the reduction—the sense of something lost, of awk-
ward absence accompanying the slick presence of abstract in-
formation. This uncertainty shows itself in a certain
tentativeness, even fitfulness of layout, or else in a sense of the
incompleteness of even the most seemingly complete form, the
instability of the most seemingly stable format. The media are a
mode of abstraction, flattening the reality of what it approp-
riates into a "fast" formulation—into fast information—that
bespeaks a sense of abandoning reality—of leaving that sinking
ship—as much as of firmly grasping it. This makes for the sub-

limity of the media formulation, the sense of its infinite malleability—endlessly manipulatable information—yet steadiness, the sense of formulation as an eternally unfinished business and yet of a cleverly accomplished business, another demonstration of the cunning of reason.

In general, speed and spread are the desiderata of modernity, the instruments of its sublimity—the very roots of its necessity. Speed and spread are, in Kant's language, the dynamically sublime and the mathematically sublime respectively, shaping our sense of the modern social landscape as much as Kant saw them shaping our sense of nature's timeless landscape. Speed of movement of information is the modern form of the dymanically sublime—the qualitative experience of the modern sublime. The sense of an increasingly accelerated and increasingly unscannable flow of information—information that by the very momentum of its flow creates a sense of unstoppable power—is the source of the modern sense of absolute, ceaseless, and so finally infinite, energy. The sense that this limitless, fast flow of information can be given some kind of form, however limited and tentative—however much a manipulation or directing of that flow if not a complete control on it, and a manipulation that cannot even predict with certainty the effect it will achieve—gives us the quantative experience of the modern sublime. The magnitude of the form seems to increase by reason of its perpetual need for reformulation, so that *the* form seems always just out of reach, and presents itself as a kind of absolute intelligibility mastering the absolute flow of information. But the absoluteness is speculative, the forms used seem tentative and inadequate and finally shabby and silly—trivial hypotheses rather than global theories—and what finally remains is a sense of the incomprehensible totality of information. The formulation of the information does not totalize it—as little as its flow can be stopped. The modern sublime issues from a sense of an infinite amount of information managed by a half-formulated—perpetually revised—code or form, serving more to more cue our response to the flow of information than to help us be fully informed.

In a sense, the explicit recognition of form as a code signalling an infinite abundance of information never to be encompassed and therefore only indirectly related to occurred with Minimalism. The boring nothingness or minimal nature of the finite gestalt is the "negative" of the infinite flow of information, the limit of its limitlessness, as it were. The infinity is not so much suppressed by the gestalt as mediated through its finiteness, i.e., exists ideally as the aura of its simplicity. The importance of speed—of creating a fast image, an image in ever accelerating motion and thus seemingly disintegrating, becoming nothing but a matrix of forms—was already recognized

75

by Cubism, if only implicitly—explicit in Futurism. But it was not really until Abstract Expressionism, particularly with Pollock, that the image was more or less left behind and the idea of instant and absolute and irreversible acceleration, making for an effect of spontaneous speed or instantaneous flow, was truly realized. Speed becomes an unspecifiable immediacy, immediately and freely transmitted energy. What image there is comes to us with such speed—speed of course is the final image—that we are left with a sense of unfathomable flux, a dynamic which exists only for itself and which finally cannot be managed even by a name. Now the minimalist gestalt—the minimal form—conveys the same sense of instantaneousness, only now through a namable form, which while it apparently has nothing to do with motion, implies the same untotalizable totality of information as Abstract Expressionist flux. In the Abstract Expressionist case speed has become so sublime it seems at a standstill, and in the Minimalist case form has become so sublime it seems facile, which makes each convey a transcendental illusion of totality. They are thus united as the optimum formulations of speed and spread respectively—as optimum fictionalizations of the infinite, in its manifestation as a flow and a form. Both have that immediacy of impact which is the ideal of mass mediation, and that comes only from the illusion of completely fluid information or completely managing form.

Neither Abstract Expressionism nor Minimalism are obviously media-determined movements. That they nonetheless reflect media methods and ideals shows the domination of mass mediation, as an ideal to be realized as well as a fully operational reality to be experienced. Pop art is explicitly media-oriented, and as such is more useful than Abstract Expressionism and Minimalism as a revelation of media ends. What it makes most explicit is the media's de-organicizing, if not explicit robotization, of reality. What the media do is encourage the conversion of everything organic into an abstract mechanism—information is a form of mechanism as well as flattened reality. Mechanism, as Karl Mannheim says, "denotes a system put together by a craftsman for some specific purpose, rather than a living being evolving spontaneously and seeking to maintain its internal balance."[1] The figures in Lichtenstein, Warhol, and Wesselman are mechanisms crafted as informational abstractions—systems of information in a formulation "individualized" by means of "art." Warhol in particular shows a strong tendency to reduce living beings to arty mechanisms, completely craft-determined (photography is the major source of determination of the mechanism of figure for Warhol). Another artist—not explicitly Pop but also explicitly media-motivated—who shows the mechanistic effect of informational over-coding is Alex Katz. His figures—the portraits at the corner of 42nd Street and Seventh

76

Avenue in New York City are most exemplary—are nothing more than a composite of cues crafted into a superficially totalizing mechanism, i.e., a mechanism which seems to have summed up all the "necessary" information about its organic (figural) source. But of course a sum is only a superficial specificity of instantaneous information, conveying the momentary exaltation of quickly achieved, facile abstraction.

This makes for a certain kind of hyper-visibility—Pop art achieves the same effect—which eliminates, in Oscar Wilde's words, all the wonder and mystery of the work of art, the effect of the belief that it is organic, and in some sense evolves spontaneously and works to maintain its equilibrium or wholeness. The residual organic quality of the work of art is dismissed by the hyper-obvious effect of the fully mechanized work. As a mechanism the work is democratically accessible—like a scientific experiment, it can presumably be duplicated by everyone—and a summary of collectively available information. The democratic accessibility achieved by the hyper-visible effect is perhaps the ultimate media effect. It is, of course, epistemologically, what photography aims at, which in part explains why already in the 19th century artists were turning to photography: not only as a mnemonic device but for its effect of hyper-visibility, or hyper-immediacy, as it might also be called. The Cubist use of collage by Braque and Picasso is also a way of achieving the hyper-visible, democratic effect that the manipulation of information into a mechanism can give. (Cubist paintings and scuptures are perhaps the first explicit mechanisms in art, i.e., the first works of art that want to be flat information rather than rounded reality—a new ideal of mimesis, or rather a pseudo-mimesis of reality, putting it in deliberately reduced or flattened and mechanical form.)

In general, mass mediation—easy and rapid accessibility—of information leads to the creation of a new public rhetoric—the rhetoric of information—that comes to dominate and finally empty of meaning the ideal and idea of personal, organic style, which becomes no more than an ability to manipulate information with the mechanism of art. While superficially replacing-what Husserl called the natural attitude with the meaningful, sophisticated information that results from a phenomenological reduction of reality, the mass media approach to art oversocializes it into a mechanism, which in the end weakens its power. The power of art to effect a subtle identification between viewer and work of art is undermined by the increasing mechanization of art into a democractic system of information. The viewer can no longer turn to art to find his own spontaneity and equilibrium—to recover from the art context what may be hard to have in actual experience. And since in the end he can find all the information about reality he needs from reality, he

turns less and less to art, even though it is more and more accessible. It has become accessible just so he will turn to it, not forget its existence. But he turns to art to resist information—to resist the informational reduction of reality—and to recover his sense of his own rounded reality, and the roundedness of reality (even if this has to be accomplished by "informational" strategies that do not seem reductive but rather integrative). Since art no longer resists being information, it is less and less useful in the attempt to recover the sense of oneself as a living being from the field of information—to recover from being a unit of information in someone else's reductive field. The fact that art no longer works against the reduction of reality to a flat information abstraction in the name of a return to roundedness—and once the use of reductive informational abstraction or the flattening of reality was a way of restoring the sense of its living roundedness or spontaneity and equilibrium (spontaniety issuing from equilibrium and never unbalancing life)—indicates just how much the media have become the model for art. Adorno's idea that the media administer or filter culture has to be superseded by the subtler idea that the media, by their creation of information, create the modern actuality of art. To serve our roundedness, or at least free us from our flatness, our existence as information for others, art must resist its media model. But how this is to be done remains unclear, for we are dominated and formed by the media.

The State of Formalism

BY RUDOLF BARANIK

The promise and achievement of *October in the Arts* is the way Annette Michelson recently defined both a nostalgic memory and a projection into the future. I would want this phrase to escape both geography and time and not to be confined to the early years after the October Revolution and the Russian Avant-garde. A less nostalgic view would recognize other times and places. There was an *October in the Arts* in this country when Abstract Expressionism came forth three decades ago. There was an *October in the Arts* at the turn of this decade when some American artists expressed their anger and anguish over America's role in the war in Vietnam. And there may be, at this very moment, an *October in the Arts* carried forth in the various expressions liberated by the Feminist Movement.

It is no accident that the phrase, a four work manifesto, has a fresh ring today: it signals a renewed concern for the dialectic

79

of moral commitment and formalist goals.

These are the times when the broad impulses in art and the fine nerve endings of content come together. It is these fine nerve ends, these specifics, we call form. This understanding of form, the recognition that form is not an arbitrarily imposed entity, is what the word formalism should stand for. In other words, primacy of form is not anti-content. On the contrary, the supremacy of form is the concern for the specificity of content. Any other understanding of form carries within it the seed of vandalism.

There would be no need to discuss the state of formalism if we were willing to leave it to its narrow meaning, to see the term formalism as it has been used for almost three decades. We know how Greenberg, great as his achievement may have been, also derailed formalism from its essential course, giving it what Robert Pincus-Witten aptly described as "a smaller diagnostic profile than usual within the broad range of formalist possibilities."[1] Pincus-Witten wrote this in Greenberg's defense, leaving out the fact that while a small diagnostic profile may be expedient in science, it is detrimental in confronting art, because the profile cannot act as a tool for broader analysis and remain merely that: instead it becomes an instrument for aesthetic paralysis, hampering movement into the periphery and, what is worse, into the future.

In numerous writings, Donald Kuspit develops a theory which is of interest to me. Contrary to Greenberg's hailing of certain stylistic advances in art as the formalist criteria, Kuspit often focuses on art of a formal rigor infused with a subtle expressionism and defines it as existential formalism. The art described, or rather this tendency in art, is close to my own sensibility, and my first impulse is to go along with this definition: but only if appropriate parallel definitions within formalism are found for other tendencies in art. If such theories are to be fruitful, they have to be built across the stylistic range. I would argue that Edward Munch did not let initial assumptions spill out and jell, but fought out a rigorous formal specificity and arrived at an expressionist formalism.[3]

It is important to understand that the formalist outcome, the rigorously molded Gestalt of a work of art, can grow from the roots of any and all artistic impulses. This analysis is an important step toward detaching formalism from the habit of positioning it in the context of the "cool." From this understanding flows a clarification about how formalism and social intent are not in opposition. Political artists who abandon formalism instead of finding an appropriate formalism for their intention are not advancing either art or social intent. Those who confuse formalism with elitism, who attack both from so called populist positions, are in effect conceding that certain impulses in art

80

cannot claim either sensitivity or flight of imagination.

It is important to redefine formalism because without redefinition it is harder to confront the various vandalist assaults on art itself. Douglas Davis in Artculture wrote:

> Language is governed by deep laws; it is open-ended in terms of flexibility: since it can reform itself to state new concepts, it defies determinism.

In the same manner, language reforms itself and rescues terms from misinterpretation. On whether formalism is used as a banner for one style or used for serious analysis about the art process depends the relationship art and all discourse on art, including art criticism. When Greenberg elected to build his clearly important theories on narrow stylistic grounds he locked himself into a determinism which left him eventually with the Bannards, the Boxers and the Bushes, the academy of the provincial museums of today.

I want to make sure that the vandalist impulses I spoke about earlier are not misunderstood. Retrograde as they are, they sometimes act as an intervening corrective. These are impulses which stem from the all too familiar sense of the futility of art. Art is an assumption, a poetic assumption, if you will, and form is the intuitive speculation actualizing the assumption. And both are often under the suspicion of the rationalistic mind. And why not? Here is an admitted assumption but held with ferocity as if it were God's truth; and here is form, intuitive and capricious, yet fought out with doggedness, as if life itself depended on it. Why should not the world, as it rushes by, feel like kicking over the whole thing?

As a matter of fact, the impulse of disparagement comes not only from the ousider, it is and always has been abundant within art's own world. In the Middle Twenties, when the avant-garde cinema flourished in the Soviet Union, Dziga Vertov not only made such important films as "Man With a Camera," but mocked Eisenstein and other film-makers. He called their studies "Factories of Grimaces" and their films "Cinema of Sorcery." Acting, he said, was a relique of the bourgeois past. To all this he opposed his "Factory of Facts." And he wrote eloquently:

> Filming facts. Sorting facts. Disseminating facts. Agitating with facts. Fists made of facts. Lightning bolts of facts.

I read this now and think: poor Dziga Vertov. Had his vandalist wish won out, Eisenstein would have been forgotten. Instead, "Potemkin" and other works which came out of the Cinema of Sorcery are shown in every avant-garde cinematique now, a half a century later. And Vertov did not even realize that by "sorting facts" he engaged in a bit of sorcery

himself.

In contemporary art discourse "facts" have a new name: facticity. And in the name of facticity, the assumptions of art are undergoing a continuous grilling. The judges are many, and they don't sit on the same bench but their questions construct a ring of suspicion. These judges are some writers on art, often brilliant, who armed with a deep knowledge of both art history and theory, think they can dissect art on an operating table. They are some radical art historians whose analysis holds firm in centuries past but falls apart when they meet the more wicked 20th century. They are the combative pro-populists to whom all high art is disposable and who see 420 West Broadway as the Pentagon. And there are some dogmatic conceptual artists who confuse the conceptual with the intelligent, and look down on all other art. And there are, of course, the generic philistines of all variations.

All of them, except the philistines who do not know the term, speak of the "art object." This fashionable term has so much entered the language that its subtle impact goes unnoticed. You will note, however, that those who write about the "art object" never use equivalent terms for *their activity*. Never does a writer on art speak about his or her collected essays as "multiple printed objects" or "printed phrases." Verbal discourse is hardly described as "sound-making."[3]

There are other terms which play a supportive role to the "art object," "art product," "uses of art" and so on. These terms are all part of an activity popular on the right, left and center and known proudly by the participants as de-mystification. All the de-mystifiers, the scholarly, the vandalistic and the hip, go at art with the zeal of village atheists.

Some time ago I talked to Dore Ashton about these matters. As I went on explaining how painful it is to listen to your friends de-mystify not only mystification but the mystery of art itself, Dore listened sympathetically and finally said, "Don't worry, they can't."[4]

At the College Art Association meeting in New York some year ago, I said on a panel that even a small oil painting by Ryder auctioned at Parke Bernet is not an object *in essence* and will eventually be rescued from misuse and will mean what it means, the night sky.

This I read on a panel of the Marxist Caucus of the CAA. As a socialist and a Marxist I find the vandalist tendencies most objectionable when they come from the left. I find it astonishing that while Rosa Luxemburg, in the midst of raging social battles, said that in art the social formula is of a secondary importance, some on the Left, today, cannot understand this elemental truth. Luxemburg, as we know, was not alone. The writings of Bucharin, Lukacs, Caudwell, Trotsky and Walter Benjamin are good

examples of the special sensitive relationship between Marxism and art. Greenberg understood that and said so often. But whether Marx stood for this or that in relationship to art is not really the issue, at least not to me. Socialist formalism, in other words the valuing of art as one of the most intense forces in life, is what matters.

Finally, all the clumsy efforts to over-anlayze or to de-mystify do not do art any harm. They are irritants but the proddings and pushings may even invigorate art. Since art is a poetic assumption it may even re-act to these proddings once in a while—by moving over to another assumption in the dark sideways of life.

I am a formalist because as an artist I know that formalism defends these passageways of artistic assumption from the vandals and the investigators with flashlights. And it is in the dark that good things happen.

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[1]Robert Pincus-Witten, "Entries: Cutting Edges" *Arts*, June 1979.

[2]A similar analysis would apply to conceptual expressionism (Beuys, Acconci, some works of Robert Morris).

[3]I would concede the logic of using the term "art object" in certain instances: for example, in communications with art movers or insurers...

[4]A literal quote from a conversation in 1976.

This statement was read in March, 1979 during a panel discussion on the State of Formalism at Cooper Union, New York. Other participants on the panel were Dore Ashton, Douglas Davis, Donald Kuspit, Kate Linker, Brian O'Doherty and Miriam Schapiro. A few minor changes were made in the text by the author prior to publication.

When the Realists Killed Realism

BY BRADLEY NICKELS

Realists and their supporters tend to subscribe to one version or another of what David Hackett Fischer calls the "furtive fallacy,"[1] or the assumption that historical events are always the effects of sordid schemes that have been hatched by back-room conspirators. I believe that the furtive fallacy is at work whenever we read that the problems of realists, whether in lack of sales or an abundance of critical scorn, are to be blamed on abstract painters and their collaborators in academe, art magazines and commercial galleries. The furtive fallacy is especially misleading when it is joined to the notion of a native tradition of realism in American art. Both ideas strengthen the habit of seeing "realism" as a static thing in contrast to abstraction, formalism or modernism.

It was the realists of the 1930's who killed realism, if anybody did, although their crime has often been ascribed to innocent

abstractionists. The paintings of the latter were more a symptom than a cause of the declining prestige of realism by the late 1940's. Thomas Hart Benton, Ben Shahn and others contributed to the demise of realism by creating a more abstract and synoptic form of figure painting than had been practiced by earlier realists. The new criteria for realism were more ideological and emotional than visual, and the hold of an external, visible model was notably weakened. The Regionalists and Social Realists were among the most famous and influential painters of the day, and their work probably did more than that of the American modernists in popularizing "distortion" and "abstraction."

If we possessed no polemical writings from the 1930's and were left with only the paintings as evidence for the period, we might well assume that many self-styled realists were attacking realism rather than defending it against modernism. It was a paradox of the 1930's that realism could be continued only by abandoning many of the qualities that are usually associated with it. Professor Linda Nochlin has summed up these qualities in an interesting pair of essays, *The Realist Criminal and the Abstract Law*[2]. Although her title suggests the furtive fallacy, her analysis of traditional realist concerns is astute. She cites a preoccupation with specific people and things in a particular time and place, and a preference for accumulating visual facts rather than imposing ideal forms upon the subject. More often than not, the realists of the 1930's inverted these priorities, and in what follows I will hazard a guess as to why they did so.

The key to understanding much realist art of the 1930's is found in the following formula: schematic form and stereotypical content. Well before the rise of Abstract Expressionism, the Regionalists and Social Realists broke decisively with 19th century attempts at capturing the richness of concrete visual experience. They did so, I believe, because they were increasingly preoccupied with a complex and highly abstract theme: the social contract, or the old question of what holds a people together. For many figure painters, the problem was no longer how to faithfully transcribe what they saw in a particular setting, but how to symbolize in a single image the history or destiny of an entire race, nation, class or region. As realism became more complex in content it also became more streamlined and simplified in form.

World War I literally made the social contract a world-wide issue that was intensely debated. The very slogan adopted by politicians as diverse as Woodrow Wilson and Vladimir Lenin, the right of self-determination of peoples, implied a nationalist answer to the question of social bonding. Each people was now to have its own nation-state. World War I intensified nationalist movements but it also provoked a reaction against nationalism.

The legacy of World War I is very much with us today. We help establish new nation-states and we then try to defuse the tensions that result from national rivalries.

Nationalism had many rivals, notably Marxism. The Russian Revolution of 1917 gave an impetus to socialist theories which held that adherence to one's economic class is more elemental and "natural" than one's allegiance to a nation-state. Socialism was not new, but it now had a new prestige. No longer was it an academic theory or a feverish notion in the crazed minds of a few revolutionaries, but the guiding doctrine of a great people. Socialism seemed very likely to be the way of the future.

One result of a revived Marxism was Social Realism. The latter name has often been denounced, but it seems to be at least half-accurate. Social Realism was not very realistic by older standards but it was certainly social. Paintings by Shahn and Evergood presupposed a socialist reading of the social contract. Older realists had been drawn to specific facts in the visual field, but now a particular event had to be presented as part of a broader pattern of the class struggle or of corruption of the legal system under capitalism.

In a series of paintings that were dedicated to the trial of Sacco and Vanzetti (1931-1932), Ben Shahn did not simply paint portraits of two men who were accused of robbery and murder. He underscored their role as international symbols of injustice. Shahn did not see the accused men in prison, but painted from photographs. In effect, he symbolized a remote and complex series of events that he knew through written and photographic accounts. The Sacco and Vanzetti series seems far removed from the realism of Eakins and Homer in subject but even more obviously in style.

The love of humanity that was so often expressed by the 30's realists did not prevent their taking liberties with the shape of the human form. Shahn's paintings seem typical of a kind of populist primitivism of the time. The deliberately awkward style even suggests that this is how Sacco and Vanzetti might have drawn their own portraits. Also, many of the clumsy shapes and shadows on the faces seem to have been inspired by photographic effects.

Marxism was not the only alternative to nationalism in the years immediately following World War I. Racial theories also flourished. Like many peoples throughout the world, American Blacks were encouraged by the atmosphere of the war to ponder their heritage and identity. A classic example of an awakened racial self-consciousness is found in Aaron Douglas' series of four mural panels Aspects of Negro Life (1934). Douglas used easily-read silhouettes to illustrate the transition by Blacks from tribal life in Africa to a participation in American culture. Ironically, it is the racial theme of such paintings which

show that Black artists were far from being culturally isolated and were taking part in the cultural life of their nation and epoch.

Racial, Marxist and nationalist themes were not always neatly segregated. Diego Rivera's historical phantasmagories were often heady brews of race (the history of the native Indians), the class struggle (landlords versus peons), and nationalism (an attempt to create an authentic Mexican art). Diego's paintings, which served as models for many Americans, were conglomerations of stereotyped humanity, including capitalists, militarists and oppressed peons.

Like Douglas and Rivera, Thomas Hart Benton resorted to flowing contours to build his stereotyped figures. Stock characters appear and reappear in his murals just as they do in Rivera's. Rugged bronco busters, crooked politicians and tight-lipped poker players are typical samples from the Bentonian repertoire.

The Regionalists have often been dismissed as simplistic nationalists or jingoists, but historian Matthew Baigell has undermined this stereotyped reading of their work.[3] If anything, regionalist art was antithetical to a purely nationalist interpretation of the social contract. For Benton, the central theme was not Americans versus foreigners, but the way in which a regional culture shaped human behavior. In his murals, being a "Westerner" or an "Easterner" seems to be a more basic fact about a man than is his being an "American."

The abandoning of many aspects of 19th century realism stemmed from a widespread desire to translate the social forces of American life into memorable emblems that could be easily read by an aesthetically unsophisticated public. I have suggested that World War I had underlined the message that was to be made memorable, namely one version or another of the social contract. But the war did more than stimulate verbal debate upon that subject. It was also the occasion for the making of thousands of propaganda images that were designed for a mass audience. Regionalism and Social Realism were in a very real sense the continuation in civilian guise of the poster art of World War I; and the audience of Benton and Shahn were people who had only recently become accustomed to seeing popularized images of the social contract.

Countless posters and newspaper diagrams reduced the complexities of a World War to a simplified visual format. Racial and national stereotypes were the very stuff of the poster war. The techniques which Toulouse-Lautrec had employed to playfully "advertise" the Moulin Rouge were now used to educate Americans to the unspeakably evil ways of the much dreaded Huns. But the war and the posters which advertised it did more than accustom people to think stereotypically. In every com-

batant nation, a goal of propaganda was to instill a vague, quasi-religious ideal: the Great Cause of World War I. Posters suggested the ineffable, a shadowy cause which demanded that each man be prepared to make what was euphemistically called the ultimate sacrifice. Poster art underscored the duty of a man to his fellows, and made it clear that the meaning of an individual's life was in his contribution to the destiny of his people.

Professor Nochlin has pointed out that no realist art prior to the 19th century has so completely excluded all references to a transcendent reality as did the paintings of a Courbet or a Degas. However, it was precisely the goal of many realists of the 1930's to reinstate an extra-personal, abstract ideal. As in the poster art of World War I, this ideal is vaguely located in the ties that bind the individual person to his race, class or nation. The key word here is "vaguely," because realist painters of the 30's, far from being smug or complacent, tried to satisfy a yearning for a vague something to which the individual might aspire. It is possible that the abstract themes of Benton or Shahn fed an appetite for intensely idealistic goals which had been stirred by the Great War.

Benton, Wood, Curry and Shahn belonged to a generation that matured during or immediately after World War I. The genre scenes that were favored by older men such as Sloan or Glackens must have seemed old-fashioned and empty to younger painters who were accustomed to thinking in terms of dramatic clashes of peoples and of a great collective effort. However, events were soon to overtake the synoptic realism of the 30's, and to make it seem inadequate in its own turn.

It seems likely that a waning interest in Regionalism and Social Realism by the 1940's was more a function of a new World War than of events localized in the art world. Once again, the making of stereotypical images was the business of entire nations. Some realists contributed to the war effort, as Shahn did by making posters. But the ultimate effect of the war was to place a generation of artists out of work in a manner more decisive than the Great Depression. The resurgence of poster art robbed 1930's-style realism of much of its content, and made the latter seem an ineffective adjunct to all-out propaganda. Another problem with stereotypical realism was the widespread aversive reaction to everything associated with the Nazis, and increasingly with the Soviets. The theme of the social contract, expressed through stereotypes, was the core of both Nazi and Soviet art.

The legacy of the 1930's mitigated against realism in the new figure art of the 40's and 50's. A somewhat bizarre situation had developed in which many painters were unwilling to either particularize their subjects in the manner of Courbet and Eakins, or to generalize them as did Benton and Shahn. It was now

88

commonplace for painters to disdain mere truth to the visible model, a trend already powerfully at work in images of the 30's even if it was contradicted in polemical writings. But in the years after World War II, the movement away from concrete details was not matched by a movement toward typification, or the tendency to see in a person the marks of his social or economic environment. The latter had also been discredited for reasons mentioned above.

If one can paint neither vivid particulars nor typical attributes, the only alternative is a kind of indeterminacy. This is exactly what one sees in so much "figure painting" (as opposed to realism) in the 1950's. Typical examples are the murky nudes of Balcomb Greene and the vaguely described figures that Diebenkorn placed in his nondescript interiors. "Figure painting" presupposed neither truth to visible nature nor any attempt to comment upon human nature.

Oddly, it seems to have been the Abstract Expressionists, the very people usually credited with destroying realism, who seem to have done the most positive work with the realist legacy during the 1940's and 1950's. Pollock's "myth" paintings from the 40's and de Kooning's "Women" from the 50's continue the earlier tendency toward greater abstraction in form and a content that centered around the problem of human nature. To be sure the theme was no longer the social contract, but something even more elemental: a kind of human essence, qualified only by sexual gender if even that. In paintings such as Pollock's *Male and Female* (1942) and de Kooning's *Woman I* (1950-52), we have something more than an obscure image of an ordinary nude. It is as if both painters had tried to imagine the shape of human beings who have never been exposed to a culture, and whose only bonds are sexual rather than political.

The realists of the 1930's contributed to the demise of realism, but only inadvertently. They had tried to deepen the content of their work and found it necessary to adopt a more abstract form in order to do so. Real-life contingencies and not the sudden rise of Modernism soom made the content of their work unacceptable to many younger painters. Both visual acuity and social content wree screened out of many figure paintings of the 50's, thus precluding very much in the way of realism. Painters who did aspire to be realists could not look back to a continuous tradition but to a pattern in which the very idea of realism was increasingly problematic and as obscure as figure paintings of the 1950's.

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[1]D.H. Fischer, *Historians' Fallacies* (New York, 1970), pp. 74-78.

[2]L. Nochlin, "The Realist Criminal and the Abstract Law I," *Art in America* 61 (September-October 1973), p. 54.

[3]M. Baigell, *The American Scene: American Painting in the 1930's* (New York, 1974), pp. 13-16. In the introduction to *The American Scene* Baigell sketches in the complexities of the period.

Re-Review

Reviewing
The Relativist
Perspective

A Reflection on George Boas

BY ROBERT NEVILLE

George Boas, one of the most distinguished figures in American philosophy of art, died on March 17, 1980, at the age of nearly 89 years. Professor of PHilosophy at Johns Hopkins, for many years he was involved in exhibiting and criticizing modern art, long as a trustee of the Baltimore Museum. He wrote three full length books on philosophy of art: *Primer for Critics* (1938), *Wingless Pegasus: Handbook of Art Criticism* (1950), and *The Heaven of Invention* (1962). As we take note of his death it is germane to ask whether Boas' perspective on art still casts helpful light on an art scene now convulsed with the much trumpeted birth of Post-modernism.

The perspective Boas brought to art is Relativism, roughly the cultural relativism made popular by the philosopher and social scientist Edward Westermarck.[1] Yet Boas' professional life spanned the period from, say, the rise of Cubism through the

91

triumph of Abstract Expressionism down to the final curtains of Minimalism. The art of Boas' lifetime was anything but relativistic and was even conditioned by attempts to reject Relativism. The development of various forms of abstraction aimed essentially at abstracting the work of art from those connections with viewers that would relativise the art. The triumph of Abstract Expressionism was to make even the deepest human emotions into self-contained forms to be appreciated and understood simply on their own terms. Minimalism, as practised most typically by Ad Reinhardt, aimed at the completion of purity and at decontamination from adventitious relations, and it was willing to pay the deadly prices of purity. Was the Relativism of Boas then simply an idea misplaced in time? Was it a comparatively true idea challenging the pretensions of Modernism? Or was it a distortion of art (and perhaps much else) that resulted from the reduction of aesthetic truth to philosophy?

These are important questions for at least two reasons. First, whatever we think when speaking "officially" about art, most of us are relativists of one stripe or another. Therefore, Boas presented at least one version of a basic supposition that guides contemporary life, probably a more sophisticated version than we commonly would supply ourselves. Second, the heart of the contemporary Post-modernist reorientation of art is precisely to reject the flight from Relativism characteristic of Modernism. Whereas Modernist art sought to be understood and prized as much as possible on its own terms, Post-modern art explicitly allows itself to be understood and prized relative to historical allusions, relative to cross-overs from one medium to another, relative to public and private instrumental usefulness, and so forth. Perhaps then Boas' relativist perspective is especially illuminating for the latest "scene changes" in art.

I.

To appreciate Boas' sophisticated Relativism, think of the more common vulgar kind. The Freshman comes to college and meets for the first time a Jew, or a Wasp, or whatever represents the Other of his or her inherited culture; from this meeting with the Human But Different, the conclusion is drawn that there is no truth or true attitude about things but that all truth is just a projection from the cultural standpoint each one brings to experience. Besides, there is no agreement about values across history, which can only be explained by the view that all values are only subjectively projected. The moral of vulgar relativism is that anyone's opinion is as good as anyone else's (until it clashes too coercively with one's own, at which point one is justified in violence for expressing the assertion of one's own relative opinion whose merit consists in its being one's own).

The cure for vulgar relativism is simply the broadening and deepening of experience, meeting more kinds of people and understanding more history. The argument from mere difference to the subjectivity of values founders on the discovery of distinctions between the superficial and the profound. Although different cultures identify, say, knowledge and health according to different markers, there is no known culture that does not value knowledge and health as it understands the terms. Even the appreciation of art, that enterprise most vulnerable to charges of subjectivity, displays far more continuity and unanimity of judgment across time and culture than science. Greatness in art is rather consistently recognized, from Imhotep to Wright, from Praxiteles to Davis Smith, even though writers disagree about how important the specific kind of greatness is at the time and for history. We might ship copies of Plato and drawings by Leonardo off into space as heralds of our civilization, but we would not set the navigational controls according to the theories of Ptolemy. In the long run, valuations are more constant than description and explanation!

Sophisticated Relativism of Boas' sort fully appreciates the difficulties with vulgar relativism and is based upon a different foundation, a thorough-going naturalism of the sort characterizing American philosophy in the first 25 years of this century. "Following Perry and Prall," Boas wrote,

> we shall define a value as the satisfaction of an interest or desire. Anything which satisfies an interest or desire—and one might add "a basic drive"—is good, regardless of what tradition or subsequent criticism may say. Anything which does not satisfy an interest is indifferent; anything which prevents the satisfaction of an interest is bad.[2]

Now it is a long way from a definition of value to a definition of value in art, and Boas carefully made that transition. But the basis of his Relativism is clear from the quotation above: values are relative to the interests they satisfy. That is, one understands the value of something not in any intrinsic character of the thing but in the ways by which it satisfies someone's interest or desire. Sophisticated Relativism is not concerned, at least in the first instance, with whether there is universal agreement about values. Universal agreement would indicate to the sophisticated relativist only that people have much the same interests and desires and much the same intelligence and resources for satisfying them. The essence of the Relativisim is that things take their value relative to the people whose interests and desires they satisfy, and this is an objective, not subjective, affair.

From this theoretical premise about the nature of value, the rest of Boas' perspective on art follows rather easily. In order to understand the value of a work of art one needs to identify the

various people whose interests and desires it might satisfy, the artist, the artist's tradition and "situation," the various kinds and settings of viewers, and so forth. One needs to have a detailed knowledge of history to make accurate correlations of the work and the interests. And one needs to discern and classify the various senses in which a work of art satisfies an interest or desire, how the interests it satisfies are terminal themselves or instrumental to the satisfaction of further interests, and so on. Indeed, what people classify as aesthetic interests depends on their historical and cultural conditions, and there can be no one universal definition of what art consists in.

Perhaps the most important concept in Boas' theory of art is what he called "multivalence," the fact that any work of art has many kinds of values, all at once and for many kinds of people.[3] A work of art may give aesthetic pleasure to a person, be appropriate decoration for that person's home, be a good investment, display the person's good taste, make a political statement, and be a nostalgic reminder of the person's childhood. It does all of these, and doubtless more, in its character as what we would agree is a work of art. More, it could fail to satisfy in any number of these respects and still be valuable in others as art.

The practical consequence of multivalence is a two-fold moral for Boas' practice of art criticism: be pluralistic and be democratic. Pluralism stems from the fact that the critic needs to look to as many different kinds of values or satisfactions of different kinds of interests and desires as possible. And the critic needs to understand the multifariousness of history, noting what things are important interests in each period and why. Democracy stems from the fact that the critic needs to avoid any apriori assumptions about what kinds of values in a work of art are most essential, about what is artistic as opposed to what is adventitious. For although in each situation there surely are dominant values that define and override the rest, the identification of those values is relative to the historical situation. Our own period can appreciate, if somewhat at a distance, the Renaissance interest in religious symbolism. But we do not easily allow ourselves to acknowledge as an artistic interest the display of good taste and the wealth of the patron which was a far more dominant interest in the Renaissance. Indeed, from the standpoint of the Renaissance itself, the actual religious symbolism was somewhat conventional and uninteresting, while the cultivation of individual personality in the symbols and the effective display of the personality of the artists and patrons was perceived to be the more important artistic problem or interest to satisfy.[4] Boas the relativist would insist that the dominance of certain values as definitive of artistic identity or success is itself relative to the situation at hand.

One more observation is in order before we begin to evaluate Boas' position. His Relativism gives great weight to knowledge of history in the understanding and appreciation of art, for artistic character and worth are always relative to historical circumstances. But his theory itself is curiously unhistorical. Like so many thinkers who take their intellectual rise from nature as opposed to history, Boas takes historical relativity to be a contingent shifting of features arising in more basic form from nature. Having desires and interests, finding satisfactions of various sorts, employing intelligence to find a human way between mechanical responses and habitual, routine behavior, all these are universal characteristics whose particular manifestations give history its variety, according to Boas.[5] But what about the historical condition of the theory itself? A Marxist, even a vulgar Marxist, might suggest that Boas' Relativism is simply a manifestation of bourgeoise individualism, and that rooting it in a naturalistic philosophy in an attempt to exempt it from the critical dialectic of history. Of course Boas could preserve himself from this kind of criticism by accepting it as quickly as possible and using his theory as an illustration of itself. But this is a hollow victory because the next historical step may not be all that relativistic.

II.

Before considering the challenge of historical dialectic to relativism, however, what about the opposition between Boas' Relativism and the Modernism of the art of his own period? Donald Kuspit in criticizing the pre-eminent Modernist theorist, Clement Greenberg, quotes this comment of Whitehead:

> An abstraction is nothing else than the omission of part of the truth. The abstraction is well-founded when the conclusions drawn from it are not vitiated by the omitted truth.[6]

Relativism could make a thorough case that Modernism, in emphasizing the self-sufficient in art, is vitiated by more important relativities. Kuspit cites the intentionality in art that makes art "charged beyond its literal effect, 'effective' beyond its material and formal reality. In fact, its material and form are the 'instruments' of its intentions."[7] Unless the concept of intentionality be broadened to signify anything "intended" to satisfy interests or desires, Boas could supplement Kuspit's list many fold. Unlike Michaelangelo's art which was responsive to patrons, or Frederick Church's art which was exhibited popularly for admission fees, abstract expressionist art is to be sold as a commodity. A self-confident modernist artist either succeeds in this commodity system or conceives his or her art to be so revolutionary as not to have its value appreciated according to current standards, which is still to conceive it by reference to sale value.

95

Unlike Gothic art which was intended to wed memory with spiritual aspirations, and unlike Renaissance art which subliminally aimed to create the modern ego by depicting it as mirroring the glories of the cosmos, Abstract Expressionism aimed to fulfill the artistic emotion of the confrontation of subjective spontaneity with an objective yet abstracted medium. The economic and emotional dimensions of modern art are surely important, and they are by no means the only dimensions to contest with the pursuit of artistic worth understandable and valuable strictly within itself. The question is not which dimension is most important. The question is, do those other dimensions vitiate the conclusion that Modernism would like to draw from its abstraction, namely, that art can have (and in its own case does have) a self-contained nature, worth and justification?

And of course the answer is a resounding Yes! The very exclusiveness of the Modernist approach is its Achilles heel. It does not require a demonstration of very important intentional meaning, or economic formation or biographical and emotional aspiration to refute the claims that none of these count. Without ever confronting these claims of Modernism, which seem so stark from the Post-modernist perspective, Boas demonstrated it to be ludicrous on its own terms by the very piling up of detail so characteristic of his analyses of the relative dimensions of art.

Yet this is only half the story (if that) of the confrontation between Modernism and Relativism. How could it conceivably be the case that all the conditions in the relation between a work of art and its viewers are set by the viewers? Is there no original contribution from the side of the art? A flatfooted presentation of Relativism of Boas' naturalistic variety suggests that the interests and desires of individuals determine the conditions that art might meet in order to be satisfying, and a work happens to be art if it meets enough of these conditions. This is like an animal who when depleted of sodium has a sodium appetite that can be satisfied by whatever is sodium. Neither sodium nor art, on this presentation, teaches anything new. But even the most doctrinaire relativist (which Boas was not) would admit that art expands experience, teaches novel perceptions, and so forth. Boas' more sophisticated account explains how the very multivalence of art elicits new interests while addressing old ones. Things prized for their instrumentality, for instance, come to be appreciated for qualities they have in themselves. With modern heating and lighting, says Boas, there is no longer an instrumental need for rugs or windows, yet we have come to prize the qualities of their appearance, their kind of soft warmth and clarity of light.[8] A sophisticated relativist in principle could explain any artistic introduction of novelty into

96

experience by describing the interactions between need and the capacity in the work to satisfy.

But this is not enough, for two reasons. The first has to do with that elusive question, what makes art art? The Relativist would deny that this could be answered in terms of any special qualities of the art object, but only in terms of the interests of the observers. But are there any special artistic interests? No, only those that are labeled such relative to each culture. Now the study of history could describe how labels pertaining to art came to be used; but it could not explain *why* they were so used unless there is some more nearly normative way of identifying their subject matter. Although nutrition and metabolism are normative reference points (among others such as ritual) for identifying the usage of food terms, there is nothing that could perform that function for art on the relativist's view.

Modernism had an answer for this problem, overstated and needlessly limited though it was. Art has to do with formal integrity. Art occurs when the components of a situation are mixed so as to enhance one another, taking on new identities relative to one another and composing a whole greater than the collection of parts in isolation. When art occurs, whatever the other instrumental, moral, historical, nostalgic, or other advantages or disadvantages of combining the components, the achievment of a notable degree of formal integrity has a life and value of its own, perhaps paradigmatic for other combinations. Thus, we speak of the artfulness by which a politician extricates himself from a difficulty, the artfulness of a certain moral solution, even the artfulness by which a plumber achieves an efficient connection. "Works of art" made by artists are artful by virtue of their formal integrity. And works of art are failures, despite valid or novel symbolism, crafty or inventive handling of media, or satisfaction of prior artistic interests, if they fail to achieve a notable degree of formal integrity; we say, "it just doesn't work."[9]

Now Modernism had too restricted a notion of formal integrity, believing that the only forms to be integrated were those contained within the body of the work. But works of art have many associations and inevitable potentials for symbolic reference. They also express the experience of the artist and the artistic tradition, and they address the multivalent interests of hosts of viewers in all the ways Boas described, and more. All of these elements may or may not be important formal elements to be integrated in a work of art, although of course different works treat different formal elements as important. An artist produces a work which, if artful, is so because it gives potential components a formal status as integral to itself in special ways that set it apart from all its other roles. One significant contribution of Modernism has been to isolate and epitomize the con-

cern for formal integrity as an essential feature of art over against the time of Relativism which would resolve art into mere conditions for satisfying interests and desires. Reactive though this may be, it has been a necessary dialectical protest against the centrifugalagainst the centrifugal and ultimately trivializing force of Relativism.

The second reason for the failure of Relativism is that by treating the value in art as an object of interest or desire it neglects an even more crucial experiential location for art, namely the imagination. Imagination is not merely the capacity to fantasize but is a special synthesizing activity whereby mere causal influences, e.g., light, sounds, pressures, are transformed into the stuff of experience. Even the sensuous perceptual elements of experience are formed in such a way as to connect in judgments of appreciation and intention. Experience is intentional through and through. The contribution of imagination is thus to organize the impinging environment with forms that constitute images. Art is one of the major disciplines for guiding imagination, and works of art function, among other places, at those levels of experience that themselves are the conditions for judgment. Art helps manipulate how we engage the environment as a world. In this sense it is far more basic than satisfying interests and desires, since it forms the basic structure of experience that makes interests and desires possible and provides the indicators of satisfaction.

Human imagination is formed in many ways, most of them undisciplined. Art and religion, the basic disciplines of imagination, only scratch the surface, and when they do it is because their function in imagination is lifted out of the imaginative level and objectified in the context of overt judgment. As Plato argued, there is a crucial difference between just any old images and those that justifiably ought to be cultivated. So art (and religion) add their unique kinds of criticism to the mere cultivation of productive imagination. Here there is some truth to the relativist's claim that art is to be judged as satisfying interests, because the artistic interest in cultivating images is still an interest. But it is not an interest, except in the case of artists who choose to make morality one of the formal elements they integrate, on a par with the ordinary experiential interaction between interest and satisfaction typical of the relativist's account.

Modernism has appreciated this sense in which the artistic imagination ties in to the basic human imagination at a level that is prior to and the condition for responsible judgment. In perceiving this as a reason for isolating art from all the concerns of responsibility for other things, Modernism has made a theoretical and strategic mistake. But it marks a truth about something else essential in art, its subterranean formation of imagination; this truth simply does not get registered in the

98

Relativist's perspective in which art is only a condition for satis-
faction of previously imaged interests.

The confrontation between Modernism and Relativism is a
critical drama transcending art and literature into politics, phi-
losophy, and practical approaches to the meaning of life.
Where Relativism says something is to be understood and ap-
preciated in terms of conditional connections with other
things, Modernism says things are to be understood in terms of
their essential qualities relative to which impinging conditions
are trivial or perverse. Relativism is right in its insistence that the
conditions cannot be excluded from what is important in an
artistic response. But Modernism is right to insist that both
formal integrity and artistic imagination as a condition for expe-
rience are essential to art in ways that cannot be reduced to
mere conditions relative to other things. This suggests that a
Post-modernist and Post-relativist perspective would find ways
to conjoin both conditional and essential features in its under-
standing of art.

<div align="center">III.</div>

The reference to a Post-modernist and Post-relativist pers-
pective sets the discission once again in the context of historical
Dialectic. Let us take up the question raised at the end of Sec-
tion I above, whether Boas' Relativism is merely an ideology of
liberal individualism attempting to exempt itself from history by
basing itself in an unhistorical philosophy of nature. There
surely is an historical truth to the association of Relativism with
individualism. Both the pluralism and democracy in Boas' mul-
tivalent Relativism bespeak explicit respect for individual differ-
ences. They urge the identification of particularities, and
faithfulness to the discrete findings, before any attempts to sum
up either a field or an epoch in generalizations giving coherent
meaning. The reason Relativism would view Modernism as
nearly totalitarian in its exclusiveness is Relativism's own atten-
tiveness to individual differences. And individual differences
are perceived as important only with the co-eval peception that
individuals are important. Furthermore, it has been argued that
a naturalistically-based philosophy is to some extent formally
exempt from being regarded an historically relative. This is only
a matter of degree, of course, and the great naturalist philo-
sophers like Dewey and Whitehead took evolution to be the
matrix that makes nature understandable.

But the challenging question is whether naturalistically based
Relativism is itself but a stage in the historical Dialectic, already
on the way to being surpassed when conscious of its own his-
torical position. George Boas was one of the most historically
minded of 20th Century philosophers, long associated with Ar-
thur Lovejoy in projects on the history of ideas and culture. He
of course knew that his Relativism was a 20th Century perspec-

<div align="center">99</div>

tive arising out of the increasing importance of science and the encounter of Western culture with other traditions. How could he have had illusions about his having attained trans-historical truth? In no way. He was acutely conscious of why the scientific approach to nature nust itself be understood as an historically relative development.

But the more basic version of the dialectical question is whether Boas' Relativism had any internal reason to look for its own supercession in the history of ideas. Apart from a general Relativist approach to the history of ideas, probably not. There is little analogy in Boas' perspective to the Hegelian or Marxist claim that each position contains the seeds of a contradiction that will lead it to effect its own supercession. This is because, for Boas, there is nothing essential about history itself, only a host of historical conditions.

Against Boas, Dialectical Historicism can effectively argue that what his Relativism prizes, e.g., individual differences, is itself a function of the historical conditions of Relativists, e.g., the bourgeoise setting of liberal academia. Whereas positions other than Relativism might be able to counter this charge by showing in some way that liberalism with its emphasis on individuals is a justifiable good, Relativism stands refuted in its own view. For it must admit that it is the interests and desires of 20th Century intelligensia, conditioned by the advantages of liberal individualism, that makes so much of Relativism attractive. Ironically, the characteristic view of Dialectical Historicism, that the history of ideas is a function at least in part of an underlying history of social realities is of the essence of sophisticated Relativism. Because of this, Relativism ought to look to the historical causes of its own attractiveness and entertain the need for finding its own outcome in some less relativistic perspective.

But this is a somewhat empty criticism without a concrete candidate for Post-relativism. And there is a powerful argument available to Relativism that would undermine any attempt by Dialectical Historicism to provide such a candidate. The unit of historical understanding in the Hegelian dialectical perspective is the total system. For it is only the stresses on totalization that provide contradictions causing the system to break down or change. Describing an art critic using the dialectical method, Donald Kuspit wrote in an earlier number of this journal:

> The dialectical critic does not naively confront this charisma with its own methods of mediation, but extends the system's power of negation to *reductio ad absurdum* by turning it against the system's claim to absolute power of determination. He makes the cultural system look undignified or unsystematic by creating alternative critical terms which de-totalize rather than totalize, disenchant rather than

enchant—terms which withdraw totality from the work before the system decides the work does not conform to the mythical totality of culture.[10]

But for this to make sense, the dialectical critic must conceive the situation as a system in the first place with at least the claim to totality. Detotalizing would not be significant if there were no real or imagined totality to begin with. And if there is no such totality, then the important remarks of the dialectical critic reduce to the specific negative or (by double negation) positive judgments the observant critic makes as a matter of course. Although the dialectical critic may avoid merely "positive" expressions of aesthetic approbation and make judgments on the basis of understanding historical development, the relativist's perspective would urge exactly the same thing. Furthermore, once the dialectical critic is obliged to give up conceptions of historical totality that prescribe apriori what is historically important, he or she is at one with the Relativist in making piecemeal judgments about what is important in particular works of art, historical or not. Both would appeal to historical context to justify their conclusions.

Neither Boas nor the great dialectical critics, Adorno and Horkheimer, lived to respond to the claims of the French deconstructionists, Foucault and Derrida. These claims are that when we survey what is actually known about things, our knowledge is extremely fragmentary, filled with lacunae, and expressed in incommensurable terms; furthermore, when we give a unity to history by imposing what would be intelligible to a Self, we are merely creative fiction. There simply is no history as such, the deconstructionists claim, only episodes here and there, charts of climatic conditions, birth and morality rates, and so forth.[11] So far is history from being a dialectical totality turning on some inner mechanism such as contradictions in the institutionalized means of production, there is hardly history at all. Only episodes.

We may then wonder whether the episode of Boas' Relativism is over, or soon will be. The answer is Yes, but not because of the reasons brought by the dialectical approach to history. Rather, Relativism is over because it left out something that is essential in art that Modernism, among other traditions, saw, namely, that what is essential to the artistic dimension of things is formal integrity. In addition, Modernism saw that art functions at the level of imagination which provides the conditions for experience of interactions between interest and satisfaction.

How undramatic to be abandoned because of leaving something out! Relativism is not false but partial, inadequate like Modernism because of the truths that vitiate its abstractions. This mode of argument—trancending positions that leave out truths that vitiate their abstractions—is the spring of systematic

thinking. Systematic thinking has not been an explicit norm for reflection in a long time, but it seems to be the presupposed norm that has guided our consideration of Boas' Relativism. Systematic philosophy would make a similar criticism of dialectical thinking, namely, that it must leave out, without intrinsic warrant, those aspects of things that play no significant role in whatever dialectical scheme is supposed to move history. As Boas would say, those dialectically unimportant aspects might be the very key to understanding what makes something artful.

Systematic philosophy cannot sustain itself on criticism, however, showing only how other less systematic positions leave out vitiating factors. For, as Foucault and Derrida would argue, perhaps there is no systematic improvement to be made, no way of having what is left out as well as what is incorporated. Therefore, systematic philosophy must provide positive categories that in fact exhibit integration, categories that justify themselves through examination from all relevant points of view.

But now we must face the important question that in a sense has motivated the entire enterprise of dialectical criticism, namely the criticism of authority. Does not the appeal to a systematic perspective on things, for all its arguments for advancing upon other views, run the risk of imposing itself as an authority? Is it not likely that the very success of a systematic philosophy in supreceding less systematic versions will make its categories authoritive ways of seeing the world? Perhaps only academics believe that intellectual vision is what determines the possibilities for real life, but to the extent they are right, the authority of a philosophical system can become an authority within the world of practice. And do we not already have our fill, within the scene of art alone, of authoritative pronouncements of what is important and worth buying? Kuspit's article cited above is convincing.

The protection against authoritarianism in systematic philosophy is that any system is only an hypothesis, only as plausible as the arguments by which it seeks to supecede other views, and bound to be superceded itself by better systems. As Whitehead would say, virtue in systematic philosophy consists in finding abstractions that are not vitiated by the things they leave out, and yet that are definite enough to provide a coherent way of seeing things together. A systematic approach to art must not lose the truths of any other perspective, but must itself provide insight that advances upon the art as it was understood before the systematic contribution. With these caveats in mind it may be safe to suggest that a more nearly adequate philosophy of art would analyze art in terms of its ways of harmonizing its conditional features of the sort of which Relativism speaks with the essential features so prominent in Modernism.[12]

The greatness of George Boas lay in many things, not all of which had to do with philosophy of art. But as a philosopher of art Boas performed the important function of setting his own time's work in a context it would have itself refused. For this reason, the mainstream of 20th Century art has been far more complete than it would have been if left to its own lights.

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[1]See, for instance, Westermarck's *Ethical Relativity* (Paterson, New Jersey: Littlefield, Adams & Co., 1960).

[2]George Boas, *Wingless Pegasus: A Handbook for Critics* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1950), p. 19.

[3]See ibid., Chapter 3.

[4]See Michael Baxandall's *Painting and Experience in Fifteenth Century Italy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1972), Chapter 1.

[5]See Boas, pp. 1-2 where he defined artistry.

[6]Donald Kuspit, *Clement Greenberg, Art Critic* (Madison, Wisc.: University of Wisconsin Press, 1979), p. 172. The quotation is from Whitehead's *Modes of Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1956), p. 189.

[7]Ibid.

[8]Boas, p. 31

[9]Probably the most articulate expression of this Modernist point comes from literary criticism. William K. Wimsatt and Monroe C. Beardsley write, in their "The Intentional Fallacy,"

> Judging a poem is like judging a pudding or machine. One demands that it work. It is only because an artifact works that we infer the intention of an artificer. "A poem should not mean but be." A poem can *be* only through its *meaning*—since its medium is words—yet it *is*, simply *is*, in the sense that we have no excuse for inquiring what part is intended or meant. Poetry is a feat of style by which a complex of meaning is handled all at once. Poetry succeeds because all or most of what is said or implied is relevant; what is irrelevant has been excluded, like limps from pudding and "bugs" from machinery.

From Chapter 1 of *The Verbal Icon* (Lexington, Ky.: University of Kentucky Press, 1954) and reprinted in *Problems in Aesthetics*, ed. by Morris Weitz (2nd. ed.; New York: MacMillan, 1970), quote from p. 348. Donald Kuspit's citation of intentionality against the Modernism of Clement Greenberg, mentioned above, is to be understood as an attack on the claim that the critical search for intentions is a fallacy.

[10]Donald Kuspit, "The Necessary Dialectical Critic," *Art Criticism* 1/1 (Spring, 1979), p. 28.

[11]See, for instance, Michel Foucault's *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, trans. by A.M. Sheridan Smith (New York: Harper, 1976), Introduction and Chapter 1.

[12]At this point it may not be too presumptuous to refer to my own theory of value and treatment of things as contrasts of essential and conditional features, in, for instance, *The Cosmology of Freedom* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1974).

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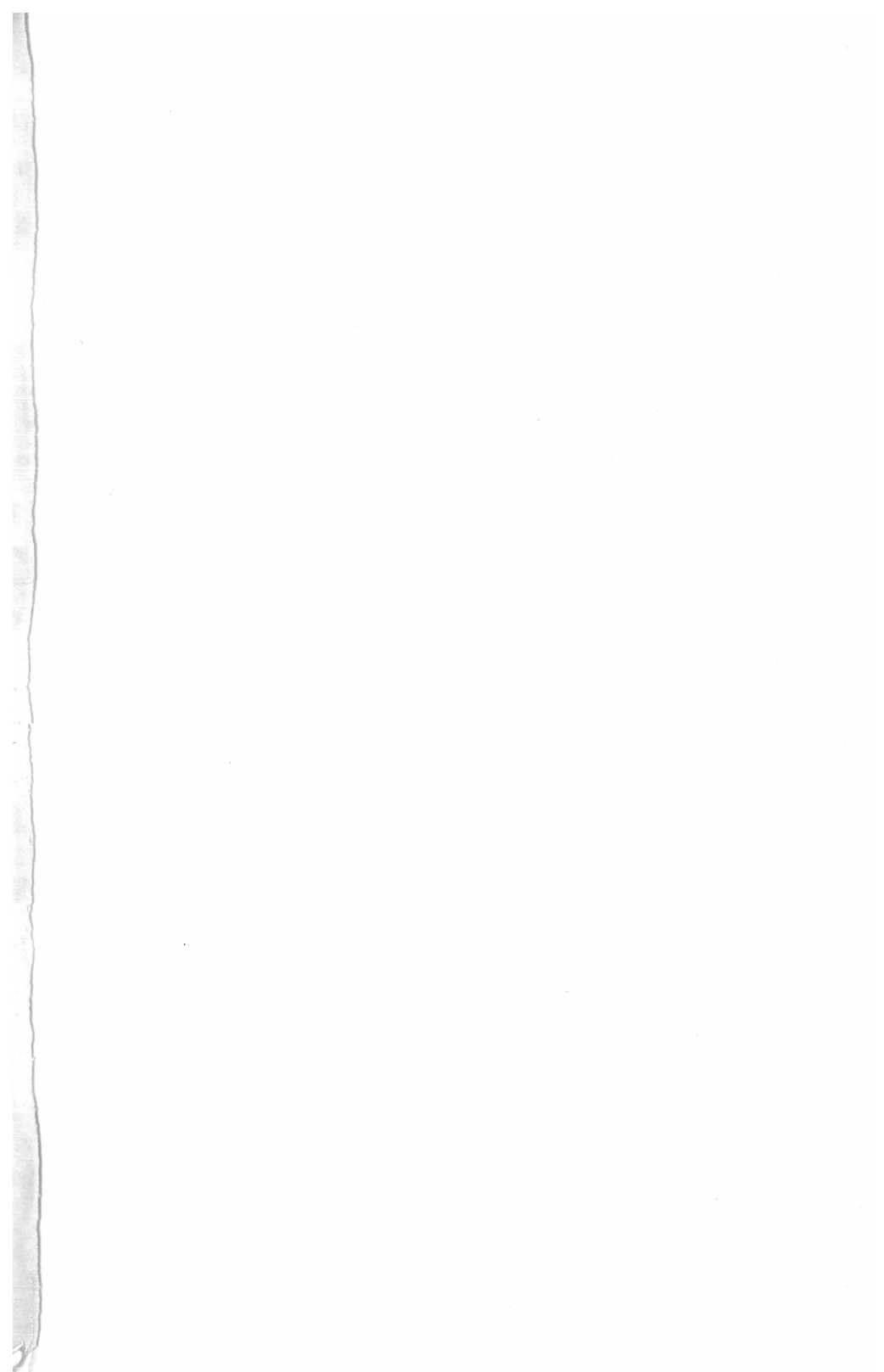
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