

VOL. 9, NO. 1

# Art Criticism



# **Art Criticism**

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

The editor wishes to thank the Stony Brook Foundation, Deputy Provost Bryce Hool and the Dean of Humanities and Fine Arts, Richard A. Kramer for their gracious support.

© 1994 State University of New York at Stony Brook

ISSN: 0195-4148

---

# Table of Contents

Purists and Pluralism Reconsidered: A Look at Criticism of the 1980s.....	1
<i>by Barbara Jaffee</i>	
The Politics of Silence: The Degenerate Art Show Revisited.....	19
<i>by Robert Jensen</i>	
The Art Criticism and Politics of Lucy Lippard.....	32
<i>by Stephanie Cash</i>	
Gendered Values in Clement Greenberg's Criticism.....	41
<i>by Matthew Rohn</i>	
The Earliest Bullfight Images of Pablo Picasso.....	65
<i>by Dina Comisarenco</i>	
Regenerate Art: The Reception of German Expressionism in the United States, 1900-1945.....	72
<i>by Cécile Whiting</i>	
On Malls, Museums, and the Art World: Postmodernism and the Vicissitudes of Consumer Culture.....	93
<i>by Babette Babich</i>	



# Purists and Pluralists Reconsidered: A Look at Criticism of the 1980s

Barbara Jaffee

The spirit of critical scrutiny behind some fifteen years of wide-ranging reconsideration of the momentum and the direction of avant-garde artistic practice coalesced, in the American art world of the 1980s, in the discourse of postmodernism. Although the label, postmodern, has a history going back at least to the 1950s and 1960s, its success in the 1980s was specifically a sign of dissatisfaction, disappointment, and frustration among visual artists with the various aspirations and/or achievements of modernism.<sup>1</sup> A debate over parochial issues of anti-formalism soon evolved into an embrace of highly politicized and philosophically sophisticated systems of explanation, as the "great divide" of American modernism, between high and low, avant-garde and kitsch, came increasingly under question. In what follows I argue that although postmodernity is firmly entrenched in other disciplines (notably in literary critical discourse), among artists, art critics, and curators the distinctive form of the debate, i.e., a conflation of concerns about the continuing viability of the conventions of modernist, abstract painting, with a spectrum of political positions on the continuing relevance of avant-garde activity, has ensured ongoing controversy. What is at stake in this debate, I suggest, is not only the meaning and the affective ability of art in our society (as expression and as revelation), but also the relationship between aesthetic theory and artistic practice.

The practice of art criticism reflects the limits of explanation as well as its aspirations. What one finds in a look at the dialectic of modernism and postmodernism in American art criticism of the 1980s is a clinging to older interpretive paradigms on the one hand, and a railing against an inability to effect action on the other. The sensibility of the first group was formed on the cusp of the so-called "American Century," as the United States, moving out of its economic depression and isolation in the 1930s and 1940s, reassessed its role on the world stage. The generation of critics and curators that came of age in the late 1960s and early 1970s faced a much contracted reality in the 1980s, with the rhetoric of an

earlier age still ringing in their ears. They eyed the promise of an avant-garde project as tinged with disappointment and betrayal, and their criticism became an admixture of iconoclasm and pragmatism; a project of political “realism” rather than aesthetic idealism. In a politically conservative historical moment, the 1980s, one characterized by negative cultural consensus (the death of the avant-garde, the collapse of formalist criticism, the questioning of modernist aesthetics), critics and curators of all persuasions hastened to set forth paradigmatic programs for future artistic practice.

Each position in this rhetorical duel could be associated with a canon created to fit the particular argument, and each was an attempt to create an exclusive story about painting in the 1980s. What fueled this urgent revisionism was, I believe, the suffocating effect of the formalist tradition in art history and criticism, and, more to the point, the equating of that tradition with a definition of modernism. This observation introduces an arena of ambiguity within which many recent discussions of modernism (that is, attempts to clear a discursive space for the formulation of a theory of postmodernism) have operated: the distinction between modernist orthodoxy and the more radical project of the avant-garde. One obstacle to a nuanced understanding of the terms “modernism” and “avant-garde” is that they have been conflated in the United States almost beyond redemption, a conflation embodied in the art critic Clement Greenberg’s famous polemic “Avant-Garde and Kitsch,” published in the journal of progressive social thought, *Partisan Review*, in 1939. Greenberg wrote under the influence of a revolutionary model; his avant-garde was one that would carry the movement forward through the force of its own creativity. Thus formal innovation was, for Greenberg, painting’s *raison d’être*. As his career developed, the political dimension of Greenberg’s project was subsumed by a Kantian faith in the benefits of artistic quality, as he had defined it. When, in 1965, Greenberg reconfigured the attitude of his earlier work into the essay “Modernist Painting” (a defense of his theory of self-reflexivity in modern art), the mapping of the meaning of avant-garde onto modernism was complete in the United States.<sup>2</sup>

In continental discussions of modernism, on the other hand, a more dialectical understanding developed. German cultural theorist Theodor W. Adorno and his colleagues at the Institute for Social Research (the so-called Frankfurt School), believed that the modernism of Arnold Schönberg’s music, for example, might be a dialectical negation of the modernity of the age. Adorno’s dialectic of modernity (that the social promise of technology is subverted by man’s drive to dominate nature and thus enlightened reason inevitably becomes repression), evolved virtually simultaneously with Greenberg’s more one-dimensional positivism.<sup>3</sup>



Adorno's argument for an autonomous art was more complex than Greenberg's. As articulated by Adorno in his posthumously published *Aesthetic Theory*, art is not

social only because it derives its material content from society. Rather, it is social because it stands opposed to society. Now this opposition art can mount only when it has become autonomous. By congealing into an entity unto itself—rather than by obeying existing norms and thus proving itself to be “socially useful”—art criticizes society just by being there. Pure and immanently elaborated art is a tacit critique of the debasement of man by a condition that is moving towards a total-exchange society where everything is for-other. This social deviance of art is the determinate negation of a determinate society.<sup>4</sup>

In other words, autonomous art guarantees an opposition to the regressive tendencies of capitalist mass culture. That, Adorno concluded, was the utopian promise of art. Yet his insistence on “high” art made Adorno, when rediscovered by the New Left in America, an unlikely hero for artists, critics, and curators chafing, by the mid-1970s, under the hegemony of Greenberg's late, authoritarian formalism.<sup>5</sup>

In the work of Walter Benjamin (Adorno's older friend and close colleague whose suicide in September, 1940, made him a martyr to fascism), these younger artists, critics, and curators found a more amenable prescription. In particular, Benjamin's 1936 essay, translated into English in 1968 as “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,” provided a rallying point for them. The essay addressed the potential effects of accelerated possibilities for reproduction (photography, lithography, etc.) on traditional forms of visual expression. Technical reproduction, Benjamin insisted, challenged the unique presence of the original work of art, which had been its guarantee of authenticity and authority:

The authenticity of a thing is the essence of all that is transmissible from its beginning, ranging from its substantive duration to its testimony to the history which it has experienced. Since the historical testimony rests on authenticity, the former, too, is jeopardized by reproduction when substantive duration ceases to matter. And what is really jeopardized when the historical testimony is affected is the authority of the object. One might subsume the eliminated element in the term “aura” and go on to say: that which withers in the age of mechanical reproduction is the aura of the work of art.<sup>6</sup>

The social base of the concept of aura was “the desire of contemporary masses to bring things ‘closer’ spatially and humanly,” he continued, a desire frustrated by mechanical reproduction because, as Benjamin believed, aura inhered in the work of art only as a product of an association with the originality and genius of the artist [MR:223]. Thus “the instant the criterion for authenticity ceases to be applicable to artistic production, the total function of art is reversed. Instead of being based on ritual, it begins to be based on another practice—politics” [MR:224].

The enthusiastic reception of this plea for a political practice based on the forms of mass culture marked the agonized uncoupling of Greenberg’s yoking together of avant-garde and abstraction.<sup>7</sup> This deconstruction of Greenbergian modernism (an activity too often abbreviated as the deconstruction of modernism *per se*), gained momentum and coherence in the 1980s, driven by those convinced that the “post” could be a reactivation of earlier models of “genuinely” critical art.<sup>8</sup> Rosalind Krauss, once a follower of Greenberg’s, found her voice as a critic at a prescient moment and her vehicle, the journal *October*, became something of a lightning rod for this sea change in sensibility.<sup>9</sup> The history of Krauss’ development from moderate modernist to fervent postmodernist encapsulates some of the upheavals of a discipline undergoing a painful loss of legitimating narrative. In the September 1972 issue of *Artforum* magazine (a young, artist-oriented journal that had recently shed its West Coast roots in favor of New York sophistication), Krauss published an essay entitled “A View of Modernism,” a public admission of self-doubt and disillusionment, and a pivotal transition in her career. A repudiation of what she described as “Greenbergian modernism,” Krauss’ gesture was to become a rite of passage shared by many of her activist generation. Hal Foster and Craig Owens, for example, were defining a leftist postmodern agenda as editors at *Art in America* in the early 1980s. Foster’s observations focused on problematizing the state of pluralism that had dominated art and art criticism in the 1970s. The need for a critical art and the desire for radical change dictated Foster’s call for artists “to invent new truths, or, more precisely, to reinvent old truths radically.”<sup>10</sup> Owens’ analyses explored the “misrepresentation” by formalist art critics and historians of the problem of representation. Suggesting that the so-called “return to representation after the long night of modernist abstraction is in many instances a *critique of representation*,” and that criticism “has subsumed this impulse under the dubious banner of a revival of figurative modes of expression,” Owens concluded that “we must therefore look to the group of Continental critics known as the poststructuralists, whose work has also been identified as a critique of representation.”<sup>11</sup>

Why this search for new paradigms? Formalist criticism, the persuasive force of which had long marginalized any discussion of the

meaning and the function of representation, no longer seemed to these young critics to account for the specificity of their aesthetic (or, to use Hal Foster's idiom, "anti-aesthetic") experiences. The issue of representation now emerged as the contested ground of any future consensus on avant-garde practice. For many, the Marxist charge that every act is saturated with political meaning inspired a radical reconsideration of abstraction, and a call for modes of representation more resistant to ideological appropriation by the political right.<sup>12</sup> American art historians and art critics (like Krauss, Foster, and Owens, familiar with the radical negativity of the Frankfurt School),<sup>13</sup> participated in an appropriation of French poststructuralism in which the "discourse of dissent," as Eve Tavor Bannet has described it, survived translation.<sup>14</sup> Poststructuralism and its sophisticated form of ideology critique, deconstruction, have become in America signs of the inevitable estrangement between medium and message.

At the heart of the Frankfurt School's negative dialectic could be discerned an anguished grasping for salvation; the so-called poststructuralists reveal a similar impetus, devoting themselves to exposing the means by which language oppresses. It is no coincidence that a conjunction of these radically negative philosophies occurred in the United States at a moment characterized by a dissatisfaction among the intelligentsia with the excesses of this country's postwar optimism (the mentality which assumed that society was a rational system and endeavored to make it one), a moment not unlike the contexts that produced critical theory in Weimar Germany, and poststructuralism in Gaullist France.<sup>15</sup> If Clement Greenberg's theory of modern art was conceived as an antidote to the pessimism of 1950s humanism,<sup>16</sup> then the postmodernist evisceration of originality, authenticity, and the humanist project can be seen as compensations for these earlier tendencies to subsume difference into seamless unity. Thus, while the postmodernist embrace of the polyvalence of continental philosophy might be a welcome revitalization of earlier models of critical thought, it is one that emerges, not coincidentally, in the vacuum of Greenberg's optimistic universalism.

Whether posed as *visuality* versus *textuality*, the discourse of *author* versus the discourse of *producer*, *universalism* versus *particularism*, the debate over the viability of an avant-garde emerged in the United States at a moment in which an authoritarian rationalism appeared, to partisans of progress, to have exhausted itself. The "pure" abstraction advocated by Greenberg seemed similarly discredited. In 1981, for example, Donald Kuspit analyzed the modernist movement (which he defined as "that point of view which sees art as the mastery of purity"), and concluded that it contained a self-destructive paradox: "institutional non-conformity."<sup>17</sup> The modernist predicament, Kuspit argued, was that its

practitioners hoped to communicate beyond itself and ended by fetishizing “presentness.”

A somewhat less charitable view was expressed by Rosalind Krauss in her essay, “The Originality of the Avant-Garde,” which, in exposing the mythology of the modernist assumption of originality, pronounced the impossibility of any avant-garde. Yet even in this death could be detected a yearning for succession, a yearning articulated in *October* by Stephen Melville. His essay, “Notes on the Reemergence of Allegory, the Forgetting of Modernism, the Necessity of Rhetoric and the Conditions of Publicity in Art and Criticism,” appeared in *October*’s Winter 1981 issue and was received by some as an attempt to reinvigorate the critical lineage of Michael Fried (a critic whose 1967 essay, “Art and Objecthood,” was a restatement of the polemic on the confusion of the arts that had also fascinated Clement Greenberg).<sup>18</sup> Melville focused on the reemergence of allegory in contemporary art as a signal that the modernist dream of being purely present was over: “painting is now to be defined through its discontinuity with itself, its inability to attain a presence that is not also represented and deferred ... there are then ways in which the critical claim to the postmodern appears to find its deepest sense if the postmodern is understood to be itself an allegory of the modern.”<sup>19</sup> Allegory had been a term of denigration in the discourse of modernism, Melville noted, while the present age, because of its problematic relationship to the past, demands indirectness, conventionality, interpretation, criticism.<sup>20</sup>

An exhibition mounted by the Los Angeles County Museum of Art [LACMA] at mid-decade, “The Spiritual in Art, Abstract Painting, 1890-1985,” took on these issues directly. At once provocative and problematic, the show, a spectacularly ambitious revisionist celebration of the museum’s new \$35.3 million Robert O. Anderson Building, opened on November 23, 1986 and continued through March 8, 1987. It traveled next to the Museum of Contemporary Art in Chicago, where it was on view between April 17 and July 19, 1987. The final stop on its tour was the Haags Gemeentemuseum, The Hague, September 22 through November 22, 1987.<sup>21</sup> LACMA curator Maurice Tuchman, musing on the origins of his exhibition, cited a late 1974 conversation he shared with his friend the art critic Barbara Rose in which the two “bemoaned the condition of art and talked about the change in the contemporary art world from around 1960 when we were students at Columbia, when our friends were Frank Stella and company and when abstraction was perceived as a tremendous adventure ... [“The Spiritual in Art” exhibition] comes directly out of a sense about something that had gone off-stream in the mid 70s.”<sup>22</sup> This revealing anecdote pinpoints Tuchman’s motivation, to re-direct the progress of art, and to throw “fuel on the fire of the new generation that ...

wants to freshly write the history of modern art and not accept the conventional inherited wisdom.”<sup>23</sup> Perhaps the most controversial aspect of the exhibition concerned the argument for spiritualism in contemporary art, and, towards that end, its curator’s appropriation of “adamantly materialist post-painterly abstraction” (works conceived under the hegemony of Clement Greenberg’s theory of purity and quality in art), into the spiritualist tradition.<sup>24</sup> The curatorial conceit of the exhibition was most vulnerable at this crucial crossroad, as Sue Taylor observed: “Ultimately, in their desire to revise the history of abstraction, to lay bare its ‘hidden meanings,’ the organizers of ‘The Spiritual in Art’ have suppressed the significant impact formalist theory has had on modern art at least since mid-century ... the exhibition, almost perversely, challenges the already crumbling hegemony of formalism by denying its influence altogether.”<sup>25</sup> On some level then, the “Spiritual in Art” exhibition positioned the LACMA in the ideological debate over modernism and postmodernism by retrospectively reorienting the project of modernism. The result was to preserve an arena for a modernist-type renewal.

One might argue that these critics and curators were simply following the lead of artists, whose splintered and complex activities left no clear trail. To explicate some of the issues at stake for artists, Lilly Wei published a two-installment series of interviews with eight mid-career and eight younger abstract painters in the July and December 1987 issues of *Art in America*.<sup>26</sup> Among the first group one finds a bewildering variety of positions: “I believe the reality is in the paint, the paint in itself becoming meaning,” said Jake Berthot, an artist with a commitment to the phenomenological tradition of abstract painting [TA1:95]. At the same time Berthot’s “real fear is that I will do something no one will understand, that I will become so involved with my own investigation that no one will know what I’m doing” [TA1:95]. Also featured was Ross Bleckner, an even more ambivalent practitioner: “I do not see myself as the guardian of universal values. My painting functions in a way that challenges what I believe in and don’t believe in ... my paintings flirt with belief, both undermining it and establishing it ... In a way, I make them to test my own lack of faith” [TA1:84]. Peter Halley is representative of the postmodern abstractionists: “I liked [Baudrillard’s] idea of taking combinations of preexisting signs and recasting them to make other meanings. It was a key to how I wanted to express myself. In short, my work is not about line and color; it’s about the relationship between abstraction and the technological and socio-economic systems of our times” [TA2:121].

Halley’s remark invites a consideration of the postmodern theorist whose work dominated the discourse of American magazines of advanced art in the mid-1980s: French sociologist Jean Baudrillard. Baudrillard has

characterized postmodernity as the site of implosion, the end of the real, of meaning, of history, of power, of revolution, and even of the social itself. Simulation is the social rule, he says. It precedes reality because “the real is not only what can be reproduced, but that which is always already reproduced, the hyperreal.”<sup>27</sup> Following Baudrillard literally, as did Halley when he wrote, “hyperrealization describes a certain kind of relationship that is formed when one artist looks at another artist’s work and then makes his or her own work ... the second artist hyperrealizes the previous artist’s work” [TA2:120], postmodernist art seems an unlikely tool of political activism. Yet the argument was made in 1981 by Thomas Lawson who, in his essay “Last Exit Painting,” championed artists mining the image-scavenging vein. Asking “What is a radical artist to do in the current situation if he or she wants to avoid instant cooptation or enforced inactivity,” Lawson answered by insisting that “It is painting itself, that last refuge of the mythology of individuality, which can be seized to deconstruct the illusions of the present. For since painting is intimately concerned with illusion, what better vehicle for subversion?”<sup>28</sup>

There is subversion, however, and then there is subversion. In the ontological dilemma posed by recent painting, the example of two abstractionists, Marcia Hafif and Sherrie Levine, hints at these complexities. In 1978 Hafif described the emergence of a revisionist minimalism in painting, emphasizing intuitive, mystical qualities (monochromat, contemplative, quiet): “the work I am talking about is involved with the experience of *being*,” she wrote. Out of this investigation would emerge, Hafif believed, a “reaffirmation of the strength of nonobjective means of artistic expression.”<sup>29</sup> Sherrie Levine, an appropriationist whose deadpan copying of canonical modernist works caused a sensation early in the 1980s, rebelled, in 1987, against a materialist interpretation of her work:

I enjoy painting because of its physicality. The surface becomes a record of the artist’s bodily relationship to the painting. I want them to be experiences as beautiful, sensuous objects. Unfortunately, the rhetoric that developed around my work didn’t make that clear enough. My intention seemed programmatic and bloodless. I regret this misunderstanding and my part in it [TA2:114].

Elsewhere she has explained,

I never thought I wasn’t making art and I never thought of the art I was making as not a commodity. I never thought that what I was doing was in strict opposition to what else was going on—I believed I was distilling things, bringing out what was being repressed. I did collaborate in a radical reading of my

work. And the politics were congenial. But I was tired of no one looking at the work, getting inside the frame. And I was tired of being represented by men.<sup>30</sup>

Levine's was, at face value, a remarkable admission; an expression of precisely the possibility of self-expression that critics had argued her work repudiated once and for all. Levine's conversion underscores an observation made by Patrick Frank that "the supposed erosion of aura concerns the viewer, not the creator. The process of picture-making can still be a vehicle for inner explorations, no matter how often the resulting images are reproduced, and no matter what use they are put to."<sup>31</sup>

Patrick Frank's argument addresses intentionality only, and offers little to critics and artists struggling to establish a new avant-garde. Lamentably, it was the reception of simulation abstraction's critique of the formalist tradition that left them no exit in their search. It is gradually becoming clear that postmodernist art also both offers and withholds possibilities for cultural resistance. The problematic status of art as a commodity, for example, deprives the avant-garde of the 1980s even the illusion of a dialectical relationship with the dominant society.<sup>32</sup> By 1986, Thomas Lawson was ready to admit that "modernism and mass culture are in fact the twin offspring of a capitalism based on the principles of the free market," observing ruefully that "these are difficult times for artists with the ambition of reformulating the cultural identity of society."<sup>33</sup> Hal Foster turned equally pessimistic in 1986. In his "Signs Taken for Wonders," Foster offered a Baudrillardesque analysis of neo-abstract simulationists, noting that "along with the delirium of commodity-signs let loose into our world by serial production, the duplication of events by simulated images is an important form of social control." Foster concluded that the simulation of abstraction offered only "the abstractive [erosive] processes of capital" as latent referent and real subject.<sup>34</sup>

Amid all this pessimism there was precious little room for a reconsideration of representation as a vehicle of personal expression. While some theorists of postmodernism fetishized abstract painting's apparent disassociation from quotidian reality into absolute irrelevance and others condemned the genre as defenseless against appropriation by reactionary agendas, others, like Donald Kuspit or Suzi Gablik, labored to rehabilitate the primacy of the experience of form, believing it necessary to the redemptive spirit of art.<sup>35</sup> Yet ours appears to be a time peculiarly impervious to the affirmative gesture. Only indirection (irony masquerading as allegory or the artfully employed cliché), seems to speak directly. What remains unacknowledged in this consensus is its historically provisional condition. What was most curious in the milieu of the 1980s was not the disappearance of transcendental values, but that a metaphysics of trust simply went undercover in the service of complacent

cynicism, and that efforts as elegant and ambitious as Maurice Tuchman's "The Spiritual in Art" exhibition seemed to come and go with barely a ripple to mark their passing. Tuchman had attempted to rehabilitate a humanistic perspective (at a time when one was ill-served by the rational language of science), by re-investing authorial discourse with a content that was no longer disinterested or politically neutral. His was neither a mere bolstering of the status quo nor an endless deconstruction of it. Instead, his exhibition described a potential for shades of gray within an otherwise black and white field. The discomfort many felt with the "spiritualist" solution posited by Tuchman<sup>36</sup> touches on what is continuous between yet under-examined in this discourse of modernism and postmodernism: the lingering effects of the West's "religion" of rationalism. Just as Greenberg repressed the irrational in his vision of modernism, so do his denouncers repress their own reactionary logic.

Individual sensibility is, after all, the level upon which this partisan debate has been unfolding. A bias toward photography or image-scavenging found among editors of *October*, for example, is the result of privileging art's literal content; an insistence on the cathartic quality of the painterly sign is the result of privileging form. Greenberg made his choice, he felt, in response to an historical imperative when he fused the meanings of modernism and avant-garde into a theory of progressive innovation in painting. As he noted in his 1940 essay, *Towards a Newer Laocoön*, "I find that I have offered no other explanation for the present superiority of abstract art than its historical justification. So what I have written has turned out to be an historical apology for abstract art."<sup>37</sup> This admission followed fast on the heels of his declaration in "Avant-Garde and Kitsch," that "in seeking to go beyond Alexandrianism [a static academicism], a part of Western bourgeois society has produced something unheard of heretofore: avant-garde culture."<sup>38</sup> The unity of these two essays suggests that an avant-garde is necessary to the progress of human society, and that abstract painting represented the most innovative, hence avant-garde, art of its time. Greenberg hoped to preserve a space for avant-garde activity, to protect it from, on the one hand, economic alienation which might tempt it back to academicism, and, on the other, the threat of kitsch, a commodity form of art which offered only vicarious experience and faked sensation. Unfortunately, having decided on which side of history certain modes of representation belonged, Greenberg elected to sever his audience's connection to that history. His once dialectical logic of a modernism based on purity in art became evolutionary logic, by insisting on the repression of the negative term of his pairing: kitsch.

Does this mean that the importance of kitsch in current art production might be understood as a powerful return of the repressed, rather than as



an inevitable historical imperative? This would account for why criticizing Greenbergian notions of purity apparently has discredited abstract painting's transgressive efficacy. However anti-Greenbergism has prohibited a rigorous examination of the problematic of kitsch. Adorno, for one, perceived a flaw in Benjamin's reasoning that mass culture supplied a foundation for a political art: "aura" would increase, not wither, Adorno wrote, precisely because it would become a product of the "culture industry" (the bureaucratic arm of rationalizing society), which would work to reinforce commodity fetishism by reinforcing cultural consensus.<sup>39</sup> The controversial status of art as a commodity forms a constant between the lamentations of critics who, like Foster and Lawson, hoped to maintain an elevated conception of the role of art. Foster longed (in traditionally avant-garde fashion) to expose contradictions. Experiencing the exhaustion of the space of the aesthetic, he turned to post-structuralism and a rapprochement with mass culture as a way out of the "prolonged wailing" of negative dialectics. Unfortunately, post-structuralism is also a product of intellectual disappointment, post-1968 rather than post-World War II, and deconstruction is relentless in its purpose, leaving no myth intact. Contradictions are precisely what cannot exist in its brave new world: political radicalism, as Baudrillard would have it, is but "the nostalgia for a natural referent of the sign."<sup>40</sup> Ultimately poststructuralism repeats the profound disillusionment that Adorno experienced in the shadow of Auschwitz (which destroyed even the possibility of transcendence Adorno held out dialectically through history), and this accounts for its success in the politically conservative atmosphere of the 1980s. Perhaps the guarantee of art's opposition to society, autonomy, resides in the belief that some art (abstraction?) can escape the ideological limitations of explanation, if not, as Adorno thought, the economic limitations of the marketplace.

For theorists of modernism and postmodernism alike to continue to posit transgression (or, at the very least, resistance) in the frenzied economy of the 1980s, required a leap of faith in either the autonomy of art or the autonomy of criticism. I am happy to conclude that such acts of faith were the rule among protagonists who otherwise shared little consensus on aesthetic issues, for it was precisely the idea of progress, manifest in the discourse of modernism and implicit in the discourse of postmodernism, that so many found so difficult to relinquish. Even Baudrillard's so-called "holistic nihilism" need not be a prescription for (in)action, but may be received as an elaborate morality play, a projection of well-intentioned modernization into a nightmarish future of conformity. Clearly, it was against the possibility of complacent negativity that the Los Angeles County Museum of Art mounted its assault in 1986. Admittedly, the effects of their revisionist exhibition were

peripheral. At the same time, its example illustrates a desire to forge an intellectually defensible reconciliation of modernist certainties (abstraction and relevancy, avant-gardism and style), that had come under attack in postmodernist theory.

It has been my intention to contrast such a reconstructive approach with the largely deconstructive maneuvers of many postmodernists, in order to highlight what I would describe as a dialectic of pessimism and hope pervasive in the discourse. Despite the apparent cynicism of so much recent criticism, creative acts are to some degree acts of faith, and as such imply profound belief in the affective ability of art. The difference between modern and postmodern, structuralist and poststructuralist, might devolve, as Margaret Iverson has suggested, to “the attitude [each] takes to the sensuous, visual, non-semantic aspects of art.”<sup>41</sup> Vision is chastised, she writes, and no image is innocent in the trajectory of postmodernism. Those who wish that it were otherwise should remember that a rhetoric is dependent for its persuasiveness on a social contract, the willingness of a particular audience to suspend its disbelief when confronted by an argument. While artists must choose their audiences carefully, an audience need accept no preconditions as to what forms may move them. Critics, meanwhile, need only to believe in the ability of interpretation and explanation to intervene, a pursuit that, as we have seen, is never value-free.

## Notes

- 1 An exact dating of the emergence of the term “postmodern” is problematic in that the struggle to define a theory of postmodernism in the United States has moved across several disciplines. A tendency to conflate attendant discourses of modernism versus postmodernism in the arts, and modernity versus postmodernity in social theory, further complicates attempts at chronology. For an excellent analysis of these distinctions and an epistemological discussion of the term’s pre-history, see Andreas Huyssen, “Mapping the Postmodern,” *After the Great Divide: Modernism, Mass Culture, Postmodernism* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1986), 179-221.
- 2 This confusion carries over into the arena of the postmodern as well. For many, “postmodernism” is simply another name for a new avant-garde.
- 3 *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, written by Adorno with his Frankfurt School colleague Max Horkheimer while the two were refugee intellectuals in America in the early 1940s, is considered a definitive statement of the School’s critical theory. Published finally in 1947, in Amsterdam, the book was not available in English until 1972.
- 4 Theodor Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory* (London, Boston, Melbourne, and Henley: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1984), 321.
- 5 However, the Adornian dialectic returned to American debate in the 1980s, supplying, in the 1984 English translation of the German Peter Bürger’s *Theory of the Avant-Garde* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), the basis of a more strictly Marxist use of the term “avant-garde” than Greenberg’s. According to Bürger, the project of modern art was to mediate between illusion and reality, to promote society’s critical self-awareness. This

role of art was falsely resolved through bourgeois counterrevolution into the autonomous realm of the aesthetic, into late nineteenth century notions of art-for-art's-sake. It was the project of the historical avant-garde (1915-1925 according to Bürger) to reintegrate art and life.

- 6 Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt (New York: Schocken Books, 1969), 221. Subsequent references in this paragraph to Benjamin's oft-quoted essay are identified "MR."
- 7 That Benjamin's encomium to mass culture offered American artists and critics an antidote to Greenbergism can be heard in the following quote, a response to Joshua Dector's recent attempt to measure the impact of Greenberg's polemical writings. The speaker conflates Benjamin's populist program with a nostalgia for traditional avant-gardism: "What we have today," said a young curator, "is an institutionalized avant-garde used as a marketing tool for the masses (and turned into kitsch), and kitsch elevated by an educated elite as a potent, edgy form of expression still capable of the kind of shock value that only vanguard art used to have" (Joshua Dector, "The Greenberg Effect, Comments by Younger Artists, Critics, and Curators," *Arts Magazine* 64 [December 1989]: 62).
- 8 The deconstruction of Clement Greenberg's criticism has a lengthy bibliography. The vagaries of this expanding discourse have been presented in, among other places, Francis Frascina, ed., *Pollock and After: The Critical Debate* (New York: Harper & Row, 1985).
- 9 Krauss became a founding editor of the journal of art, theory, criticism, and politics, *October*, in 1976. The new magazine was to become a forum for postmodern self-definition, abounding with articles that variously deconstructed and reconstructed the history of modernism while positing theories of postmodernism. In the introduction to an anthology of *October* writing (published in celebration of the journal's tenth anniversary in 1986), the co-editors identified the dual reference embodied in the name *October* itself:

we wished to claim that the unfinished, analytic project of constructivism—aborted by the consolidation of the Stalinist bureaucracy, distorted by the recuperation of the Soviet avant-garde into the mainstream of Western idealist aesthetics—was required for a consideration of the aesthetic practices of our own time. We founded *October* as a forum for the presentation and theoretical elaboration of cultural work that continued the unfinished project of the 1960s (Annette Michelson, Rosalind Krauss, Douglas Crimp, Joan Copjec, *October: The First Decade, 1976-1986* [Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1987] ix).

The unfinished project of the 1960s involves, the editors imply, a reconciliation of art and life not accomplished by an earlier, aestheticist avant-garde.

- 10 Hal Foster, "The Problem of Pluralism," *Art in America* 70 (January 1982): 14.
- 11 Craig Owens, "Representation, Appropriation & Power," *Art in America* 70 (May 1982): 9. The European interdisciplinary tradition known as structuralism was based on the anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss's formulaic analyses of the underlying logic of myth and ritual adapted from the structural linguistics of the Swiss Ferdinand Saussure. The so-called "post"-structuralist modifications of Parisian philosophical and intellectual discussion over the last twenty years have contributed to an increasing refusal of the *a priori* truths assumed by Lévi-Strauss, and of the phono-centric bias of Saussure. The poststructuralist critique of representation suggests that there is no stable, empirically verifiable relationship between sign and signifier.
- 12 Recent deconstructions of American abstract expressionism raise this

objection. Essays such as Max Kozloff's "American Painting During the Cold War," *Artforum* 11 (May 1973): 43-54; Eva Cockcroft's "Abstract Expressionism, Weapon of the Cold War," *Artforum* 12 (June 1974): 39-41; and David and Cecile Shapiro's "Abstract Expressionism: The Politics of Apolitical Painting," *Prospects* 3 (1977): 175-214, inaugurated a wholesale attack on the viability of Greenberg's aestheticist avant-garde. This is not a new dilemma for the left. The political roots of the idea of an avant-garde, found in the writings of French social reformer Claude Henri de Rouvroy, Comte de Saint-Simon (1760-1825), suggest that the artist be assigned a privileged position as the creative force that carries a new movement forward, but only through the execution of an already articulated didactic program. The historian Donald Drew Egbert has explained twentieth century contradictions between avant-garde practice in politics and in art as the product of this conflation: the dilemma for the artist, according to Egbert's argument, is whether to forward social ideals through the most accessible of possible styles, or to follow the call of individualized expression (as Clement Greenberg advocated), expecting society to bring up the rear (Donald Drew Egbert, "The Idea of 'Avant-Garde' in Art and Politics," *The American Historical Review* 72 [December 1967]: 339-366). In 1962, Hans Magnus Enzensberger complained that to follow the latter procedure had led only to an "impotent avant-garde ... content ... with obliterating its own products" (Hans Magnus Enzensberger, "The Aporias of the Avant-Garde," *The Consciousness Industry: On Literature, Politics, and the Media*, ed. Michael Roloff [New York: Seabury Press, 1974], 34). Perhaps the Marxist historian Meyer Schapiro expressed this problem most pessimistically when, in his 1936 essay, "The Nature of Abstract Art," he suggested that no truly "avant" garde was possible. Schapiro argued that all art, even abstraction, belonged to the continuum of history, reflecting, not inspiring, the spirit and aspirations of its producers (Meyer Schapiro, "The Nature of Abstract Art," *Modern Art: 19th & 20th Centuries* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1978), 185-211).

13 Martin Jay has noted that

benefiting from the popularity of their former colleague Herbert Marcuse in the 1960s, the Frankfurt School as a whole gained widespread attention in the United States only a few years after its explosive rise to prominence in West Germany. Critical theory seemed the most appropriate form of heterodox Marxism for a society without a large-scale militant working-class movement and with a growing counter-culture distrustful of technological rationality (Martin Jay, "Adorno in America," *Permanent Exiles, Essays on the Intellectual Migration from Germany to America* [New York: Columbia University Press, 1985], 126-127).

14 On the "discourse of dissent" Tavor Bannet writes:

Like many other dissenting French intellectuals after the Liberation, [the poststructuralists] realized that the humanist arts of writing and speaking and 'the republic of professors and advocates' associated with it, were becoming increasingly irrelevant to a society which was rapidly becoming technocratic, technically oriented, and, in their view, 'americanized.' Their endeavor to redefine the place of creative intellectual writing in this, to them, alien symbolic and structural order, and non-traditional function within the society and culture they condemned is one of the factors which led them to view writing and speech in a much broader and more complex intellectual and cultural framework than traditional humanist critics (Eve Tavor Bannet, *Structuralism and the Logic of*

I offer Tavor Bannet's characterization and evidence of its potency when applied to the field of art history, theory, and criticism, in contrast to such assertions as Rainer Nägele's that, "in the United States the reception of French structuralism and poststructuralism was mainly mediated through the literature departments, which incorporated the new theories in an institutional context that traditionally was little concerned with problems of socio-political implications' (Rainer Nägele, "The Scene of the Other: Theodor W. Adorno's Negative Dialectic in the Context of Poststructuralism," *Postmodernism and Politics*, ed. Jonathan Arac [Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986], 92).

- 15 Tavor Bannet argues that "where Lévi-Strauss saw structuralism as a universal and unconscious law of human society and of the human mind, [Roland] Barthes, [Jacques] Lacan, [Michel] Foucault and [Jacques] Derrida saw it as an unwelcome development of modern society." For the French, Tavor Bannet continues,

de-centralization, pluralism and the ability to make one's difference felt in the power structure, were concrete realities only for a brief span of the student uprising of 1968. This is why 1968 marked French thinking so profoundly. Before 1968, and again after 1968, decentralization, pluralism, difference, the freedom not to conform and *autogestion* appear in left-wing writings as purely theoretical and nonreferential—and therefore also fictional and unreal—alternatives to the status quo (Tavor Bannet, 4, 232).

- 16 That is, an antidote to the existential angst that alone secured humanism as an intuitive, self-validating basis for moral and ethical behavior in the 1950s. Erwin Panofsky, for one, testified eloquently that 1950s humanism represented a turning away from the materialist abyss: "It is impossible to conceive of our world in terms of action alone," he wrote in the wake of the second World War (Erwin Panofsky, *Meaning in the Visual Arts* [Woodstock, NY: The Overlook Press, 1974], 23). Successive postwar generations of Western society, Clement Greenberg's among them, have felt compelled by the specter of the Holocaust to emulate the excesses of scientific proof in order to support such intuitions.
- 17 Donald B. Kuspit, "The Unhappy Consciousness of Modernism," *Artforum* 19 (January 1981): 53, 57.
- 18 Greenberg's advocacy of autonomous formal values was an adaptation of the new humanist ideas of turn-of-the-century critic Irving Babbitt, whose 1910 book, *A New Laocöon: An Essay on the Confusion of the Arts* (in which Babbitt insists on the necessity of formal purity), in turn had recast the ideas of the eighteenth century German dramatist, aesthetician, and critic, Gotthold Lessing. Michael Fried revived this polemic in 1967 by denouncing the "theatricality" of minimalist art (Michael Fried, "Art and Objecthood," *Artforum* 5 [Summer 1967]: 12-23). Fried's conception of modernism has cast him since (notably in an exchange with T.J. Clark documented in W.J.T. Mitchell, ed., *The Politics of Interpretation* [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983], 203-248), in the role of defender of traditional modernist values. In an interview that appeared in the Australian journal, *Art & Text*, *October* editor Rosalind Krauss attempted to dismiss the notion that her magazine was aligned with Fried: "We published that whole long elaborate thing by Melville which does make an attempt to recuperate Fried for a poststructuralist experience," Krauss said, "there was a lot of dissension on the editorial board about publishing that and it almost didn't get published. We did not want the magazine to be seen in any way as promoting Fried's work. On the other hand, that piece did analyse the position of *October*, it articulated that and seemed

- relevant to the magazine" (Paul Taylor and Rosalind Krauss, "Interview," *Art & Text* 8 [Summer 1982]: 34). Krauss's protests, however, do little to mitigate the effect of Melville's work, which is less a Foucauldian laying bare of the hidden political agendas within formalism than it is a Derridean blocking of the "hubris" of modernist ontology with the "self-deprecation" of postmodernist indeterminacy.
- 19 Stephen Melville, "Notes on the Reemergence of Allegory, the Forgetting of Modernism, the Necessity of Rhetoric and the Conditions of Publicity in Art and Criticism," *October* 19 (Winter 1981): 81-82.
  - 20 In glossing modernism's own allegorical functions (some of which are suggested in Thomas Crow's revisionist historiography, "Modernism and Mass Culture in the Visual Arts," *Modernism and Modernity*, ed. B. Buchloh, S. Guilbaut. D. Solkin, [Halifax: Press of the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, 1983], 215-264), Melville rehabilitates Michael Fried's promotion of formal purity (cf. n18). That Krauss chose not to challenge the ambiguity lends credence to those, including Craig Owens, who had accused her of following a "logical" rather than strictly ideological method. Owens, a former student of Krauss's, acknowledged the allegorical dimension of modernist art when, in a pointed rebuttal of Greenbergian theory, he wrote that "in practice, modernism and allegory are *not* antithetical, it is in theory alone that the allegorical impulse has been repressed" (Craig Owens, "The Allegorical Impulse: Toward a Theory of Postmodernism," *October* 12 [Spring 1980]: 79).
  - 21 Other exhibitions that attempted to define the meaning of abstraction in the 1980s included "Abstraction/Abstraction" at Carnegie/Mellon University Art Gallery, "Endgame: Reference and Simulation in Recent Painting and Sculpture" at Boston's Institute of Contemporary Art, "Vital Signs: Organic Abstraction" at the Whitney, and "The Image of Abstraction," followed by "A Forest of Signs: Art in the Crisis of Representation," at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Los Angeles. These focused largely on the reductive emptiness and paralyzing indecision found amongst artists cut adrift from foundational myth. The last exhibition, for example, attempted to replay the 1980s as the decade came to a close, focusing on an undercurrent of profound disaffection among its thirty artists: "this is an age in which the media are always dissembling," reviewer Hunter Drohojowska observed, "These artists admit that they are lost in society's trough between role and reality, a landscape of denial where neither the answers of history nor the expediences of the present seem to suffice. They need more than signs to find their way out of this forest" (Hunter Drohojowska, "The '80s Stop Making Sense," *ARTnews* 88 [October 1989]: 151).
  - 22 Charles Jencks and Maurice Tuchman, "The Spiritual in Art: Abstract Painting [Charles Jenks interviews Maurice Tuchman]," *Art & Design* 3 (May/June 1987): 17. The conversation evidently spawned more than one exhibition. In 1979, Rose assembled a collection of new abstractionists she called "American Painting: The Eighties."
  - 23 Jencks and Tuchman, 24.
  - 24 Sue Taylor, "On the Spiritual in Abstract Art, A Revisionist Return," *New Art Examiner* 15 (September 1987): 26.
  - 25 Taylor, 26.
  - 26 Lilly Wei, "Talking Abstract," *Art in America* 75 (July 1987): 80-97 and *Art in America* 75 (December 1987): 112-129, 171. Subsequent references are identified as "TA1" and "TA2."
  - 27 Jean Baudrillard, *Simulations* (New York: Semiotex(e), 1983), 146.
  - 28 Thomas Lawson, "Last Exit: Painting," *Artforum* 20 (October 1981): 46. Lawson's defense of the propriety of painting as a vehicle for deconstruction contributed to a growing leftist debate over painting versus photography as the quintessential mode of postmodern anti-modernism. Douglas Crimp, an *October* editor and curator of "Pictures," the 1977 exhibition that launched an opening salvo in this debate, had argued earlier that the activity of

- postmodernism was inherently photographic, because only photography could effect an extraordinary presence through the suggestion of absence. Postmodern photography, Crimp argued, must labor to subvert Benjaminian aura by "showing that it too is now only an aspect of the copy, not the original ... showing photography to be always a representation, always-already-seen" (Douglas Crimp, "The Photographic Activity of Postmodernism," *October* 15 [Winter 1980]: 98. Lawson countered that photography was too straightforwardly declarative, too easily recognized, to be subversive.
- 29 Marcia Hafif, "Beginning Again," *Artforum* 17 (September 1978): 34-40.
- 30 Sherrie Levine, quoted by Abigail Solomon Godeau in "Living with Contradictions: Critical Practices in the Age of Supply-Side Aesthetics," *Screen* 28 (Summer 1987): 10.
- 31 Patrick Frank, "Recasting Benjamin's Aura," *New Art Examiner* 16 (March 1989): 31.
- 32 Richard Bolton has pointed out that the artists most avidly collected and promoted in the 1980s were often those whose postmodern works were most critical of the marketplace. According to Bolton, the transformation of the arts into an ideal commodity was systematically institutionalized in the 1980s, as the arts were "rob[bed] ... of their role as a space of dissent, as a possible site of uncommodified experience ... presented [instead] by advertisers as a form of withdrawal ... [because] the mythology of artists withdrawal creates an illusion of nonconformity that ... sells the product." Because the illusion of nonconformity had been ill-served by the discourse of pluralism in the 1970s, (the notion that "anything goes" does not offer the same vicarious compensations as transgressive avant-gardism), the emergence of the rubric "postmodernism" in the 1980s, for better or for worse then, attended to the demands of the market. Critical artists, Bolton argued, are less subtle and flexible than the system they ostensibly critique. It is capitalism "that proves to be the master at appropriation and interruption, stealing back from these artists all that they have stolen" (Richard Bolton, "Enlightened Self-Interest: The Avant-Garde in the '80s," *Afterimage* 16 [February 1989]: 15, 17).
- 33 Thomas Lawson, "Toward Another Laocoön, or, The Snake Pit," *Artforum* 24 (March 1986): 98, 106.
- 34 Hal Foster, "Signs Taken for Wonder," *Art in America* 74 (June 1986): 91, 139.
- 35 Suzi Gablik has posited two postmodernisms, one deconstructive and one reconstructive (*The Reenchantment of Art* [New York: Thames and Hudson, 1991]). The former is destructive in its sadness, seduction, and nihilism; the latter re-enchants the world by reuniting mind and spirit. Donald Kuspit, a champion of neo-expressionism, closed the decade arguing that the sublime enigma of modern abstraction was necessary still as catharsis. Abstract art, he wrote, "seems to spontaneously locate us in the preconscious order of effects .... It is a highly ambivalent sensation, at once all too chaotic and exalted for Enlightenment reason" (Donald B. Kuspit, "The Will to Unintelligibility in Modern Art, Abstraction Reconsidered," *New Art Examiner* 16 [May 1989]: 28).
- 36 The exhibition did inspire response, though not in the terms Tuchman envisioned. In Chicago, local gallery owner Hudson and artist/curator Kevin Maginnis together mounted a counter-exhibition of work by twenty-two Chicago artists, ("The Non-Spiritual in Art: Abstract Painting 1985-???"), in an unoccupied gallery space in the city's River North gallery district. The curators argued that they were raising "the issue of materialism as a legitimate source of inspiration in abstract art in Chicago," in order to counter the "great ambition" of Tuchman's show, i.e., "to replace the old paradigm with a new paradigm: to replace Greenbergality with Tuchmanality. They might be able to get away with that in L.A. but *not* in Chicago" (Kevin Maginnis, "Kevin Maginnis Responds," *New Art Examiner* 16 [October 1987]: 6).
- 37 Clement Greenberg, "Towards a Newer Laocoön," *Partisan Review* 7 (July/August 1940): 310.

- 38 Clement Greenberg, "Avant-Garde and Kitsch," *Partisan Review* 6 (Fall 1939): 35.
- 39 At least some of the motivation behind *Dialectic of Enlightenment* was, in fact, to refute Benjamin's thesis: to suggest that the aura of Hollywood glamour, for example, was even greater than that of the old masters.
- 40 In David Carrier, "Baudrillard as Philosopher, or, The End of Abstract Painting," *Arts Magazine* 63 (September 1988): 58.
- 41 Margaret Iverson, "The Positions of Postmodernism," *The Oxford Art Journal* 12 (Spring 1989): 32.



# The Politics of Silence: The Degenerate Art Show Revisited

Robert Jensen

In 1912 the Paris correspondent for the German art magazine *Kunst und Künstler*, Otto Grautoff, wondered at the seemingly inexhaustible capacity of German audiences to patronize an art that even the French art public was unwilling to buy.

Today the cubist movement can no longer be overlooked. A hundred such pictures hang with Kahnweiler and Uhde in Paris. German and Russian collectors buy paintings by Braque, Picasso, Delaunay (sic), Gleize (sic) for considerable sums. Poiret invites Delaunay to an exhibition. Gleize and Metzinger prepare an extensive propaganda piece. *Les Marches du Sud-Ouest* wants to edit an album with reproductions and critiques from contemporaries. In Munich Kandinsky has published an apologetic on Cubism. Piper wants to create a magazine for this manifestation of the times. It is remarkable that Munich now immediately reacts—as it has always done in the past—to a new idea in painting. Or is it remarkable? This art is perhaps simply and solely created for a country whose spiritual life moves between metaphysical salvation and angst and flight from metaphysics, whose untranslatable and most beautiful word is *Sehnsucht* (longing). However, it appears to me that this art will remain alien to people whose strong precepts are *clarté, la mesure and le tacté*.<sup>1</sup>

Twenty-five years later Adolf Hitler opened an exhibition of “true German art” in Munich with a blanket condemnation of international modernism.

Art can in no way be a fashion. As little as the character and the blood of our people will change, so much will art have to lose its mortal character and replace it with worthy images expressing the life-course of our people in the steadily unfolding growth of its creations. Cubism, Dadaism, Futurism, Impressionism, etc., have nothing to do with the German people. For these concepts are neither old nor modern, but are only the artifactual stammerings of men to whom God has

denied the grace of a truly artistic talent, and in its place has awarded them the gift of jabbering or deception. I will therefore confess now, in this very hour, that I have come to the final inalterable decision to clean house, just as I have done in the domain of political confusion, and from now on rid the German art life of its phrase-mongering.<sup>2</sup>

Every student of German art of the first half of this century is familiar with the intense dualism in the German reception of modernity, the simultaneous resistance to and attraction of modernist art, and its tragic trajectory within German history. If German artists, critics, and museum men were responsible for the most ambitious exhibition of international modernist art before 1914—the 1912 Sonderbund exhibition in Cologne—twenty-five years later the same nation produced the most concerted campaign to denounce and to destroy that art.

The Nazi cultural project was simultaneously propaganda for a new (old) aesthetic personality for the Third Reich and an aesthetic and institutional pogrom against all its perceived enemies within the field of culture. Hitler used anti-modernist polemics in the same manner as his racist arguments to denounce and then to exterminate political enemies, to galvanize popular support, and to legitimize state policies of imperial expansion and genocide. In the field of art, its most famous, and infamous, manifestation was the *Entartete Kunstausstellung*, the Degenerate Art Show. Staged in Munich in 1937, the Degenerate art exhibition was, in essence, the attempt to reverse not only the aesthetic project of modernism, but also the commercial, critical, and museological underpinnings of modernism that Grautoff saw already so manifest in 1912. The recent American reconstruction of this exhibition, organized by the curators at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art with the support of German scholars, “*Entarte Kunst: The Fate of the Avant-Garde in Nazi Germany*” (hereafter “*Entarte Kunst*”) was widely received as an important and immediately relevant reminder of what may happen when political power is used to curtail freedom and expression. The curators recreated a unique moment in twentieth century art history when a comprehensive, politically motivated campaign was undertaken to cancel out modernism, to “purge” German “culture” of modern art by eradicating its presence from its museums, by removing modernist artists from positions of institutional authority, and by the systematic prosecution of modernism’s institutional supporters particularly within the publishing industry and the museum establishment. The centrality of the Degenerate Art exhibition within this campaign is justification enough for its restaging. But the greater tragedy of the Holocaust gives such an exhibition an almost unbearable poignancy.

Nonetheless, “*Entarte Kunst*” exemplifies the inability of museums,

especially in the United States, to rise to the historical and curatorial obligations posed by such projects. Billed as a ground-breaking exercise in the historical contextualization of the art they displayed, the curators offered a detailed reconstruction of the exhibition itself, accompanied by a wide array of supporting material, from the newspaper reviews, catalogues, books, etc., that “promoted” the exhibition, to the “literature” that laid out the idea of “degeneracy,” the racial and cultural stereotypes that the Nazis used to feed their propaganda machine. The exhibition also explored the National Socialist interventions in the worlds of music, literature, and to a small degree, film, in a multi-media presentation. Yet “*Entarte Kunst*,” unfortunately, was premised on and merely rehearsed the long familiar arguments advanced by the proponents of modernism that divides the art world between the “good” forces on behalf of modern art (usually only vaguely defined) and the “bad,” and in this case, the evil character of modernism’s opponents. Thus, the most remarkable feature of the “*Entarte Kunst*” exhibition in regard to the American audience for whom it was intended was the absolute censorship of the Nazis. No translations were offered in the exhibition itself of the various texts, addresses, etc., that were placed on rarified display in the museum’s vitrines. The only voices were those of the victims, and while this made for moving, compelling stuff, one left the exhibition having gained no more understanding of the forces that generated this purge, or even a richer understanding of its horror.

In fact, the silence of the oppressors as spokesmen for their own cause may well have left precisely the wrong impression with the beholder than the curators intended. While it is true that denying a voice to the Nazis may conveniently perpetuate the victimology of the modernist artist-hero, in the absence of their hateful discourse, the beholder might be led indirectly to judge on one’s own the “degenerate” works. It is not at all clear that they can face that test as unscathed as the curators seemed to imagine, because the paintings and sculptures themselves open the possibility that if there was not a political right for the annihilation of this art, there exists other grounds, defined by quality, gender, intrinsic political and social motives (e.g., nationalism, claims and counterclaims of degeneracy versus “normal” art), etc., that deserve serious criticism. This exhibition suggested even the possibility that there exists more than a chance continuity between the artists and their prosecutors, a shared sense of brutality, of ugliness, and of the will to violate the integrity of the human body and spirit. It is worth asking whether this art may well mirror the same stresses, the psychological indulgences, and the habits of myth-making which also produced totalitarianism. In short, the complex political, cultural and aesthetic relationships between modernism and its opposition were never seriously examined, just as the beholder was never

allowed to see the historical reality of German expressionism as a cultural program in its entirety, warts and all.

Although the catalogue did not evidence the same degree of censorship as the exhibition itself—which has produced this troubling image of the Nazi oppressors as a voiceless horror and evil—like the exhibition, the catalogue still largely refused to consider the nature of the Nazi opposition to modernism, its implications for not only fascist cultural policies (and the many inconsistencies therein), but also for what it may tell us about the social and political ramifications of modernism in Germany in the first half of this century. For example, in the catalogue Stephanie Barron observed that

Since every work of art included in “*Entartete Kunst*” had been taken from a public collection, the event was meant not only to denigrate the artists but also to condemn the actions of the institutions, directors, curators, and dealers involved with the acquisition of modern art.<sup>3</sup>

The Degenerate Art exhibition mocked the panegyric discourses of modernism advanced by its leading German supporters and it criticized the institutional patronage of modernist art by German museums by labeling most of the works of art on display with the prices the museums had paid for them. Neither Barron nor any of the other authors who contributed to the reconstruction catalogue chose to examine the implications of this institutional critique. By reflecting modernism back through the lens of its most virulent (and powerful) opponents, the Degenerate Art show exposed much of the inherent historicism of modernism, but more particularly of expressionism in Germany, its self-fashioning as the only authentic art of its time, its unself-conscious bifurcation of money and art, its use of a romantic martyrology as a market value, and other such constituent elements of modernist discourse.

The prices blazoned on the walls of the Degenerate Art show was the ironic, but inevitable reversion of a primary element in the commercial discourses of modernism. For almost a century the price made by a work of modernist art was used as evidence for and vindication of the value of that work vis-à-vis a hostile or uncomprehending general public. As Émile Zola wrote of Édouard Manet’s paintings in 1866: “In fifty years they will sell for fifteen or twenty times more than now and certain other pictures now valued at forty thousand francs will not be worth fifty.”<sup>4</sup> The genius of the future was condemned to be ignored in his own time. Zola, of course, was right about Manet’s pictures, but for those appalled by the artist’s naturalism, by his strange and disturbing style, the market value was a kind of taunt, what used to be called “*épater le bourgeois*,” or, in the characteristic Germanization of all trappings of French modernism in the

years before the First World War, what Grautoff translated as “Epatismus.”<sup>5</sup>

For a century the myth of the neglected artist served as a promotional tool and as an article of faith. On one of the walls of the Degenerate Art show, the organizers reprinted under the commentary “In praise of nonsense” a statement of the director of the Stadtmuseum in Dresden, Paul F. Schmidt:

For the sake of a suffering creation these great souls embrace all suffering, and they do so with the joyous conviction of the martyr. This is a truly heroic generation, and its willpower verges on the sublime, for to the outside, who knows no better, it seems like eccentricity and madness and a vile assault upon the sanctity of tradition.<sup>6</sup>

The expressionist language of Schmidt’s apologetic echoes the claims made by and for the artists about whom he wrote.

Modernist artists and their defenders worked and wrote as if their production were not intended for anyone (save perhaps for the Museum), that they were free-floating expressions of historical necessity. The vacuum of this non-audience was to be filled by the *amateur*, the connoisseur, whose learning and sensitivity would alone permit the genius’ apprehension. Neglect and transcendental apprehension would form the dual qualities of desire and negation, of having what others cannot have because they do not see. In this market trope seeing becomes a form of possession, not of the physical wealth that had accrued to the object, but of the cultural prestige, the class identity for those who could see in such paintings and sculptures what others could not.

We should not be surprised if this formula unleashed its reverse, expressed in many forms, in resistance to modernity, in the naming of conspiracies (particularly those reputedly managed by dealers), in the denial of authenticity to modernist art, and to the sanity of the modernist artist. The language of this dialectical discourse seen from the vantage of the institutional modernists is intellectual vs. bourgeois, connoisseur vs. philistine, young vs. old, city vs. country, etc. From the vantage of the conservative opposition, it was nationalism vs. internationalism, healthy vs. degenerate art, tradition vs. fashion, masculine vs. feminine aesthetics. The Nazis, in a characteristic reversal of these stereotypical oppositions, inverted the modernist equation that great suffering leads to great art by resorting to a populist discourse on insanity and artistic deformation, and concluded that the suffering artist is merely a psychotic, who is only capable of making “crazy” pictures. Hitler chillingly formulated an explanation of modernist style that rested either on psycho-physical genetic deformations or on dealer-museum conspiracies:

Either these so-called “artists” really see things this way and therefore believe in what they depict; then we would have to examine their eyesight-deformation to see if it is the product of a mechanical failure or of inheritance. In the first case, these unfortunates can only be pitied; in the second case, they would be the object of great interest to the Ministry of Interior of the Reich which would then have to take up the question of whether further inheritance of such gruesome malfunctioning of the eyes cannot at least be checked. If, on the other hand, they themselves do not believe in the reality of such impressions but try to harass the nation with this humbug for other reasons, then such an attempt falls within the jurisdiction of the penal law.<sup>7</sup>

If modernism depended upon art criticism to justify what might not be manifestly evident in the pictures, then criticism would be outlawed—as it was by Goebbels in 1936. If modernism had succeeded in winning over the German museum community then it must be systematically eradicated. 1937 marked the beginning of the purge of modernist art dating after 1910 from German collections.

Despite the dramatic counterpoint of Nazi ideology to institutional modernism, there exists this compelling, unifying continuity between the two parties: that they are joined in a struggle for supremacy over historical interpretation, over what we would now call a usable past. In the Nazi case (but only because they resorted to physical violence) it was a contest where the gloves had finally come off. But the terms cannot be reduced simply to nationalism versus internationalism, German versus French. For both parties the contest was defined by external cultural standards. If Hitler viewed the German nation as being “harassed” by external powers, his counter text was that, as Nietzsche observed as early as 1874, German intellectuals and literati felt a deep-seated and long standing cultural inferiority vis-à-vis the French. Nietzsche knew, of course, that this cultural ambivalence was to be found in Herder and Goethe. And if we are prepared to replace France with Italy, the essentialist question of what is *echt Deutsch* extends back at least to Dürer. And indeed, in choosing between Italy and France one discovers the fundamental terms of the remarkably German argument that there existed two competing recensions of how Germans should understand themselves as a culture, one turned toward Italy (and Greece seen through Italian art), the other toward France.

This alienated, pessimistic nationalism is the locus of Nietzsche’s early critique of German identity (the young philologist had just embarked on his career as *Kulturkritiker*). Nietzsche reminded his German readers that the recently completed Franco-Prussian war, although a victory for the Prussian military, was not a cultural victory.

“Our culture played no part even in our success in arms. French culture continues to exist as heretofore, and we are dependent upon it as heretofore.”<sup>8</sup> But it is also present in men like Adolf von Hildebrand, the sculptor and theorist, who in 1893 called for a return to the discipline of Italian (and Greek) principles in composition and a limited spatial field, an idealization of classicism.<sup>9</sup> And for a moment, Germans claimed to have found themselves in *Neo-Idealismus*, and its new painters and sculptors: artists like Arnold Böcklin and Max Klinger, the Raphael and Michelangelo, of the *fin de siècle*. But they were washed away in the current of Nietzsche’s cultural pessimism—understood in nationalist terms—which would nourish on the part of so many *fin de siècle* artists, writers, and officials within the German cultural establishment both the fascination for and resentment against all things French. That inferiority shows up once again on the walls of the Degenerate Art exhibition, in the form of a text taken from the German critic, art historian, and occasional dealer, Julius Meier-Graefe’s 1905 polemic, *Der Fall Böcklin* (which effectively destroyed the artist’s reputation):

All of them—Böcklin, Klinger, Thoma, and the rest, with their cheap, barbaric “anthropomorphism”—succeed only in proving that Böcklin’s case is Germany’s case. What these men lack is culture, and so does Germany.<sup>10</sup>

For over thirty years Meier-Graefe had been Germany’s most passionate spokesman for French Impressionism and Post-Impressionism. Hated by the Right, Meier-Graefe embodied for the National Socialists what was wrong in Germany: its self-hatred, its need for an imported culture, and its “Jewishness”—the claims for modernism being a Franco-Jewish import, mediated by Jewish critics, museum directors, and especially art dealers and publishers, goes back to before the beginning of the century. If Meier-Graefe was an extreme representative of this alien culture, his views were shared, if not to the same degree, by a remarkably large percentage of the German intellectual-cultural elite.

Their identification with the products of French modernism is all the more fascinating because of the rapidity of this development. Before 1890 most German cultural leaders had only the most stereotypical understanding of concepts like “plein air.” “Impressionism” meant Albert Besnard more likely than Claude Monet. Yet by 1900, Monet was being hailed as one of the most important artists of the nineteenth century. And by 1905, a new generation of German art audiences held Impressionism to be bankrupt, planting the seeds of a “Post-Impressionist” art which emerged in Germany under the label, in a characteristic embrace of French terminology, *Expressionismus*. This sudden revolution in German art was carried out from above, from the highest strata of Germany’s

cultural establishment. The chief German collectors of modernist French art were major industrialists, bankers, and politicians. The German museums played a significant role in encouraging the taste for this art, buying significant examples of French modernist art even in the face of vocal domestic opposition. German art dealers proved to be among the most aggressive in Europe, not only in importing French art, but acting as conduits between Paris and other European countries. The flow of pictures between Paris and Moscow or Vienna or Amsterdam or Basel often had Berlin as its way station. Indeed, in 1912 Berlin was probably the most internationally-minded art center in Europe, regularly exhibiting at both commercial and public institutions art from Russia, eastern Europe, Scandinavia, Switzerland, Britain, Italy and Spain. But perhaps most significantly, Germany lent its considerable academic machine and the recently invented (and largely German) tools of art historiography to the creation of modernist histories of art, which lifted modernism above the polemic into a manifestation of historical necessity.

This will to historicize, which was in effect to ideologically encode the past in order to claim contemporary art for the future, is endemic to the rise of modernism; but in Germany it served first to decouple modernity from French culture and then to claim a reaction to this same modernity as a quintessential German experience. In the years before 1910 German critics, historians, artists and members of the museum community acted to make out of the nationalist fabric of French modernism a pan-European, indeed, a Western *Zeitgeist*. Although they willingly acknowledged the French role in the creation of modern art—indeed insisted upon it over the objections of their conservative critics—they were also responsible for universalizing *modernité*, transforming it from a specific, fundamentally French, aesthetic phenomenon into a far-reaching cultural and social manifestation of modern, urban, industrial life. Having declared modernity, manifested in Impressionism, a fundamental virtue of modern society, the German intelligentsia set about institutionalizing it with remarkable industry.

Although initially it was a younger generation of critics and art historians and museum men who supported the revolt against Impressionism, what was avant-garde in 1912 was all but state policy by the early years of the Weimar Republic. The depth of the German commitment to the rhetoric and the products of Expressionism was surely motivated by the view that this version of modernity, at last, was held no longer to belong to France, but to be fundamentally German in character. In 1913, the *Brücke* painter Ernst Ludwig Kirchner made the insupportable claim to be completely uninfluenced by French modernism. Paul Fechter, a Dresden critic and museum official, asserted in his 1914 panegyric, *Der Expressionismus*, that Expressionism was the product of a



Germanic spiritual disposition, an inner necessity, that arises from

the old gothic soul, which despite the renaissance and naturalism still continued to live, which broke through everywhere during the German baroque, which some believe can still be discovered in the rococo, and which, despite all the devastation of rationalism and materialism, again and again raises its head.<sup>11</sup>

If this art was perceived not to be French it was equally held not to be Italian.

The Degenerate Art show therefore must be understood not only as a systematic attempt to overthrow especially these Germanicized histories of modern art as they had been constructed in the prior two generations. It was also a return to the other figure of alienated nationalism. In the place of French modernism the Third Reich offered an uninterrupted march of an “authentic,” “healthy,” “German” tradition, an art and a culture bound to classicism and to the claims of empire. It had its own heroes, an alternative canon of great German artists that would restore a continuous, non-modernist tradition from Dürer to National Socialism. But this canon was based paradoxically on the international academic tradition and the photographically-oriented realism that had dominated international Salon painting in the last three decades of the nineteenth century. The most famous demonstration of this politically imposed revisionism was the second great exhibition in Munich in 1937, held under the corrective title of the *Große Deutsche Kunstausstellung* (the Great German Art Exhibition), a display of contemporary German art that was dominated either by idealist posturing or academic realism. Moreover, under the National Socialists German art historians attempted to offer not only an alternative history of German art that bypassed the prior forty years and effectively returned the course of German art to where it had been circa 1890, but mined the early history of German art looking for what might be called cultural essentials. Yet this history was more than the invention of the Nazis. During the closing years of the Wilhelmine empire and the Weimar Republic, it had simply been forced to take a backseat to the dominant discourses and institutions of modernism, particularly to the cultural triumph of Expressionism (which was above all the target of the Degenerate Art exhibition).

Of course, both the modernist histories and the Nazi history were mythic. In the same fashion, the Nazi version of German art was no more seamless and possessed no fewer internal contradictions than the modernist art, institutions, and discourses it sought to replace. While the National Socialist propaganda machine aspired to eradicate modernism as a totality on the absurd grounds of “cultural bolshevism” and “Jewish”

influences, the ambiguities, the paradoxes, of its program abound. The Nazis could not disguise from posterity, even if they perhaps could from themselves, that they had absorbed many lessons from modernist art and its institutions. In an unintended reversal of roles, the “classic” counter-demonstration of the Great German Art Exhibition imitated exactly what the Dadaists had ridiculed in their notorious 1920 *Erste Internationale Dada-Messe* (First International Dada Fair). The Dadaists had suspended a stuffed dummy in the dress of an officer, had hung paintings and slogans upon other paintings, words virtually scrawled on the walls and so forth. The Dada Fair mocked the pretensions of the pre-war modernists, especially the Expressionists, who had triumphed after the war in the domain of the “white cube,” the clean, glistening walls of Germany’s commercial galleries and public museums. The Dadaists attacked the allegiances between the museum and the marketplace and the manner in which the Expressionists posed their art as if it were already, inevitably, museum bound. The Great German Art Exhibition accepted the exhibition grammar worked out by the pre-war modernists and their institutional allies, undoubtedly unself-consciously, and thus staged a show that even today looks unmistakably “modern,” even if the works on display exhibit “discredited” academic conventions. In the same confusion of styles and political intentions, the Degenerate Art show consciously or unconsciously mimicked the jumbled format of the 1920 Dada Fair. The epiphany of these strategic confusions occurred at the preview given for Hitler and his staff before the official opening of the Degenerate Art show. The “Führer” stopped at the “Dada” wall, where, against a background painted to suggest the abstract compositions of Vassily Kandinsky, the organizers had placed a collection of Dada paintings and broadsheets, including a work by Kurt Schwitters, at odd angles to the floor. This obvious, if unusually clumsy, attempt to mock and subvert the “aura” of authenticity in these artists violated Hitler’s petit bourgeois sensibilities and his own training as an artist. He had the works straightened. This little incident testifies to the complexity and even the quixotic character of the “corrective” offered by Hitler’s propaganda machine. In a final layer of paradox, the reconstructed “*Entarte Kunst*” exhibition offered a rehabilitation of the ridiculed art of the Expressionists and Dadaists à la Hitler that in its staging looked remarkably similar to the enlarged photograph that “documents” the Great German Art Exhibition.

If the Nazis were unable to distinguish between the ideological and institutional viewpoints of the Expressionists versus the Dadaists, the reconstructed exhibition offered no better understanding of why some art and artists were targeted and not others. The vast majority of works on display at the Degenerate Art exhibition belonged to the Expressionists, and to the Expressionist element within German Dada. I have already

suggested that this target has an institutional basis, in the degree to which it was promoted as German, as opposed to modern art. The Nazis in fact largely spared the French Impressionists and many of the Post-Impressionists. (Indeed, the private collection of the Impressionists held by Goebbels is justly famous.) Only a handful of non-German modernist artists were included, most notably the non-objective painters Kandinsky and Mondrian. Moreover, and one would think this the most curious omission, although the organizers claimed to target the Jewish element in modernism, the leading Jewish *and* modernist artist in Germany before 1933, Max Liebermann, a man whose work was virtually synonymous with the admiration for French Impressionism, was only nominally represented at the exhibition. (Despite being hounded off the public stage of the Berlin art world, forced out of his post as president of the *Preußischen Akademie der Künste* in 1932—just three years before his death). Why did the Nazis pass up this ready opportunity to demonstrate the “Jewishness” of modern art? Perhaps it was because Impressionism, at least, was by 1937 no longer so objectionable, this art could no longer be clearly identified as “modern.” Or was it because Liebermann was so much the establishment artist, a member of Berlin’s elite cultural circles for over thirty years, whose work was represented in the collection of men who still retained power in the Third Reich? The style of his art, moreover, differed far less from what was officially approved than did the Expressionists of the next generation. In concentrating its vitriol primarily on its native exponents of modernism, the Expressionists and Dadaists, the organizers of the Degenerate Art exhibition naturally chose the easiest targets. The truly political artists of the 1920s, and the direct artistic enemies of the radical Right, were artists like George Grosz or John Heartfield. But their work was just that, too political, too pointed in what it had to say, to be of use in such an exhibition. On the other side of the spectrum, the modernist French paintings in German public collections, which were so resented not just in 1933 but in 1912 or even in 1900, while they could be removed from German museums and sold at auction in Switzerland (or kept privately) were simply too beautiful, too desirable, by now too accessible to be useful examples for ridicule.

Ironically, one more aspect of the reconstructed exhibition was fudged by the curators, namely the issue of the fate of the art dispersed by the Swiss auctions, much of which is now in the hands of American museums and private collections. Again, the auctions were held up by the organizers as a bad thing, a representative act of Nazi repression, but, perhaps not surprisingly, the organizers drew back from the related and very sensitive story of who bought the confiscated pictures and what museums and individuals (particularly in America) now own them, and the even more sensitive issue as to whether the original owners have

some claim, if not legal, then moral, to their restitution to the museums (and the families, if surviving, of the private collectors) from which they were stolen. The moral issue of the possible repatriation of this art to Germany is conveniently overlooked, even though the fate of this art is the most tangible, most immediate consequence of the Nazi policies which the exhibition holds to be the contextual background of the Degenerate Art show. In a similar fashion, while the reconstructed exhibition paid some attention to the international response to the Degenerate Art show, particularly in London, where a counter-exhibition was eventually staged, the organizers provided no comparable documentation for the international response, if there was one, to the Swiss auctions. There is an important story here that deserves to be told in full. Finally, it is worth observing that while it was comparatively politically easy to reconstruct the Degenerate Art show, how much more difficult it would be to restore the Great German Art exhibition. The German state, I believe, still holds the most obviously Nazi art under lock and key in Munich. Although exhibitions of Nazi art has occurred in Germany, the kind of scrutiny this art has received has obviously reflected the political realities of contemporary Germany.

In summary, what should one make of the observation in the catalogue to the reconstructed exhibition that while only some 400,000 people visited the Great German Art exhibition, some two million people visited the Degenerate Art show as it made its rounds, in a characteristic institutional element of German modernism, of the major provincial capitals of the Third Reich between 1937 and 1941? Do these figures reflect, as the catalogue seemed to imply, a more fundamental popularity for modernism than for official art? I think not. The spectacle of this exhibition, free to the general public, and with the undisguised invitation for the public to view this show as a form of—of what?—vaudeville? cannot be measured through a scale of devotees. In the end, the American public was misled by “*Entarte Kunst*” to see in this exhibition merely an original vilification and now redemption of modernist aesthetic doctrines. What was more fundamentally at stake for the Nazis in 1937 was the reverse coin of what motivated the modernist apologists who trumpeted the arrival of cubism in 1912. Then it had been the effort to seize history for the Moderns against popular taste, against the legacy of Salon art and the impoverished realism of *fin de siècle* international “official” culture. In 1937, the fascists hoped to reverse the historical and institutional appropriations of modernism in the name of a “healthy” German art. Each was a kind of *coup d'état*, an attempt to shape public taste and belief through the exercise of cultural power; the “success” of either in the field of propaganda is impossible to measure. Yet together they pose the fascinating but unanswerable question as to whether either or both of

these competing phenomena, expressionism and fascism, were “grafts” on German society and culture.

## Notes

- 1 Jensen trans. O.G. [Otto Grautoff], “Paris,” *Kunst und Künstler* 10 (April 1912): 369.
- 2 Adolf Hitler, inaugural speech to the *Große Deutsche Kunstausstellung*, Munich, 1937, reprinted in translation in Herschel B. Chipp, ed., *Theories of Modern Art* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: 1968), 479.
- 3 Stephanie Barron, “1937: Modern Art and Politics in Prewar Germany,” in “*Degenerate Art: The Fate of the Avant-Garde in Germany* (Los Angeles: 1991), 20.
- 4 É. Zola, “M. Manet,” *L'Évènement* (May 7, 1866), reprinted in *Mon Salon. Manet. Écrits sur l'art* (Paris: 1970), 67.
- 5 See O.G. [Otto Grautoff], “Paris,” 368. Grautoff uses the term to describe the Futurists at Bernheim jeune.
- 6 Quoted in translation by Mario-Andreas von Lüttichau, *Entartete Kunst*, Munich 1937,” in “*Degenerate Art*,” 71.
- 7 Hitler, “Inaugural address,” 480.
- 8 F. Nietzsche, “David Strauss, the confessor and the writer,” in *Untimely Meditations*, trans. R.J. Hollingdale (Cambridge: 1983), 3.
- 9 See Adolf Hildebrand, *The Problem of Form in Painting and Sculpture*, trans. M. Meyer and R.M. Ogden (New York: 1907).
- 10 Quoted in translation by M.-A. von Lüttichau, *Entartete Kunst*, Munich 1937,” 80.
- 11 P. Fechter, *Der Expressionismus* (Munich: 1914), 71.

# The Art Criticism and Politics of Lucy Lippard

Stephanie Cash

The 1970s were a time of war, protests, political movements, peace and love. Minority groups began to demand equality and recognition. Women fought against socially ingrained forms of repression such as sex discrimination, harassment, and violence, and loudly asserted their right to equal pay and equal opportunity. The women's movement reached a feverish and controversial, if not rhetorical, pitch. It manifested itself in almost every aspect of life, even becoming part of the academic establishment. Because visual representation, i.e., movies, magazines, advertisements, was noted as one of the most problematic issues in their promotion of women as dependent, inferior, and superficial, it is only natural that "high" art would not escape feminist scrutiny. It is in this fertile environment that Lucy Lippard "found" herself.

Lippard's career as an art critic began in the 1960s. After graduating from prestigious Smith College she spent time in a Mexican village with the American Friends Service Committee, an organization providing assistance, not unlike the Peace Corps, to underdeveloped countries. This is indicative of her early interest in non-white and repressed cultures, one that has resurfaced almost thirty years later in her most recent book *Mixed Blessings*.<sup>1</sup> How this experience affected her at the time is unclear, however, since she returned to New York and immersed herself in the white male establishment of the art world. Lippard took a position as page, indexer, and researcher at the Museum of Modern Art's library where she met three fellow employee artists who, as she later states, would have a profound ideological impact on her career: Dan Flavin, Sol LeWitt, and Robert Ryman, who would later become her husband. In the early 1960s they became part of a group known as the Bowery Boys that also consisted of Robert and Sylvia Mangold, Frank Lincoln Viner, Tom Doyle, Ray Donarski, and Eva Hesse. At the same time she was also working on her Master's degree at the elite Institute of Fine Arts at New York University.

In 1964 Lippard was asked by Max Kozloff to write the New York reviews for *Artforum*, which she described as a crummy little magazine at

the time. Through a strange course of events, the position of senior critic at *Art International* fell into her pregnant lap. She describes her writing at this time as “new criticism” which was art historically grounded and formally analytical. She has since toyed with different ways of presenting art, from straightforward description to compiling data with little or no commentary or critical intervention.<sup>2</sup> While the topics and artists she chooses to cover change sporadically throughout her career, an underlying, sometimes even blatant, tone of disenchantment with her position in the art world as a critic recurs:

I've never had much faith in art criticism as a primary form because you are leaning on somebody else's work. It's not that it can't be a positive parasitic process, not that you can't bring new insights to the work, or get out the artist's intentions better than the artist himself or herself might be able to do, but I can't think of any criticism that has ever stood up in the long run as a real parallel to the art. It's self-indulgence when you come right down to it, you like something and you enjoy plunging into it with words. I don't finally know what the hell criticism does for anybody except the artist and the writer.<sup>3</sup>

This seemingly self-effacing statement, which in reality is an attack on all critics and art criticism, is very telling of Lippard's on-going struggle to justify her involvement with art. It is the self-indulgent and incestuous nature of the art world that plagues her conscience throughout her career as a member of the upper class, a guilt assuaged by her coverage of systematically excluded marginals. Hence, this is an issue she continues to address. In another book, *Six Years: The Dematerialization of the Art Object*,<sup>4</sup> she removes her written voice and attempts to make an original contribution in the presentation of different artists, thus making herself something of an artist and alleviating her shame and/or fear of being a mere parasite, again raising the age-old question of the role of a critic. She makes an interesting point for a type of criticism that is art imitative; art leads, criticism follows.<sup>5</sup> This almost necessarily implies involvement with the work on an emotional level instead of forcing the work into a rigid Greenbergian paradigm. She repeatedly criticizes the whole system for placing monetary value over all else, yet it is a system that she supports, reluctantly or not, through her participation; hence her need to constantly justify her continuing presence. Paradoxically, her coverage of “unknown” artists, e.g., women in the 70s and artists of color in the 80s, lends them instant credibility and monetary value. Her establishment status automatically inducts any artists she covers into the system, making Lippard a reluctant avant-garde critic.

It is interesting to compare Lippard's early critical work with her

writings done after the 70s and the feminist movement. *Changing* is an early collection of essays, like several other of her books, but is unique from her others in that it includes only white male artists. It is in the prefatory notes that Lippard claims not to have a critical system because of “the distortions that occur when a critic has a system and must cram all the art he likes into those close quarters.”<sup>6</sup> This is a statement she relies on and reiterates throughout her career because it allows her the prerogative of changing her mind. However, this can lead the reader to wonder whether, blinded by her own ideologies, she thoroughly thinks through her arguments. Here she also touts the benefits of the formalist criticism of the 60s because it “omitted extraneous speculation and emotionalism and purged criticism of the permissive lyricism and literary generalization of the 50s.”<sup>7</sup> It is interesting to note that these very qualities will color her criticism within five years, something she will later proudly admit. Lippard grapples with the critic’s right to set *himself* [italics mine] up as a judge because it is the artist who decides what is art.<sup>8</sup> Thus, the role of the critic should be to describe the work and not make a prescription for what the art should be or do. It is precisely because of the rapidity with which the definition of art changes, or more specifically taste as dictated by the establishment, that Lippard feels criticism should not be consistent “for consistency has to do with logical systems, whereas criticism is or should be dialectical and thrive on contradiction and change.”<sup>9</sup> Again, it is statements such as these whereby Lippard affords herself “critical flexibility.” Unfortunately, this also lends a certain quality of indecisiveness to her collected writings.<sup>10</sup>

While she finds the possibility for significant change in new or trendy movements, Lippard wryly comments that only journalists are interested in the new for the sake of sensationalism.<sup>11</sup> Yet, in almost the same breath she acknowledges that she could be perceived as an opportunist or public relations person in advocating change and novelty in critical writing. Nonetheless, this awareness of her paradoxical, even hypocritical position does not induce her to be more focused in her opinions or critical writings. This idea of change is more fully developed when she discusses novelty for artists. Lippard claims that artists are usually the best judges of innovation; therefore, if an idea is copied by other artists it most likely signifies an important change and not merely a trend.<sup>12</sup> This implies that artists are not subject to sensationalism or trends (inherent genius?), when indeed many artists will copy the work of successful colleagues in order to absorb a little of the limelight. At this time, Lippard still sees the production of art in modern terms, i.e., art for art’s sake: “The artist does not set out to change the visible world or reform taste; his expansion of how people see or his comments on the world are by-products of the initial impulse to make art.”<sup>13</sup> In closing she states, without much trace of



remorse, that a committed and professional audience is finally the serious critic's only audience. Comparatively, her involvement in the feminist movement inspired Lippard to redirect her writing to a conceivably non-art audience. This is obviously problematic in that the average woman, and later people of color, do not read art criticism. The paradox of activist art and criticism is that the message usually only reaches an audience who already has an opinion on the issue, and frequently the same opinion.

It can be argued that most of Lippard's statements in the above essay are valid and even essential to good criticism. Yet she refutes almost every one of them when she becomes a feminist art critic. The women's movement changed not only the private lives of many women, but permeated and altered methods of inquiry in many disciplines as well. Lippard has been categorized as a first generation feminist art historian.<sup>14</sup> Feminist artists and historians at this time were analyzing the structure of the art world, both past and present, to determine how and why women were excluded. Questions of identifying female sensibility and imagery in art were also being addressed. Much writing at the time was peppered with rhetoric as is to be expected at the birth of any political movement. Yet, underneath this poetic protesting are very pertinent observations. What is perhaps disturbing is the way arguments were taken to such an extreme that they alienated not only society but women as well, something of which Lippard is guilty. Her embrace of the feminist movement occurred after her personal realization of the shame she felt in being a woman. She partially attributes this to her living and working closely with so many male artists as well as her guilt at the realization of her own exclusion and ignorance of female artists.<sup>15</sup> In order to rectify this situation Lippard stridently sought to establish her position as a feminist critic.

The product of her feminist phase is a collection of essays entitled *From the Center* and published in 1976. In the opening essay, "Changing since *Changing*," she refutes most of her previous opinions in her new-found freedom of expression she attributes to the women's movement. Lippard readily admits that she makes use of the emotionalism and lyricism she had found inappropriate just five years before. Where Lippard previously thought the use of extraneous information was a distraction, "other experience," including biographical information and emotions, becomes imperative in feminist art and criticism. Her former idea of social commentary in art as a by-product had to be reworked at this point. She increasingly begins to support artists who feel compelled toward social commentary; art becomes the incidental didactic vehicle.<sup>16</sup> While several of her views on the art scene could be considered critical of the establishment, she feels the need to highlight her dissent:

I recognize now the seed of feminism in my revolt against  
Clement Greenberg's patronization of artists, against the

imposition of the taste of one class on everybody, against the notion that if you don't like so-and-so's work for the "right" reasons, you can't like it at all.<sup>17</sup>

She implies that her opposition to Greenberg was indicative of her true underlying feminist tendencies. It is obvious, however, that criticism can be aimed at Greenberg without relying on a feminist argument. While there is nothing wrong with a change of opinion, something we are all entitled to, Lippard subtly tries to deny that she could have been any other way, as if to say: "See, I was with it all along." Of course, she must address and redress comments that are blatantly in opposition to her newly "enlightened" position. But then she extricates the subtleties, often even the tone, to exemplify, and often exaggerate, her "correctness."

To criticize Lippard's writings from this time is to criticize the feminist art movement. Understandably, there are points which can be quibbled with, but the movement, both in and out of the art world, provided a forum for dialogue and an important impetus for social change. Feminist art historians and artists sought to restructure the existing art system. But because the discourse was always art-related, what was being treated was the symptom and not the cause. The larger social mentality which underlies all human interaction has to first be deconstructed before thorough change can be felt in other spheres of life. Is this a task too large for art to accomplish? Probably. Nonetheless, artists and critics tirelessly fought the prejudices and did make some headway. In issues such as representation of women in galleries and museums, change was relatively easy, although still not equal. It is in the less tangible areas of social conditioning and gender construction that progress was, and is, slow. These problems manifested themselves in feminist art discourse in the debate over a separate feminist esthetic and women's imagery.

Lippard, like many feminists, resists comparing women's art to that of men. She prefers to encourage a dialogue with the work itself. In doing so, Lippard hopes to help forge a separate female esthetic. Further, because women are historically deprived of interaction and dialogue with the male-dominated art world, such a comparison would be incompatible.<sup>18</sup> Yet, as she notes, absorption into the prevailing system is problematic because women would begin to create art for the establishment and not for themselves. This implies a repression of their female sensibility. If women remain outside the system, however, they remain free from the pressures of a biased commodity market as well as ideological and stylistic influences.<sup>19</sup> Accordingly, Lippard supports the notion of a separate system for women until the current system has been changed, realizing that "the danger of separatism ... is that it can become not a training ground, but a protective womb."<sup>20</sup> Indeed, if women's art is never allowed into the system, how can it compete? Thus, integration should be

the immediate goal. Waiting for a separate esthetic to be established, much less accepted, entails waiting for society to undo that system which has developed over hundreds of years. It is not likely that most women, no matter how idealistic, are willing to wait any significant length of time, be it ten years or a hundred, to stake their claim to fame.

Therefore, the argument of most feminists is to deconstruct the system. They feel it is dominated by a male esthetic, i.e., men have traditionally set the standards by which to judge “great” art and have had control over the means of art instruction and education.<sup>21</sup> This is an understandable problem. However, would the politics and, more simply, imagery change if women were at the helm? Tempting as it may be, it is very idealistic to think that women *en masse* would be more fair or sensitive to issues that men are accused of ignoring.

Perhaps a more puzzling and problematic issue is that of female imagery. In the early 1970s, Lippard became involved with Judy Chicago and Miriam Schapiro who were actively developing this concept in their work. While a long list of “female” characteristics was cited by Lippard (obsessive detail, circular forms, central focus, inner space, layers, windows, autobiographical content, animals, flowers, binding, sexual imagery, grids, etc.),<sup>22</sup> Chicago and Schapiro claimed central core imagery to be the most predominant.<sup>23</sup> Clearly, this list set forth by Lippard can in no way be said to be exclusive or privy to women or even feminine in nature.<sup>24</sup> It is important to keep in mind that any conception we have of a form being male or female is due to social imposition of these values onto an otherwise gender-neutral form. Admittedly, many women were drawn to “traditional” female art forms, e.g., pattern and decoration, but only to assert their identity as women artists. As such, these choices of imagery and technique can be said to be a movement like any other in the art world.

Lippard feels that because women have different social and biological experiences than men, their art should differ as well. Thus, she claims that if such elements do not appear in the work of a woman, then that woman is repressing her sex.<sup>25</sup> Here Lippard seems to ignore the possibility of a woman, or even man, expressing a *human* experience, i.e., going beyond their immediate perceptual reality. This is not to say that experiences are not different, indeed they are an amalgam of intricate experiential nuances as well as the obvious sex, race, and class. Yet, she insists that the sexual identity of the artist be evident in the work. This demand can only serve to restrict the artistic freedom of women.

Lippard is convinced that there are aspects of women’s art that are inaccessible to men (attributable to different life experiences), thereby claiming that there is an art unique to women. However, anyone can appropriate forms or manners of representation. Lippard even addresses

this in her evaluation of the Pop art movement. She sarcastically accuses men of pillaging household imagery, saying that it would have been impossible for a woman to produce this art and be taken seriously.<sup>26</sup> So it is evident that men can use, or abuse according to Lippard, images that are traditionally associated with women. Perhaps what is more relevant is the inaccessibility of female experience to men. For Lippard to lump women, or any minority group, into a category and say that they have the same experience is ill-conceived. Obviously, the life experience of a privileged woman will not be the same as a lower class woman. Thus, the notion of group-identity art not only denies unique experience, which is often the motivating force in creating art, but more importantly segregates it from the larger art discourse, inhibiting interaction and exchange.

While her approach to women's art at this time seems to be more concerned with style and representation, her continuing exploration eventually leads her to a more political approach:

if our only contribution is to be the incorporation on a broader scale of women's traditions of crafts, autobiography, narrative, overall collage, or any other technical or stylistic innovation—then we shall have failed.

Feminism is an ideology, a value system, a revolutionary strategy, a way of life. (And for me it is inseparable from socialism.)<sup>27</sup>

Lippard's politics have recently led her to support other causes as well. It is curious that she seems almost to have abandoned her involvement, on an academic level at least, with feminist art, especially now when the field is ripe for a new insurgence of interpretation. Lippard must feel that she has done her part for women artists and instead now supports artists of color, the new underdogs in the art world. It appears that she is biased toward anti-establishment art with a political slant, that is art favoring didactic content over visual representation, thus calling into question her purported standard of aesthetic quality.

Although Lippard seems to be confused or non-committal, she is praised by many for her "astounding lucidity and her capacity for self-analysis," which "allowed her to understand fully the position of her own discourse at its every stage."<sup>28</sup> It is her deep emotional involvement with both the art and the causes that sets her apart from most critics. While this can impede rational evaluation (something Lippard herself would question as even necessary) it can also lead to a new and different understanding of art and its function in society.

## Notes

- 1 Lucy Lippard, *Mixed Blessings: New Art in a Multicultural America* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1990).
- 2 Lippard in an interview with the editors of *Art-Rite*, "Freelancing the Dragon," *From the Center: Feminist Essays on Women's Art* (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1976), 17.
- 3 Lippard, "Freelancing," *From the Center*, 20.
- 4 Lucy Lippard, *Six Years: The Dematerialization of the Art Object from 1966 to 1972* (New York: Praeger, 1973).
- 5 Lippard, "Freelancing," *From the Center*, 22.
- 6 Lippard in the prefatory notes, *Changing: Essays in Art Criticism* (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1971), 12.
- 7 Lippard, "Change and Criticism: Consistency and Small Minds," *Changing: Essays in Art Criticism*, 32.
- 8 In the preface to her book, *From the Center*, Lippard corrects herself on using the pronoun "he" as a term that incorporated not only female artists, but herself as a critic.
- 9 Lippard, "Change and Criticism: Consistency and Small Minds," *Changing: Essays in Art Criticism*, 25.
- 10 This creates something of a catch-22: is it possible to remain consistent without being too rigid? Perhaps Lippard could have avoided her, or her readers', critical confusion by developing her ideas from her previous statements instead of merely changing sides. Granted, it may be difficult to reconcile such opposing methods. Instead of providing readers with her personal reasons for such a change, it may have been more conducive to the understanding and acceptance of her argument to develop this transforming dialogue within her writings, thereby lending more lucidity and credibility to her opinions.
- 11 Lippard, "Change and Criticism: Consistency and Small Minds," *Changing: Essays in Art Criticism*, 28.
- 12 *Ibid.*, 28-29.
- 13 *Ibid.*, 34.
- 14 Thalia Gouma-Peterson and Patricia Mathews, "The Feminist Critique of Art History," *Art Bulletin* 69 (September 1987): 326-357.
- 15 Lippard, "Changing since *Changing*," *From the Center: Feminist Essays on Women's Art*, 4.
- 14 Lippard states in her review of the Times Square Show (1980) that activist artists are not concerned with esthetics and as much political art is esthetically ineffective. Politics seems to become her system of artistic evaluation.
- 17 Lippard, "Changing," *From the Center: Feminist Essays on Women's Art*, 3.
- 18 *Ibid.*, 5.
- 19 *Ibid.*, 9.
- 20 *Ibid.*, 11.
- 21 For a thorough investigation of this problem, see Rozsika Parker and Griselda Pollock, *Old Mistresses: Women, Art, and Ideology* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1991).
- 22 Lippard, "Prefaces to Catalogues of Women's Exhibitions (three parts)," 49, and "Fragments," 69, *From the Center: Feminist Essays on Women's Art*.
- 23 Lippard, "Prefaces," *From the Center: Feminist Essays on Women's Art*, 49.
- 24 Lippard's example of grids as an inherent component of female imagery is undermined in the exhibition she curated, *Grids* (Institute of Contemporary Art, University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, 1972) in which a good number of men were included, e.g., Jasper Johns, Ad Reinhardt, Ellsworth Kelly, Sol LeWitt, Larry Poons. While she admits that there is not a form used exclusively by women ("Fragments," 69), the fact that it is so prevalent in

- men's work as well would seem to throw the idea of female imagery into question.
- 25 Lippard, "Fragments," *From the Center: Feminist Essays on Women's Art*, 71, 73.
  - 26 Lippard, "Household Images in Art," *From the Center: Feminist Essays on Women's Art*, 56.
  - 27 Lippard, "Sweeping Exchanges," *Get the Message? A Decade of Art for Social Change* (New York: E.P. Dutton, Inc., 1984), 149-50.
  - 28 Nicole Dubreuil-Blondin as quoted in "The Feminist Critique," 343.

# Gendered Values in Clement Greenberg's Criticism

Matthew Rohn

It is through the discourse of critics ... that ideology operates to protect the dominant system and stamp the work that women produce, even within radical art practices, with its stereotypes and values.<sup>1</sup>

Clement Greenberg has been instrumental in shaping the course and nature of modern art, yet upon close examination, his essays reveal numerous deep-seated prejudices. These include gendered and profoundly sexist criteria that appear central to the evaluative system he has employed. Notwithstanding his rightful stature as one of the more progressive and insightful critics of this century, Greenberg in his writings of the 1940s displayed a latent sexism that works against the gender-free, and thus objective, aesthetics he would seem to espouse. Indeed, this troubling contradiction deserves close examination, for it provides insight into various covert biases held by Greenberg which long ago became a staple of orthodox modernism. By orthodox modernism, I am referring to what Thomas Crow has identified as a traditionally-conceived, aestheticized elite authority derived from the heterogeneous and anti-establishment impulses driving the avant-garde:

The avant-garde schism had, after all, been prompted in the first place by the surrender of the academy to the philistine demands of the modern marketplace—the call for finish, platitude and trivial anecdote. The purpose of modernism was to save painting, not sacrifice it to the debased requirements of yet another market, this time one of common amusement and cheap spectacle. In the process, the rebarbative qualities of the early pictures—generated in an aggressive confrontation with perverse and alien imagery—are harmonized and resolved.<sup>2</sup>

While Crow distinguishes between “avant-garde” and “modernist” impulses, a broader set of concerns might be addressed by analyzing this problem as a difference between what I will refer to as modernism and orthodox modernism. Modernism, in this usage, accounts for the wide

gamut of new attitudes and oppositional art actions that over the past two hundred years or so have engaged the human spirit in a quest for new and progressive values and have marked the period in epochal terms. Orthodox modernism refers to the highly successful efforts of a self-appointed elite to define and channel this quest in more prescriptive and controlled ways. While critics such as Greenberg played a leadership role in directing modernism, they adopted and even intensified certain prevailing social biases, including forms of sexism. By playing to certain prejudices (which they sometimes did unwittingly), they succeeded in promoting the art they championed among society's more influential members and helped establish it as a new orthodoxy.<sup>3</sup>

Clement Greenberg's 1947 article "The Present Prospects of American Painting and Sculpture" provides a concise exposition of his biased attitudes and their role in the propagation of orthodox modernism. In the essay he makes more overtly sexist comments than one normally finds in his writings, yet these remarks are revealing because he uses them to explain value judgements he upholds throughout his career. Although this is not one of his more commonly reprinted essays, it is historically important in so far as it is his first major statement about the Abstract Expressionists, and thus signals the beginning of his most influential period as a critic. The article was written for a special issue of the British magazine *Horizon*, which was dedicated to illustrating the strength of contemporary American culture. While not all of the authors took pride in American intellectual accomplishments, and Greenberg himself shows certain reservations about the state of painting and sculpture, his general optimism marks a new period in his career. Bolstered by post-World War II American economic, military, and propagandistic might, American cultural activity had begun to have a global impact, and Greenberg grew ever more concerned that vanguard, American culture should meet and sustain certain standards as he helped position it to guide Western culture. "Present Prospects" reflects the beginning of those efforts at directing American art to a leadership role.

Close analysis of Greenberg's "The Present Prospects of Painting and Sculpture" reveals how in their cumulative effect his evaluations became ideologically charged and forfeited the objective status that he has always claimed for them. Greenberg's importance as a critic derives in good measure from his excellence as an essayist. His choice of words, his effective use of examples, and the way he structures ideas in relationship to one another transform his seemingly casual thoughts about the American art scene into influential philosophical tracts on the nature of modern culture. His persuasive essays are always far more than the sum of their parts. In "Present Prospects" he grounds the essay in a view of American art history that excludes women. He explains how socially-



coded "feminine" domestic and nature-oriented values threaten the best effort modern culture has to offer, then ends the article by valorizing socially-coded "masculine" traits. Each aspect of the essay helps prepare the way for successive points, while the whole articulates a bias recognizable today as the sexism that more recent scholars have discovered permeates orthodox modernism.

He establishes the masculinist purview of his belief system at once when in the second paragraph of "The Present Prospects of American Painting and Sculpture," he compiles a genealogy of American painters who historically "accomplished more than a little," plus their successors, who represent "the most considerable effort of American art in the twentieth century."<sup>4</sup> In both lists he omits women from consideration. "Allston, Cole, Homer, Eakins, Ryder, Blakelock, Newman, and Whistler" make the historical roster, while Cassatt is notably absent. "John Sloan, George Bellows, William Glackens, Maurice Prendergast, Arnold Friedman, and John Marin" comprise the second list, which passes over Georgia O'Keeffe (*Clement Greenberg* 2: 160-161). While the failure of any woman to make these two lists may seem to be a relatively inconsequential matter and could be considered an understandable oversight given prevailing attitudes, it reveals the young critic's easy assumption of certain exclusionary attitudes. He compiles lists whose all-male pedigree modern art enthusiasts, until very recently, have become conditioned to expect, and he shows no inclination to undermine his own authority by countermanding those expectations. As Rozsika Parker and Griselda Pollock have pointed out in *Old Mistresses: Women, Art, and Ideology*, the inclusion of women inevitably calls into question the seriousness with which people will regard statements about creativity in the modern period. "By the late nineteenth century ... women were effectively placed in an absolute different [social] sphere from men. Thus art by women was subsumed into bourgeois notions of femininity and furthermore, art historically relegated to a special category which was presented as distinct from mainstream cultural activity and public professionalism—the preserve of masculinity."<sup>5</sup> They note that this propensity to equate male achievements with serious endeavors and to relegate women's creativity to a lesser sphere intensified in the twentieth century. Greenberg's assessment of Georgia O'Keeffe's 1946 Museum of Modern Art retrospective clearly substantiates their point and demonstrates how he was exploiting this attitude at about the time he wrote "Present Prospects."

He begins the O'Keeffe review by establishing a privileged masculinist intention for modern art. He posits two male artists, Picasso and Matisse, as standards and praises what he obviously sees as masculinist virtues in their work. Their "break with nature [is] the outcome of an absorption in

the 'physical' aspects of painting and, underneath everything, a reflection of the profoundest essence of contemporary society" (*Clement Greenberg* 2: 85). Active agents, men, propel modern society in a triumph over nature and all its threat of passivity, chaos and feminized dissolution. Greenberg contends that early American modernists misunderstood the social implications of this art, and against these two male artists' alleged engagement in society, he contrasts O'Keeffe, whose work he asserts,

has little inherent value. The deftness and precision of her brush and the neatness with which she places a picture inside its frame exert a certain inevitable charm which may explain her popularity; ... The lapidarian patience she has expended in trimming, breathing upon, and polishing these bits of opaque cellophane betrays a concern that has less to do with art than with private worship and the embellishment of private fetishes with secret and arbitrary meanings (*Clement Greenberg* 2: 87).

All of the characteristics he emphasizes—"neatness," "charm," "popular taste in art," and a turning inward—bespeak coded feminine values, which he not only ascribes to her work but condemns. Worrying, as the review's conclusion reveals, that insufficient vigilance over the standards governing modernism will lead to ruin, he is adamant that these interests be put in what he regards as their proper place:

That an institution as influential as the Museum of Modern Art should dignify this arty manifestation with a large-scale exhibition is a bad sign. I know that many experts—some of them on the museum's own staff—identify the opposed extremes of hygiene and scatology with modern art, but the particular experts at the museum should have had at least enough sophistication to keep them apart (*Clement Greenberg* 2: 87).

David Carrier has observed that the power of Greenberg's criticism resides in the genealogies he creates to justify his judgments. He builds extensively on the authority of a few established artists, whom he uses to justify his own taste and ideology.<sup>6</sup> It is further worth noting that in these narratives, men dominate inordinately, with their prominence lending masculinist authority to his accounts. The more a given essay or collection of works articulates his highest standards, the more likely he eschews references to women and their achievements. He might occasionally recognize and even commend women's contributions in short notices, but like so many orthodox modernist writers he progressively marginalized female agency the more he perceived himself constructing significant historical narratives, as he does in "Present Prospects," his first article published in Europe.

When in 1961, at the height of his career, he revised and compiled what he regarded as his most important writings, he made but three scant references to women. This contrasts significantly with the approximately sixty female artists, intellectuals, revolutionaries and entrepreneurs who populate his complete writings from just the decade 1939-1949, a number of whom receive substantive attention.<sup>7</sup> Greenberg structured his own compilation, *Art and Culture*, so that it would survey his major interests and provide an important account of modernism. It has long been the most accessible and authoritative source of his writings, as he hoped it would be. He explains the purpose of the book in the preface: "This book is not intended as a completely faithful record of my activity as a critic. Not only has much been altered, but much more has been left out than put in. I would not deny being one of those critics who educate themselves in public, but I see no reason why all the haste and waste involved in my self-education should be preserved in a book."<sup>8</sup> Given this purpose, how revealing it is that he relegates women to such an insignificant role.

To return to the analysis of "The Present Prospects of American Painting and Sculpture," here Greenberg exhibits a fear that culture might come under the sway of "feminine" values, an attitude that he shares with many of his generation. "Masculinity" in the essay comes to stand for productive impulses, while "femininity" threatens culture with deceit. The critic cautions that although the American scene appears endowed with a sophisticated new cosmopolitanism in 1947, the "feminine" nature of its sensibility exposes its falseness:

The cultured American has now become more knowing than cultivated, glib in a kind of fashionable *koine* but without eccentricity or the distortions of personal bias, a compendium of what he or (more usually) she reads in certain knowing magazines—anxious to be right, correct *au courant*, rather than wise and happy.

He or she may have a minimal judgement in literature but hardly any in art. The discussion of American art, even in the most exalted circles, is a kind of travelogue patter—this is what fills the three or four art magazines that live an endowed existence in New York and whose copy is supplied by permanent college girls, male and female (*Clement Greenberg* 2: 161-162).

His phrases "he or she" and "permanent college girls, male and female" are telling. While "he or she" has become a contemporary corrective to the historically sexist gendering of the English language's third person, singular pronoun, Greenberg makes use of the phrase for the opposite reason. He seeks to distinguish art he admires from a type of

modernism that he can separate out and mark as “feminized.” He not only apparently fears feminine values in culture, but he exploits these fears as they exist in society at large, drawing upon deep-seated bourgeois biases in order to signify and valorize his own form of modernism. Though critics have always directed readers to the narrowest spectrum of art they advocate in order to clarify through exaggeration, Greenberg’s desire for an art that by the end of the essay he will characterize as “virile” tells us much about orthodox modernism’s gender biases and their continued ties to social strictures well into the twentieth century.

Rather than citing the substantive, emancipatory gains that women had won in the modern era and celebrating their many contributions to modernism, which he knew well, he ostracizes feminine values. He, like many earlier critics, takes advantage of a bourgeois prejudice that assigns women domestic duties and that regards these as restrictive and self-limiting. Men are the mythical “shakers and movers” in this scheme. They command the public spaces and constantly test limits. Bourgeois women (as distinct from proletarian women) stay at home and hone their skills at maintaining a good domicile, which is expected to be a well-regulated institution that will help men keep in check their otherwise unbridled (i.e., without bride) passions and energies. Griselda Pollock has demonstrated how artists assumed a special position within this topography—they pursued the masculine ideal to an extreme degree.<sup>9</sup>

She and Parker point out in *Old Mistresses* that the modern usage of the word “artist” does not enter the *The Oxford English Dictionary* until 1853, when the word is used to distinguish the effort accorded creative genius. Because only men could possess the energies and the freedom to be creative geniuses, only they could be “artists;” women indulging in art have had a different status indicated by the depreciating nature of the phrase, “woman artist.”<sup>10</sup> Modernism helped create these definitions and exalted a rarefied form of the artist—the romantic, bohemian, vanguard, or avant-garde artist—who lives just outside bourgeois society by carrying out male fantasies in an uninhibited manner. He draws upon creative energies, rooted in sublimated sexual urges, worrying little about duty or obligation and living a libertine lifestyle. He “keeps culture *moving*,” to paraphrase a remark Greenberg makes in his 1939 article, “Avant-Garde and Kitsch,” by introducing into society a form of pure energy, which society constantly feeds off of, yet co-opts and “domesticates.” Women thus stand in opposition to the avant-garde, for society has deigned them domesticators. The cultured sphere of art falls within their domain, but only so long as they handle it with their own sexual energies in check. Society has long expected women to approach art in a fashionable, educated way, treating it as erudition and adornment, and this too is part of the mythos Greenberg exploits in “The Present Prospect of Painting and Sculpture.”

Greenberg was well aware that women had played a critical role within the New York vanguard he admired, yet his remarks in “Present Prospect” never reveal it. Artists such as Lee Krasner, who had introduced him to his chief artistic mentor, Hans Hofmann, had held leading positions within avant-garde circles, and the most daring galleries up until this time had been run by three women—Marian Willard, Betty Parsons, and Peggy Guggenheim. His belittlement of women by ascribing shallow, fashionable modern taste to their influence exposes his own entrapment within Western, masculinist ideology and its modernist variant. He finds it rhetorically convenient to distinguish “true” from “false” modernism by employing the gendered mythos of his time. The remarks quoted previously show how he brandished these prejudices in a manner welcome to his audience, but it is within the next eight paragraphs of the essay that he more fully develops his analysis of the new American cognoscenti along gendered, bourgeois ideological lines with an attack on the levelling effect that he perceives consumer culture has had on creativity. He claims that: “Art has become another way of educating the new middle class that springs up in industrial America in the wake of every important war and whose cash demands enforce a general levelling out of culture that, in raising the lowest standards of consumption, brings the highest down to meet them” (*Clement Greenberg* 2: 162). He then goes on to remark that: “At the same time that the average college graduate becomes more literate the average intellectual becomes more banal, both in personal life and professional activity” (*Clement Greenberg* 2: 163). Education, conformity, and consumption—factors bourgeois society has especially inculcated among women—menace serious art in Greenberg’s scheme.

The sole way in which he can perceive American culture avoiding this menace is if it cultivates individualism, which reigns with particular freedom in the special domain of bohemia. Greenberg had hinted at the importance he credited to individualism in the remarks first quoted, when he spoke about cultured Americans being “glib in a kind of fashionable *koine* but without *eccentricity* or *personal* bias.” He elaborates on this point in the section of the essay now under consideration when he holds up the French modernists as having been successful despite industrialization because of their reliance on individualism.

... if [the French Impressionists’] outlook, as that of most Parisian art up to 1925, was not dark, it was because industrialism—and history—still permitted the individual a little confidence in his own private solution, a modicum of space in which personal detachment could survive and work up its own proper interestingness. Standing off in the preserves of Bohemia, the impressionists, fauvists and cubists could still

indulge in a contemplation that was as sincere and bold as it was largely unconscious (*Clement Greenberg* 2: 164).

Greenberg's phrases, "his own private solution" and "a modicum of space," deserve special notice here. They affirm the case Griselda Pollock makes that individualism marks a special male topos within modernism, and, thus, defines the nature of the modernist, masculine, individualism orthodox modernism has sought to promote.

Industrialization has enjoyed two philosophical critiques, rationalism and romanticism. Although both have intensified the phallogocentric character of Western culture, romanticism availed itself of a more pluralistic and, at times, androgynous outlook. Romanticism has promoted what Greenberg and others called for in terms of a retreat from social conformity, yet it did so by employing a "Gothic, transcendental, subjective" approach, to use the critic's own words. Romantics turned inward away from the public sphere, seeking a route not only amenable to a feminine outlook but endemic to women in the modernist scheme. As a leading orthodox modernist, Greenberg quite naturally prized rationalism over romanticism. His rhetoric and genealogies reveal the manly character of rationalist thinking, and its engagement with the manufactured, public domain made it preferable to him. Greenberg's reaffirmation of modernism's neo-classical core has been one of his more significant accomplishments, yet clearly it underscores the profoundly gendered character of the formalist approach to art that he successfully promoted among mid-twentieth century intellectuals. He accepts conservative skepticism about art leading to non-productive work, but counters this attack by seeking to show its productive potential in terms defined by prevailing masculinist thinking.

Because Greenberg and a significant core of his readership want art to prove itself viable based upon certain standards that America sets for usefulness and acceptability, he prizes the rationalistic and progressive qualities that he can ascribe to the art he reviews. As Leo Steinberg points out in one of the early postmodern critiques of American formalist criticism, it relies upon a corporate model of productivity in line with the pragmatic spirit that Americans have long brought to aesthetics.

Americans ... assimilate art by actively changing it, by moving it from where they find it onto home ground and adapting it to native criteria. The dominant formalist critics today tend to treat modern painting as an evolving technology wherein at any one moment specific tasks require solution—tasks set for the artist as problems are set for researchers in big corporations. The artist as engineer and research technician becomes important insofar as he comes up with solutions to

the right problem ... the solution matters because it answers a problem set forth by a governing technocracy.<sup>11</sup>

What Steinberg fails to note is the masculinist bias of these “native criteria.” June Wayne, though, perceived this problem and noted in 1973 how this entrapped artists in a gendered doublebind wherein *all* artists became perceived pejoratively in “feminine” terms: “society unconsciously perceives the artist as female. It becomes profitable to many people to view the artist as one unable to cope with the real world of money and trade. So profound is the stereotype of the artist as the inchoate, intuitive, emotional romantic, that both the public and artists themselves find it difficult to imagine that we can be anything else.”<sup>12</sup> Greenberg recognized this prejudice against artists much earlier, but tried to counter it by imposing a socially acceptable, masculinist and rational sensibility on the type of art he championed. This helped him sell avant-garde art to a skeptical audience. Modernism could not be allowed to show any feminizing weaknesses if it were to serve postwar American society in any meaningful way. Hence, Greenberg felt compelled to justify it in masculinist terms so that he could save art as well as culture from itself.

Greenberg recognizes that modernism has not always favored “productivity,” and in “Present Prospects” he develops his historical analysis of the battle between unproductive and productive avenues that modernism has explored by citing Rimbaud as the first artist in French culture to signal what he regarded as an escapist retreat: “It is only by one of those inevitable confusions prompted by uneven cultural developments that the aberrated and deranged could have become so intimately involved with modern art” (*Clement Greenberg* 2: 165). Greenberg then goes on to posit a contemporary, alternative development which, he claims, guided modern painting and sculpture. His rhetoric makes clear the rationalist, male character of this, his preferred route: “The great modern painters and sculptors are the hard-headed ones—or at least they are great only as long as they remain hard-headed” (*Clement Greenberg* 2: 165). He admires incisive artists, and ones who don’t grow soft over time. The double-entendre created by his phrases “hard-headed” and “great only as long as they remain hard-headed” constitutes a fitting, if inadvertent, Freudian slip. Greenberg has long been a brilliant journalist whose effectiveness in his chosen medium has required that he conjure up a wealth of ideas in a brief space. His rhetoric develops covert meanings that are no less important than what he denotes.

Having developed a qualitative distinction between romantic and rationalistic attitudes through authority vested in the historically established, French orthodox modernist tradition, Greenberg then returns to his analysis of American art and culture. But rather than centering his

analysis on painting, he turns to literature, which at the time had a more mature and respected position in the English speaking world. Greenberg contrasts two pairs of authors. Emily Dickinson and Marianne Moore represent his vision of American romanticism, and oppose a heritage he attributes to Herman Melville and William Faulkner, though one is hard pressed to call them rationalists. Greenberg's discussion of female writers in this essay is every bit as unusual as would have been any references he might have made to female painters or sculptors, and this rarity makes his pairing of two women particularly significant. It marks only the third time in almost a decade as a cultural critic that he had referred to Emily Dickinson's poetry (and each time it was just in passing), and it is his second commentary on Marianne Moore's writing. The lineages he creates are not obviously gender-specific, but his atypical reference to women, the histories of these genealogies within his own corpus of writings, and the rhetoric he uses to characterize each lineage reveal just how gendered they are.

Greenberg views Dickinson as a decidedly feminine poet, and she irritates him for being a successful progenitor of a heritage he finds overrated and unproductive, an American poetic rooted in nature. The first time he mentions her is in a 1942 review of R. P. Blackmur's *Lyra: An Anthology of New Lyric*. There he notes that: "Anne Riddler is the most consistently successful and original poet in the book, though she seems rather limited. Like not a few poetesses since Emily Dickinson, she deliberately bends her verse towards prose by suppressing the beat" (*Clement Greenberg* 1: 121). Greenberg never satisfactorily explains why Anne Riddler must be compared to a female poet, or why the alledged flaw they share should be attributed to poetesses and not poets, but the pairing helps him establish a tendency, a genealogy attributable to women as poets. When he refers to Emily Dickinson a second time, in his review of the 1946 Whitney Annual, he makes his gender biases clearer and more entangled in the class issues that we considered in our earlier analysis of his gendered, modernistic attitude towards middle-class culture. Complaining again about the delight that collectors, prominent art institutions like the Whitney and The Museum of Modern Art, and leading critics took in what he regarded as a fashionable French-derived form of modernism, he credits this to

the absence of a stable leisured or a self-confident intellectual class in this country, prepared to rally to each other's help against the attrition of journalism, fashion, publicity, and kitsch. As it is, the "art world" in America remains a parody the object of which varies—now the fashion world, now the literary world, now the night-club world, now Miss Dickinson's garden (*Clement Greenberg* 2: 117).



The diminution of exalted values that the fashion world and night-clubs represent, loci for female entry into the public realm, exists as well in what Greenberg regards as a nature-oriented retreat from serious thinking—gardening.<sup>13</sup> He finds Dickinson to be a menace because the high quality of her poetry lends credence to such an unpalatable, feminized alternative.

Although he mentions Dickinson's work only in passing in these instances, he develops a fairly lengthy, gender-based critique of Marianne Moore's poetry in a 1941 review of her book, *What are Years?*, which he conducts in conjunction with a review of *Selected Poems* by a young, male, British poet George Barker. Greenberg takes advantage of the pairing in this instance, whether he intended to do so or not, to contrast them along coded, gendered lines. This strategy begins in the opening sentence when he asserts that Barker "has an excess of energy, the other a deficiency of it" (*Clement Greenberg* 1: 85). Greenberg thus sets male power and fulfillment against the notion of female "lack." Employing standard stereotypes about women's art, he views Moore's poetry as relatively weak. It shows "a certain thinness, a certain frailty ... It is small-scale poetry ... [The formal character of her] verse no less than its matter seem pure captiousness, pure kittenishness" (*Clement Greenberg* 1: 85). Barker meets Greenberg's equally stereotypical expectations about men and excellence. He is "an *enthusiastick* poet, stagey and full of violence and rant."<sup>14</sup> Greenberg is pleased that Barker capitalizes on male access to the public sphere. "Barker is more extroverted [than Dylan Thomas, even], more conscious of himself in relation to the external" (*Clement Greenberg* 1: 88). Greenberg looks for and finds indications that Marianne Moore's poetry lacks this external stimulus, developing instead from within a circumscribed "feminine" world. He grumbles about her "predilections, being guided ultimately by nothing outside themselves ... Miss Moore's belongs to the immediate detail; it is the result of concentration upon the minutest and most idiosyncratic features of experience."<sup>15</sup>

His sense that she has not engaged herself with his male vision of the "real world" permits him to complain that she concentrates too much on formal matters because she has so little about which she can write. He contends that her "unity ... is too exclusively a unity of sensibility, without intellectual consistency, without large opinions, ... Miss Moore makes only aesthetic discriminations" (*Clement Greenberg* 1: 85). This is a curious charge coming from Greenberg, long a staunch formalist, but it is a standard orthodox modernist complaint levelled against women's art because it condemns their creations to being what modernism loathes most: academic exercises. The paradoxical nature of Greenberg making this critique underscores how gender values supercede other criteria he

might employ. He and other orthodox modernists constantly have used a double standard, even when they proclaim objective criteria of excellence.<sup>16</sup> This is confirmed in the review by the way he prefers the unperfected “male” characteristics he saw in Barker’s poetry to the “feminine” excellence that he grants Moore’s work. As he put matters in his concluding remarks:

One could wish that instead of modifying his ambition Barker would try the more difficult task of developing his powers to equal it. I am tired of small poetry. Poetry is an art equipped to treat everything and to transform everything into itself. The perfection of Miss Moore’s poetry is too narrow; it abandons too much. Barker’s pretensions—and the fact that he does not fall short of them too ridiculously—are at least a reminder of what poetry could do, of what vast thirsts it once could satisfy (*Clement Greenberg*1: 88-89).

Greenberg never admits to sexism, yet he does discuss the canonical basis of his value system in this review. “George Barker’s energy,” Greenberg writes in praise, “stems not only from his youth but from a tradition [Barker is a British poet], while Miss Moore starts almost from scratch” (*Clement Greenberg* 1: 85). Building on a heritage requires its existence not only in national terms, but in gendered terms as well. Greenberg provides Barker with both, though he discusses just the national heritage openly, denying Moore a substantive heritage in either sphere. While Greenberg fails to perceive the gendered and closed nature of this canon, he overtly expresses the gendered nature of his criteria once, when he discusses his contention that Moore is an “eccentric,” “idiosyncratic writer.” “Irritated” by the capacity of her verse to “delight” even as it violates his rules of good poetry, he paraphrases a line she wrote and rants, “Feminine odd American young poetess!”<sup>17</sup>

Emily Dickinson’s and Marianne Moore’s poetry represents a mode of American modernism that he worries aloud in “Present Prospects” had shown a false path, a “sensibility confined, intensified”—that is, highly subjective. “The art that results does not show us enough of ourselves,” he claims, “and the kind of life we live in our cities, and therefore does not release enough of our feeling” (*Clement Greenberg* 2: 166). His references to “the kind of life we live in our cities,” and a “release ... of feeling” are particularly noteworthy given the context, for he contrasts Dickinson’s and Moore’s outlook to what he claims is an antithetical spirit in Faulkner’s, Melville’s, and Jackson Pollock’s creations. These male artists drew upon deep-seated, non-urban roots, yet Greenberg finds this puzzling and has little interest in pursuing this aspect of their work. He wants their achievements to point to an unabashedly urban value

system, which he prizes as a sure sign of progressivity. “In painting today such an urban art can be derived only from cubism. Significantly and peculiarly, the only one who promises to be a major one is a Gothic, morbid and extreme disciple of Picasso’s cubism. His name is Jackson Pollock” (*Clement Greenberg* 2: 166). Greenberg’s promotion of what he will develop into an exclusively urban sensibility and his praise of these artists’ expressionistic character involves more a matter of taste and less aesthetic rectitude than he or some of his followers would acknowledge. While most observers would agree with Greenberg’s assessment that these artists are expressionists (i.e., they are engaged in a “release ... of feeling”), he never explains why this is valuable. Nor does he explain why the emotions they express, which he heralds as “violence, exasperation and stridency,” should be regarded as cultural or aesthetic virtues. These contentions only make sense to the degree that they confirm the phallogocentric ideological systems that have cultivated them; the entrenched position of male-dominated violence in the modern era helps explain his position.

The aesthetic generation and “release” of violence achieves two orthodox modernistic goals. It projects force and domination out into its surroundings, while seemingly diffusing the acknowledged reprehensible nature of violence. A key to the modern, machismo mythos is its mechanisms for arousing (a term I use advisedly here) force—its urge to show the power manifest in violence through a penetration and domination of external spaces, and its desire for human control over that energy, which offers the individual moral redemption within this scheme. *Man* expends *his* force and measures how “good” he is by what he achieves.

Greenberg’s assertion that modern art should address “the kind of life we live in our cities” and his more puzzling claim that Faulkner, Melville, and Pollock best lead American art in this direction, show the critic directing all thinking about their creations toward an orthodox modernist paradigm. While each of these artists demonstrates a profound awareness of urban and industrial values, each also possesses an unusual affinity for nature. Each had non-urban roots that always informed their creations. As Pollock remarked in 1944, when asked why he chose to live in New York City, “Living is keener, more demanding, more intense and expansive in New York. At the same time, I have a definite feeling for the West: the vast horizontality of the land, for instance; here only the Atlantic ocean gives you that.”<sup>18</sup> A year and a half later, just before he began creating his most important work, Pollock left the city and moved to a coastal setting in what was then a rural part of Long Island. He, like Melville and Faulkner, needed to keep in close contact with natural forces, yet orthodox modernistic enthusiasts of his work continually expurgate nature’s importance in their interpretations. Not satisfied with

explicating its urban expressivity, they seek to purify his art in order to root it of all vestiges of provincialism and other values they mistrust. They associate nature with provincialism because of its important role in what most scholars regard as a uniquely American aesthetic and because of its ties to an older, rustic way of life, but they also mistrust artists' turn toward nature because of its Freudian implications of a precivilized state of human awareness and its cultural ties to femininity. An urban sensibility signifies progress, worldliness, civilization, and manliness, so these critics and scholars force it to become an all too exclusive value in the art they advocate, even when this distorts the facts.<sup>19</sup> Pollock undoubtedly relished any affirmation of his masculinity and may have pursued certain masculinist strains offered by Greenberg's criticism, but Greenberg's perspective misinterprets Pollock's art. Greenberg's interpretive effort involves an act of sublimation on his part. He rationalizes the more extroverted violence he finds in Faulkner's, Melville's and Pollock's work by harnessing it to the symbolic forces of order and productivity that have become embedded in urban culture.

Just as Greenberg praised George Barker's poetry for qualities it did not truly possess, he would constantly do the same with Jackson Pollock's paintings and the work of others. In the case of Barker, Greenberg's preconception involved the notion of "largeness," while with Pollock it involved largeness and an urban sensibility. Each of these male artists' "imperfect" realization of what Greenberg expected from their work represents flaws he believes they would correct as they achieved full manhood. Greenberg writes about Pollock's work in "Present Prospects:"

For all of its Gothic [i.e., transcendental, romantic, subjective] quality, Pollock's art is still an attempt to cope with urban life; it dwells entirely in the lonely jungle of immediate sensations, impulses and notions, therefore is positivist, concrete. Yet its Gothic-ness, its paranoia and resentment narrow it; large though it may be in ambition—large enough to contain inconsistencies, ugliness, blind spots and monotonous passages—it nevertheless lacks breadth (*Clement Greenberg* 2: 166).

That the so-called Gothic characteristics of Pollock's paintings remained central to his work all of his life never seems to have interested Greenberg. His unwillingness to address that aspect of the work adequately, or to acknowledge its importance even as he continued to regard Pollock as the most important painter of his generation, remains a mystery, except in the context of his imposition of an urbanizing, masculinist, orthodox modernist paradigm on the American scene. Pollock's paintings, which Greenberg sincerely admired, have been forced to carry values Greenberg sought in culture, even though he

imposed them through a willful process of rationalizations. Many scholars and critics adhering to Greenberg's explications, such as William Rubin, have readily fostered this outlook, and gendered values lie at the heart of this interpretive framework.

Greenberg introduces Pollock (along with Melville and Faulkner) at this juncture of "The Present Prospects of Painting and Sculpture," following his analysis of poets, in order to contrast him with what he had come to regard as a false start that contemporary American painting had made. He did not want American modernism to stumble unwittingly into a *cul-de-sac*. This "false start" had actually been Greenberg's own, largely unknown affair, involving his early praise of Mark Tobey's abstractions. Greenberg had first written about Pollock's paintings in a 1943 review for *The Nation*, but at that time he had been equivocal about the artist's talents. "The mud abounds in Pollock's larger works, and these, though the least consummated, are his most original and ambitious" (*Clement Greenberg* 1: 165). Tobey's work, by contrast, received almost unstinting praise in a review he wrote for the same magazine some six months later in which he heralded the canvases primarily for qualities such as delicacy, smallness, and an interest in the ineffable that society has traditionally regarded as belonging to a femininely coded aesthetic.

The showing of Mark Tobey's latest paintings ... deserves the most special notice. ... he has made one of the few original contributions to contemporary American painting. ... color is a delicate affair of pale tints. Tobey's great innovation is his "white writing;" the interlacing of white lines which ... cause the picture surface to vibrate in depth. Tobey registers and transmits emotion usually considered too tenuous to be made the matter of any other art than music (*Clement Greenberg* 1: 205-206).

Greenberg had a sincere admiration for this work, though even at this time he felt that Tobey's work lacked the character of truly great art. "And yet again—his painting is not major. It is obligatory that Tobey work to expand his range" (*Clement Greenberg* 2: 118).

Over the next several years, those doubts grew along with his regard for a masculine aesthetic, and his 1946 review of the Whitney Annual, the one in which he rued about "Miss Dickinson's garden," marks the first time that he publicly reversed his assessments of Tobey's and Pollock's relative merit. "The best painting in the present show is Jackson Pollock's *Two*. Those who think I exaggerate Pollock's merit are invited to compare this large vertical canvas with everything else in the Annual. Mark Tobey, too, is represented by a strong picture, but in the presence of the Pollock the minor quality of his achievement, original as it is, becomes even

more pronounced than before" (*Clement Greenberg 2*: 118). By the time Greenberg penned "The Present Prospects of American Painting and Sculpture" a few months later, he had turned this distinction into one of major cultural importance and had justified it using explicitly gender-coded language. He upholds Mark Tobey (and Morris Graves, whom Greenberg almost always briefly mentioned in conjunction with Tobey) as "the two most original American painters today, in the sense of being the most uniquely and differentiatedly American" (*Clement Greenberg 2*: 165). But, he then decries their accomplishment as having "turned out to be so narrow as to cease even being interesting." He claims that such a sensibility "confined, intensified, and repeated this way has been a staple of American art and literature since Emily Dickinson; but it has also been an evasion, even in the person of such a wonderful poet as Marianne Moore" (*Clement Greenberg 2*: 166). Tobey is thus placed in a feminized milieu that Greenberg establishes in order to contrast it with what he will say about Jackson Pollock and the new "prospects" for American art and culture he claims are emerging. Greenberg constructs a gendered distinction between these artists. And because the contrasts do not rely exclusively on an artist's sex, at least not with respect to male artists, they show the extent to which the critic projects gender into his evaluative criteria. A male artist such as Mark Tobey can be unbraided for "female" limitations as readily as a female artist, for worth is designated in terms of "masculinity."<sup>20</sup>

The cultural importance that Greenberg attaches to this value system becomes even clearer in the last section of his essay, where he relies on a wealth of positivistic and masculinely gendered evaluations (both coded and uncoded) to herald America's most promising "prospects." He eschews America's inherent climate for newness and change and calls instead for American artists to promote a core of established European values. He begins this process with his familiar tactic of pairing artists. Introducing David Smith in his ongoing discussion of Jackson Pollock, Greenberg creates the sense of a common spirit alive among artists and expands the range of values that he might advocate if he discussed just one artist. Smith becomes the rationalistic counterweight to what he regards as Pollock's excessive verve. The two artists are set somewhat in opposition to one another, but without sacrificing masculinist authority. Greenberg tells the reader that

Smith's art is more enlightened, optimistic and broader than Pollock's and makes up for its lesser force by *virile elegance* that is without example in a country where elegance is otherwise obtained only by *femininity* or by the wistful, playful, derivative kind of decorativeness we see in such artists as the sculptor-constructor Alexander Calder and the painter Stuart

Davis, both of whom have great taste but little force (*Clement Greenberg* 2:167; emphasis added).

He clearly adopts the longstanding bourgeois prejudice that “decorativeness,” a synonym for ornamentation and adornment, is a minor, feminine attribute and that “elegance” is doubly feminine because it combines ornamentation with acculturation.<sup>21</sup> Of course, education and acculturation also represent the use of reason, so if he can create an artist who displays “virile elegance,” he can revitalize enlightenment virtues within the passions claimed for avant-garde, revolutionary culture. Individualism, long coded as a male attribute, makes this possible; it is an objectifying agency within the masculinist scheme, where men test themselves against passions’ temptations and find out if they can act productively outside of all “domesticating” regulatory agencies. Greenberg seeks a balance between what he perceives as rationalism’s and romanticism’s extremes, believing that these two sensibilities can inform one another and hold in check the proclivity for each to develop its own form of excess and degenerate into unmanly dissolution.

He then continues the essay by setting forth in gendered, masculine and rationalistic terms the aesthetic ideal that he had not yet seen but hoped would develop in the United States. First he establishes the principles for this ideal state. “Balance, largeness, precision, enlightenment, contempt for nature in all its particularity—that is the great and absent art of our age” (*Clement Greenberg* 2: 168). Each of these qualities implies gendered values, and the way he groups these points intensifies their gendered connotations. “Largeness” has long won men praise in modern society, as we have already witnessed in Greenberg’s own writings. The reader will recall how he analyzed Mark Tobey’s, Emily Dickinson’s, and Marianne Moore’s works within distinctly feminine contexts and contrasted the “confined,” “small” nature of what they did against the size and breadth of vision that he attributed to Jackson Pollock’s and George Barker’s allegedly strong, virile creations. If Barker and Pollock show any weaknesses in their early work, Greenberg believed, it was that their creations were not yet “large” enough. “Largeness” as a literal, physical characteristic rapidly became a major, prized quality of Abstract Expressionism beginning around 1947 (this is the year that Pollock moved into his newly purchased and renovated Long Island studio-barn and made his first sustained set of large paintings), but largeness, in the full sense that Greenberg intends, serves to express a broad set of values attributable to a distinctly masculine topos. It refers to the capacity of a work to make itself felt through an invasive conquest of space—through presence—and to obtain hegemonic control over all that might fall within the artist’s grasp. Unity, which can be obtained in part through balance, contributes to largeness in this

second sense, and it too is strongly coded as a modern, masculine attribute.<sup>22</sup> Orthodox modernists, who call for largeness and unity, champion a totalizing mastery and oppose an outlook that privileges an artist's small symbiotic play within a system viewed as impervious to an individual's complete control.

Greenberg shows his full rationalistic, masculinist attitude when he ends his litany of virtues by calling for a "contempt for nature in all its particularity." Nature has long been a trope for femininity in Western culture; Greenberg, himself, the reader will remember, readily posits the origins of nature worship in American art to a woman, Emily Dickinson. His "contempt" for nature expresses a contempt for culturally coded, feminine values, and the way he opposes "balance," "precision," and "enlightenment" against "nature in all its particularity" confirms this. Naomi Schor in her book *Reading in Detail* points out that classical Greek philosophy first initiated a gendered distinction that opposed ideal form, *eidos*, against the undifferentiated and particulate character the Greeks attributed to nature. People rose above nature, the Greeks believed, by using reason to discover ideal forms and by creating a perfected, rational and unified world based upon idealism. Enlightenment thinkers adopted this rationalistic outlook and intensified its gendered polarity at the outset of the modern era. Aestheticians such as Joshua Reynolds maintained that an artist's concern with the particular, especially as found in nature, would "deviate from the universal rule and *pollute his canvas with deformity. He [the artist], corrects nature by herself.*"<sup>23</sup> Schor points out that we should pay close attention to his gendered, pronomial forms, for they affirm the gendered nature of enlightenment thought. Women, the idealist mentality claims, give themselves over to nature and belong "to an outlook that has to break things into small pieces in order to see them, that has to destroy the organic unity of everything it treats" (*Clement Greenberg* 1: 85), as Greenberg says of Marianne Moore's poetry. Men, with their unifying capability, bring order to this potential chaos through "balance," "precision," and "enlightenment"—that is, their rational faculties.

It thus requires a very particular sensibility, Greenberg maintains, to cultivate significant art:

We stand in need of a much greater infusion of consciousness than heretofore into what we call the creative. We need *men* of the world not too much at loss in the face of current events, not at all overpowered by their own feelings, *men* to some extent aware of what has been felt elsewhere since the beginning of recorded history (*Clement Greenberg* 2: 168; emphasis added).

His significant and repetitious use of the word "men" in this quotation confirms that the sensibility he has in mind is a masculine one. While the



word “man” has long served as a synonym for “person” in English, the above quotation marks only the second time in this essay that Greenberg uses “man” this way, and both instances take place in this same section of the article. Its rare usage highlights it and signals his desire to employ it with its full connotative, thus gendered, meaning. He repeats the term in an emphatic way in the sentences I have quoted and sets it within a context that further enhances its masculine character. The “men” about whom he speaks—“of the world not too much at loss in the face of current events, ... aware of recorded history”—mirror attributes movies, news reports and speeches valorized in contemporary, male military and political leaders such as General Douglas MacArthur and Winston Churchill. Greenberg contrasts his much sought after “men” with individuals who might be “overpowered by their own feelings,” which refers to an emotionalism that has been attributed to women and cowards since at least the French Revolution.

Greenberg began the article with an historical account of American art which excluded women, and he concludes it with a call for a future guided by ideal artists, whom he conceives in even more strongly gendered and masculine terms. The essay follows this pattern because gender bias permeates the modernistic value system, particularly the rationalistic approach, that he prizes. The more enthusiastic Greenberg became about modernism and the more he championed it, the more he endowed it with masculinist and other orthodox attributes.

This touched a responsive chord in his readership, for sexism, long a staple of modernist and American modernist criticism, intensified during and after World War II. Greenberg’s views are by no means unusual for his time. Indeed, he professed sensitivity to gender inequality in the arts and opposed it in principle. When he reviewed Gertrude Barrer’s first exhibition only six months prior to the publication of “The Present Prospects of Painting and Sculpture,” he praised her accomplishments and went on to remark that: “One can only hope that she escapes those social and cultural handicaps that have in the past generally combined to frustrate female talent in the plastic arts” (*Clement Greenberg 2*: 132). But even on this occasion he employs patently masculine values and contradicts his own admonitions. He writes that “Miss Barrer is not a *large* and *heroic* talent; her effects are still *minor* at best and somewhat restricted” (*Clement Greenberg 2*: 132; emphasis added). She becomes one of the many female artists whose accomplishments he calls minor and whom he never finds worthy to write about more than once, should he comment on their work in the first place. His rhetoric and more important actions set in motion a biased critical program quite at odds with the objectivity and human rectitude that he believes guide it.<sup>24</sup>

Most of the important critics of his age, including his chief rival,

Harold Rosenberg, championed masculinely coded social and aesthetic values such as stridency, action, and largeness, and this encouraged all of them to attend almost exclusively to art men in particular were encouraged to make. Greenberg deserves special attention only because of his unusual importance and influence as a critic. His extraordinary skills in recognizing a generation's unexpected and important new art, his ability in writing so cogently about this work, *and* his affirmation of certain prevailing social values has made his interpretation of modernism highly influential. The resurgence of feminism in the 1970s, following its fallow mid-century period, has, however, raised serious questions that still need to be answered about the largely unspoken assumptions governing late, orthodox modernist aesthetics. Greenberg's penchant for thinking outloud about culture in his relatively early essays amplifies the sexist character of the value system that he embraced and that has dominated western culture for some time.

The power that the United States, the first uniquely modern nation-state, wielded after World War II, and the maturation that this signalled, increased Greenberg's confidence in his vision; the nation's might in turn increased the authority of his view. His critical perspective substantively defined the times and created an historical view that largely eclipsed other modernist tendencies, obscuring them until postmodern art and aesthetic discourse began to draw greater attention to them in opposition to orthodox modernism. Greenberg himself might have been willing to pay greater attention to modernism's pluralistic character—its own revolutionary and antagonistic spirit—but the power and safety engendered by historical determinism, and its call for a clearcut alignment of all significant lines of influence, long ago captivated his thinking. He thus stands in a long line of cultural critics who have conservatively adopted models to guide what they regard as a promising but immature, and thus innately wayward, American and avant-garde culture. Greenberg's vision of the nation's art assumed that it would play a traditionally defined role in carrying out Western culture's historical destiny. The notion of an historical destiny contains a progressive component only in so far as it is conceived in terms of a slowly developing ideal. But to be part of this historical chain, a people must conform to certain norms. For all of its progressive instincts, historical determinism holds on to conservative values, which helps explain Greenberg's sometimes unwitting, but often very strong and self-righteous sexism.

The intensification of gender biases during the war and the postwar era also helps explain Greenberg's views and some of the uncritical support that a number of his ideas have received. He became caught up in the masculinist ethos that guided the United States' triumph in the war and that carried over into its international triumphs in so many other spheres

of influence. During this period, he even cultivated an air of macho violence. As his fellow editor at *Partisan Review*, William Barrett, has noted, “Greenberg had lately [ca. 1942] won a reputation of someone ‘who goes around socking people’” (which was Delmore Schwarz’s way of putting it).<sup>25</sup> Greenberg’s 1947 profile of ideal artists (“men of the world not too much amazed by experience, not too much at loss in the face of current events, not at all overpowered by their own feelings” [*Clement Greenberg* 2: 168]) could almost serve as a script for one of the moralizing, voiceover truisms of war movies that became so popular during and after World War II. As his attitudes gained currency, Greenberg made less of their social implications in his aesthetic formulations. Their sexist character became more obscure as he enfolded them into an increasingly abstract aesthetic discourse, yet his biases have remained intact and have continued to surface in various ways. The attitude that he ascribes to “Modernist artists” in 1961, for instance, echoes the sensibility that people revered in test pilots, whom Tom Wolf in *The Right Stuff* has astutely presented as the ultimate, virile, American heroes for the period between World War II and the tumultuous Vietnam protest era (a benchmark one can use to cite the beginnings of a resurgent feminism and the related establishment of postmodernism). Greenberg, who served a brief stint in the army-airforce, writes:

The immediate aims of Modernist artists remain individual before anything else, ... Modernist art ... has needed the accumulation over decades of a good deal of individual achievement. Modernist art ... converts all theoretical possibilities into empirical ones, and in doing so tests, inadvertently, all theories about art for their relevance to the actual practice and experience of art.<sup>26</sup>

Lone, individual artists show the “right stuff.” They pragmatically test ideas and pare a given practice down to its singular, streamlined essentials. These artists must constantly “push the envelop,” testing and taking risks, yet they will achieve success because they are the chosen few who know their craft well and use history, knowledge, and reason as a guide.

From today’s perspective, Greenberg’s value system inextricably reflects its time, which witnessed the establishment of orthodox modernism as a cultural construct in the wake of America’s successes during the war and postwar era. Clement Greenberg sought to make the art he admired a major cultural force in a society innately skeptical of art’s efficacy. He developed its efficacy in his own mind and in terms that his society could admire along its own prevailing, late-capitalist, masculinist and rationalist lines of thought. Greenberg founded his most influential aesthetic principles on profoundly gendered attitudes, which he

at first rigidly policed. His success as a critic in part grew from culture's receptiveness to an orthodox modernist vision and the values it mirrors. This success has, in turn, helped establish the historical pre-eminence of this narrowly defined conception of modernism. Gender, as becomes increasingly apparent, plays a crucial part in the broader set of values that govern orthodox modernism, since it constitutes a central nexus for various biased strands of orthodox modernist ethos that Greenberg and others have promulgated and because it engenders within that group a deeply satisfying masculinist sense of power and authority.

## Notes

- 1 Rozsika Parker and Griselda Pollock, *Old Mistresses: Women, Art and Ideology* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1981), 136.
- 2 Thomas Crow, "Modernism and Mass Culture," *Modernism and Modernity: The Vancouver Conference Papers*, eds. Benjamin H.D. Buchloh, Serge Guilbaut and David Solkin (Halifax: The Press of the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, 1983), 217.
- 3 See Lucy R. Lippard, "Introduction: Changing Since *Changing*," *From the Center, Feminist Essays on Women's Art* (New York: E.P. Dutton & Co., Inc., 1976), 3: "I recognize now the seeds of feminism in my revolt against Clement Greenberg's patronization of artists, against the imposition of the taste of one class on everybody, against the notion that if you don't like so-and-so's work for the 'right' reasons, you can't like it at all, as well as against the 'masterpiece syndrome,' the 'three great artists' syndrome, and so forth."
- 4 Clement Greenberg, "The Present Prospects of American Painting and Sculpture," 1 *Horizon* (October 1947) as reprinted in *Clement Greenberg: The Collected Essays and Criticism, II*, ed. John O'Brian (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1986), 160-161. Further references to Greenberg's pre-1950 writings will direct the reader to John O'Brian's authoritative edition of Greenberg's complete writings, which henceforth will be referred to in the text as "*Clement Greenberg 1*" (volume 1, 1939-1944); or, "*Clement Greenberg 2*" (volume 2, 1945-1949).
- 5 Parker and Pollock, 44.
- 6 David Carrier, *Artwriting* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1987), 37-39: "Greenberg does not work out his genealogies in detail. Greenberg is a short-winded writer, so the power of the historical framework that he sketches so lightly is all the more impressive. When Greenberg agrees with consensus, he appeals to the uniformity of taste; when he does not, he introduces a sociological hypothesis."
- 7 I have based my statistics primarily upon the names provided in the indexes of the three volumes of Greenberg's compiled writings: his own *Art and Culture* and the recently published, two volume, set of essays and criticism written between 1939 and 1949. Moreover, I have been generous with my *Art and Culture* count. When I stumbled upon an unindexed reference to Gertrude Stein, I added her name to the two women mentioned in the index, who are located under the headings "art galleries" and "shows at" and could be dismissed as references to institutions rather than the women (Peggy Guggenheim and Betty Parsons).
- 8 Clement Greenberg, *Art and Culture, Critical Essays* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1961), vii.
- 9 Griselda Pollock, "History and Position of the Contemporary Woman Artist,"

- Aspects* (Autumn 1984), n.p.: “the complex relations between the bourgeoisie and its culture drastically altered the social spaces occupied by the artist-figure. The Romantic myth and its urban derivative, the Bohemian myth, placed the artist decisively in the sphere of the masculine, but in an oblique relation to the bourgeois norms of masculinity which were lived and regulated in the office, factory and home. Peter Cominos has elaborately identified the Respectable Social System of the mid-nineteenth century bourgeoisie in which ‘manliness’ was accomplished by hard work, thrift, sexual restraint and family responsibility. The artist was projected in difference, as the figure of freedom from social regulations and as such the artist articulates the contradictions within bourgeois ideologies of masculinity.”
- 10 Parker and Pollock, 82.
  - 11 Leo Steinberg, “Other Criteria,” *Other Criteria* (London: Oxford University Press, 1972), 57-78.
  - 12 June Wayne, “The Male Artist as a Stereotypical Female,” *Art Journal* 32 (Summer 1973) as reprinted in *Feminist Collage: Educating Women in the Visual Arts*, ed. Judy Loeb (New York: Teachers College Press, 1979), 129-130.
  - 13 Griselda Pollock, *Vision and Difference* (London: Routledge, 1988), 79: “Women could enter and represent selected locations in the public sphere [during the nineteenth century]—those of entertainment and display. But a line demarcates not the end of the public divide but the frontier of the spaces of femininity. Below this line lies the realm of the sexualized and commodified bodies of women. It is a line that marks off a class boundary but it reveals where new class formations of the bourgeois world restructures gender relations.”
  - 14 *Clement Greenberg* 1: 87. Note the verve he adds to this characterization by his pseudo-German word “enthusiastick.”
  - 15 *Clement Greenberg* 1: 85-86. One of the “idiosyncratic features” that he goes on to cite is marriage.
  - 16 Anne Higonnet, “Writing the Gender of the Image: Art Criticism in Late Nineteenth-Century France,” *Genders* (Fall 1989), 60-72, details the earlier history of this phenomenon.
  - 17 *Clement Greenberg* 1: 86. The poem, “Virginia Britannia,” contrasts the Virginia that Europeans fashioned with the land once inhabited by American Indians, and contains the following lines, which Greenberg quotes in the review: “Odd Pamunkey/princess, birdclaw-erringed; with a pet racoon/from the Mattapo-/ni (what a bear!) Feminine/odd Indian young lady! ...” Greenberg takes obvious delight in equating Moore and her being a female, American poet with a quality of noble savagery.
  - 18 [Answers to a questionnaire.] *Arts and Architecture* 61 (February 1944): 14.
  - 19 See Matthew Rohn, *Visual Dynamics in Jackson Pollock’s Abstractions* (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1987), 153, n. 19. There I point out that William Rubin, whose scholarship owes a great debt to Greenberg’s approach, overstates the urbanizing expressivity of Pollock’s art in an attempt to rescue Pollock from his provincial, American origins. I cite in that note an article by Ellen Johnson, who provides the best analysis of the relationship between Pollock’s work and nature. It is more than a matter of coincidence that in 1973 a woman developed this analysis, which stands in sharp contrast to the position held by male, orthodox modernistic critics and scholars such as Greenberg and Rubin.
  - 20 When Greenberg had doubts about Arshile Gorky’s significance in a 1945 review he wrote for *The Nation*, he claimed: “Because Gorky remained so long a promising painter, the suspicion arose that he lacked independence and masculinity of character” (*Clement Greenberg* 2: 13).
  - 21 Naomi Schor, *Reading in Detail: Aesthetics and the Feminine* (New York: Routledge, 1987), 19: “at the same time as the detail militates against the production of the Sublime, it produces by its very anarchic proliferation another style, the Elegant or Ornamental [and as Joshua Reynolds explains]:

- ‘what may heighten the elegant may degrade the sublime.’”
- 22 Anna C. Chave, “Minimalism and the Rhetoric of Power,” *Arts Magazine* 64 (January 1990), 56: “Received art historical wisdom about what makes works of art ‘powerful’ is a quality of unity, with effects of dissonance or differences successfully effaced or overmastered such that an object’s or image’s composite parts are maneuvered into singular, coherent totality. Unity is associated with identity and a successful work of art is understood to require a whole identity no less than an integrated person does.”
- 23 Schor, 16.
- 24 His legendary support of Helen Frankenthaler is one of several exceptions that helps prove this rule. Though he promoted her work in a number of important ways early on (introducing her to influential people, speaking highly of her work to people in the art world, etc.), he never mentions her in print until nearly eight years after she painted her groundbreaking abstraction *Mountain and Seas* in 1952. Even when he finally does mention her in print, he does so only in a parenthetical remark included in a May, 1960 *Art International* article on Morris Louis and Ken Noland. By that time, he had already promoted Louis and Noland, along with Jules Olitsky, as the most important artists to emerge after the first generation abstract expressionists, and those three (recall Lucy Lippard’s complaint about the ‘three great artists syndrome’) would remain the postpainterly abstractionists whom he would continue to champion most in print.
- 25 William Barrett, *The Truants: Adventures among the Intellectuals*, (Garden City, 1982): 41. Barrett goes on to note that: “the reputation was highly inflated. There were two cases. The incidents had been much talked about, and a good many people condemned Greenberg’s resort to violence. One of his staunchest defenders, however, was Hannah Arendt .... Greenberg’s actions, she felt, showed a certain sense of honor, ... ‘This young man,’ she said, ‘has some sense of manliness and honor.’ And she invoked the name of Camus ... and the latter’s sense of a ‘virile ideal.’ Greenberg himself followed this line; he did not apologize for those incidents, there had been principle involved, and he had struck with due deliberation.”
- 26 Clement Greenberg, “Modernist Painting,” *Art and Literature* 4 (Spring 1965), 199-200.

# The Earliest Bullfight Images of Pablo Picasso

Dina Comisarenco

Although critical literature abounds in stylistic analysis and iconographic interpretations of the latest examples of Picasso's bullfight images, there is no specialized study which focuses on the artist's childhood artistic attempts. The fact that Picasso kept a constant dialogue with both his emotional and his artistic past seems to justify this endeavor.

Most scholars devoted to the study of Picasso's famous *Guernica* of 1937 argue the symbolic meaning of its bull. It is my thesis that the contradictory roles assigned to the animal in each individual study are not mutually exclusive if analyzed in the context of the artist's life. The different roles the bull played for Picasso since his early years of attendance at bullfights, accompanied by his father, until the artist's voluntary exile in France, account for the multilevel complexity of the symbol.

This paper deals with some of the passions and fears that Picasso experienced as a child. I will try to demonstrate here that the bullfight scenes sketched in his early notebooks<sup>1</sup> acted as the private arena in which the young artist was able to explore his feelings. Picasso's later bullfight scenes are further elaborations on his childhood memories.

*The Picador* of 1889-90 is one of the earliest examples of Picasso's bullfight images. The painting represents an ideal family portrait viewed from the self-centered perspective of the eight year old artist. The audience is constituted by a well characterized adult couple, presumably the parents, and a smaller child, Picasso himself. The still close relationship with his father is recognizable in the similar posture and characterization with which both father and son are depicted. The abundance of detail with which the female character is represented accounts for Picasso's emotional involvement with the maternal figure. The child's profound need for her constant and exclusive attention is visually enacted by the posture of the woman who does not pay any attention to the spectacle but to the little boy instead.

Children of this age usually picture horses as symbols of freedom in relation to the joy of growing. Because of their characteristic facility to

dramatize and to identify with actors and heroes it is possible to interpret the picador rider as a proud projection of the child Picasso, who in his clumsy way is being initiated in the oil painting art of his admired father.

In the *Bullfight* of 1890, scribbling pencil lines suggest the rising acknowledgment of the existence of a wider audience or social world as perceived by the nine year old child. The protagonist family trio, however, still receives special attention, plastically achieved through a more detailed characterization. The theme and figural postures reflect the child artist who is beginning to enjoy an increasing sense of independence. The familiarity with the medium employed, which did not demand the paternal supervision required by oil painting, allowed a more personal involvement with the theme. The dramatic scene which represents the hurting of a bullfighter by a bull is observed by the child who in the drawing is shown reacting with animated gesticulation. The mother, who in the oil painting did not care about the picador in the arena, is this time able to face the violent spectacle that so deeply engaged the child's attention. The father is the only one who turns his head away. The complex feelings of the child toward his father, at the same time loving and threatening, must have found an escape valve in the depiction of the bullfighter's failed performance. The child could not consciously accept his wish to harm his father, but in a drawing he could become his mother's partner in order to sadistically enjoy the bullfighter's tragedy, which so obviously affected Don Jose, Picasso's father. The upper part of the drawing has various examples of doves which Picasso was then faithfully learning to draw under paternal tutelage.

A sign of Picasso's resentment toward bullfighters, who in his infant view were probably assimilated to paternal authority, appears in another *Taurine Scene* of around the same period. The torero this time is depicted successfully performing his *faena*, the final act of killing the animal. His facial expression reveals, however, not an heroic but a malignant intention and his action is endured by the noble bull, who suffers as he receives the final stab standing still.

For a short period after his youngest sister's death in 1891 in La Coruna, Picasso avoided the depiction of the violent scenes of the arena. They must have taken on a real dimension which was probably too frightening to face in a painting. By then Picasso began instead to collaborate with his father, who increasingly allowed the child to finish some details of his own works.

In 1892 Picasso began his formal academic training and simultaneously continued his personal experiencing and depicting of bullfights. The sense of rivalry with his father and the anxiety experienced by the child around his complex love-hate struggle, are expressed in various bullfight drawings in which attempts are made to even the battling forces:



bull against bull, bull against horse, and two toreros against one bull. *The Last Toro*, of 1892, executed when Picasso was eleven years old, depicts an active bull who happily tries to challenge two passive toreros.

A caricaturesque *Bullfight Scene* of a torero escaping from a charging bull seems literally to illustrate the familiar Spanish expression, “*que te pilla el toro*” (the bull will get you). The scene could illustrate a scene actually observed by Picasso in a comic *toreo*, a popular children’s entertainment which parodies bullfights. But the election of the theme allows a deeper reading. The rising awareness of Picasso’s own power as a person and as a talented artist, and the corresponding weakening of the father’s image, accounts for the humorous inversion of the torero-bull relationship.

Bullfights have a characteristic erotic atmosphere: the matadors are regarded as the epitome of masculinity, the bulls are recognized as phallic symbols, and the rhythm of passes between men and bulls which culminates in the final stabbing recalls the paroxysm and plenitude of the sexual act.<sup>2</sup> The mature Picasso was sensitive to the erotic component of bullfights, and, beginning in 1917, he would insistently concentrate on abstractions of bull-horse couples with clear sexual connotations. As exemplified by the sketch of 1899 of a charging bull and a horse, executed by Picasso when he was only eight years old, his personal association between male-bulls and female-horses probably began to be shaped during those early years of attendance at bullfights.

Most of the bulls depicted by the young Picasso bear a well defined sexual characterization. There is in Spain, “a highly elaborate set of imagery concerned with being a true male and the possession of testicles. Such a relation is not only expressed in the everyday conversations of men when talking about themselves or about bulls, but can also be found in technical words dealing with the fighting bull.”<sup>3</sup> Picasso was undoubtedly familiar with this terminology and characterization of bulls, which helped him to covertly express, under a realist pretext, what must have been motivated by his most intimate concerns with sex and with his own physical development.

With regard to the female-horse’s association, it is interesting to observe that although there are female bullfighters they are not usually gladly received by the male Spanish *aficionados*. For them the only form of bullfight in which it is acceptable for a woman to participate is the *rejoneo* or mounted event. This common bias, probably expressed many times in Picasso’s paternal house, might have motivated in part his later equation woman-horse.

The repressive religious educational system of Picasso’s time must have encouraged in the curious child all sorts of unrealistic body fantasies. There is a characteristic child’s image of birth according to

which babies come out directly from the mother's belly. The dramatic spectacle of gored horses with gushing, bloody entrails the young Picasso frequently observed, might have provided him a visual corroboration of his sadistic birth fantasy, and may have led him to confirm the identification of horses and women. His *Bullfight* of 1901 features a close up view of a gored white horse which strongly corroborates the hypothesis.

It is very common for children to try to acquire knowledge about the sexual act by observing the behavior of animals. Usually, in the adult's view, their artistic depiction is not as censurable as if the actions are performed by humans. Picasso gives us proof of this phenomenon in his drawing of around 1894. The image is accompanied by a short verse with devious synonyms of genitals, and a pentagram which suggests the rhyme was perhaps accompanied by music when played at school.

I could not find early examples of sexual acts directly related to bullfight scenes, but it is easy to imagine that the violent penetration of the bull's horns in the horses' bodies must have signified for the child a powerful embodiment of the violence of the sexual act as usually perceived by young children. His later bull and horse series and his *Tauromachia* of 1935 might have come out of these childhood memories.

The idea of sacrifice implied in bullfights, which Picasso would later express in his *Crucifixions* of the 1930s, can be tracked down to his early childhood as well. Although the relation is not explicitly made, the pages of his early sketch books share several crucifixion and other scenes of the passion with the bullfight representations previously discussed. The bloody and tormented Christ's images that populate the Spanish churches must have impressed the imagination of the child accustomed to the violence of the arena. Both childhood memories must have merged in the adult painter when re-exploring the bullfight theme.

When Picasso "moved into adolescence a radical change in the father-son relationship took place. He rebelled against what by now had become the 'stifling atmosphere' of the parental home; he was critical of Don Jose's set ways; of his philistine outlook; of his old-fashioned artistic standards and the classical academic tradition in general."<sup>24</sup> Around 1894, when Picasso was thirteen years old, it is said that Don Jose, overwhelmed by his talented son, gave up his art profession.

A symptom of this troubled father-son relationship can be recognized by analyzing Picasso's contemporary thematic repertoire in which bullfights experienced a considerable reduction. Trying to simultaneously repeat and refuse his earlier father-son relationship, Picasso then began to look for other master artists to learn from, challenge, and eventually defeat. Among the few bullfight works executed by Picasso during those years, are some studies and sketches created not by memory or direct observation but after Goya's *Tauromaquia*. The Goya scenes chosen are,

except for the *Portrait of Pepe Illo*, the most violent of the series. *Bull Goring a Torero* of 1898 reproduces a part of Goya's engraving *Misfortunes of the Plaza de Madrid*, which represents a bull tossing a torero in the air.

In 1899 Picasso made his first etching and chose as his topic the same one of his first oil painting of ten years ago, a picador. The protagonist figure of the picador reappears in two watercolors of the same year, in various ink sketches, and in at least one pastel of 1900. By that time Picasso was beginning to experience the challenge of interacting with colleague artists in the stimulating intellectual world of Barcelona. The picador's section of a bullfight, in which the wildness or tamedness of a bull is revealed, probably offered to Picasso an expressive way to work out his fears at being tested in the art world. At the same time, the similarity of the phallic word "picas" and the name "Picasso" which the artist explored in his signature, might have contributed to a certain unconscious identification with these powerful figures he repeatedly depicted since his early childhood.

In the following years, which Picasso spent between Barcelona and Paris, the number of bullfight scenes augmented considerably. Despite the possible commercial purposes of the series, I believe it was created as a response to profound emotional needs as well. By choosing the bullfight theme when the artist decided to face a different culture, he emphasized his being Spanish. One of his self-portraits of 1901, made in Paris, bears the inscription "*Yo Picasso*."

The complex feelings Picasso must have experienced in entering his father's profession are reflected in his several experiments with signatures and names, which by this time acquire an insistent character. It was during those years that Picasso definitely dropped both his first and his father's names, "Pablo" and "Ruiz" respectively, and adopted his mother's instead, "Picasso." Dropping his father's name signified for the young Picasso a symbolic liberation, which would guard him from becoming the continuation of his defeated father. In this regard, it is valuable to observe that "the name of the stud bull is not perpetuated in its offspring, and the bull which performs in the arena, when it is out in public as it were, carries its mother's name. The names are always simple,"<sup>5</sup> like the one the artist chose for himself.

The bullfights of 1900-1901 are very vivid scenes of pure and very high colors. The dominant palette is usually composed of red and yellow, colors realistically associated with blood and sand, and, symbolically, with the Spanish national flag. The marked contrast of light and shade of most of the scenes correspond to the real division of sunny and shady zones in the bullrings. It suggests the dynamic oppositions constantly played out in bullfights. Red and yellow and "*sol y sombra*" will intrude in the quiet atmosphere of Picasso's cubist period in his *Spanish Still Life* of 1912.

In the 1930s Picasso incorporated into his personal iconography of bullfights a mythological reference, the *Minotaur*. This figure “had been much talked of by the Surrealists as a mythical being that corresponds in its duality to the conflicts within our conscious and subconscious minds.”<sup>6</sup> Picasso identified with this figure.

Although Picasso himself probably did not know much about Freudian theory until the time of his *Minotaur* series, his earlier works reflect it relatively directly. From a structural perspective, the main characters of the bullfights—matadors, bulls, and audience—can be identified respectively, with the ego, id, and superego. It is interesting to observe that Picasso, during this time of strong identity crisis and maturation, focused most of his paintings on toreros and audiences, and not on the powerful bulls of his early years.

Picasso’s interest in the human characters of bullfights of his Barcelona-Paris years probably constituted an outlet to cope with his troubled identification with parental values. Being an exile must have fulfilled his unconscious fantasy of being in the world without parents. When he finally decided in favor of France, the bullfight theme disappeared until a few months before his father’s death.

The bull of *Guernica* has been interpreted by different scholars in many different ways: impersonation of the artist himself, symbol of brutality, strength, national identity, and sacrifice. In light of the artist’s earliest experiences with bullfights, these multilevel associations are no longer mutually exclusive. The artist’s childhood sympathy toward the bull, the guilt complex that accompanied it in relation to his aficionado-father, the pain of death in the arena associated to the loss of his young sibling, uncertainties about personal and national identity, fantasies and fears of violence and sex—all these feelings and memories must have re-emerged spontaneously with the bombing of Guernica. Picasso received the tragic news in France, for after the outburst of the Spanish civil war the artist did not come back to his native land. The guilt associated with his elective absence from the fight that so deeply engaged his generation, is reflected in Picasso’s alter-ego, namely, the bull in *Guernica* who turns his head away from the dramatic event as Picasso’s father did in Picasso’s childhood drawings.

By studying Picasso’s bullfights one is drawn to explore a fascinating aspect of the artist’s creative imagination: his constant and fruitful dialogue between past and present. Picasso’s urge to transform his personal emotions into universal symbols made him blend childhood experiences with mythological beings and historical events. While examining his works we are forced to reconstruct, at least in part, the artist’s labyrinthine pathway.

As we deepen our understanding of Picasso's early experiences and artistic trials, the artist's later productions gain new levels of significance. As we advance in time we are forced to incorporate new ideas and schemes of analysis which fortify and enrich Picasso's earlier productions. What emerges from the experience is a picture of the dynamic interplay of artistic, historical and personal motivations which so dynamically merge in Picasso's works.

## Notes

My work on this topic was originated in a seminar given by Dr. Jack J. Spector in the Fall of 1989 at Rutgers University. A later version was presented at the Rutgers Graduate Students Symposium in 1992. I am very grateful to Dr. Spector for the stimulating ideas presented in class and for the warm enthusiasm with which he encouraged me to pursue my work.

- 1 See *Museo Picasso. Catalogo de pintura y dibujo* (Barcelona, 1986).
- 2 Michel Leiris, *Miroir de la tauromachie* (Paris, 1938).
- 3 Garry Marvin, *Bullfight* (New York, 1988), 91.
- 4 Jan Ehrenwals, "A Childhood Memory of Pablo Picasso," *American Imago* 24: (Spring-Summer 1967), 131.
- 5 Marvin, 96.
- 6 Sir Ronald Penrose, "The Beauty and the Monster," in *Picasso in Retrospect* (New York-Washington, 1972), 159.

# Regenerate Art: The Reception of German Expressionism in the United States, 1900-1945

Cécile Whiting

“REVENGE OF THE ‘DEGENERATES’” proclaimed the title of an article published in 1988, in which critic John Dornberg reported to his readers:

Exceptionally strong sales, in some cases record prices, were noted at a number of West German auctions in late spring and summer. Clear favorites in Cologne, Munich, Hamburg and Berlin were classical modern artists, particularly the German Expressionists and others, who had been branded “degenerate” by the Nazis.<sup>1</sup>

The conjunction between the label “degenerate” placed on German-Expressionist art in the 1930s and the market for such work just before the Second World War—and ever since—is not mere coincidence. In the United States, in particular, the circumstances and publicity surrounding the Degenerate Art Exhibition of 1937 in Munich account for the sudden surge in the exhibition and sale of German-Expressionist art in the late 1930s. The new visibility of German Expressionism in the United States went hand-in-hand with a critical reinterpretation of the movement. Before the late 1930s texts published in the United States proposed at least three competing narratives about the history and meaning of German Expressionism. After the 1937 exhibition in Munich, American art critics, museum curators, gallery directors and private collectors overwhelmingly endorsed the single argument that German Expressionism, while the fruit of a German national artistic tradition, depicted universally shared emotions. In doing so they valorized German Expressionism for many of the same reasons that the Nazis had condemned it. The terms by which German Expressionism gained popularity in the United States during the late 1930s, in short, were defined largely within the cultural debate formulated by Hitler and his ministers; American critics simply converted a negative charge into a positive one.

Art historians have often maintained that until the 1930s American curators, dealers and collectors, owing to woeful ignorance and provincialism, completely overlooked German art of the twentieth century.<sup>2</sup> In the late 1920s American art critics themselves complained about the limited access to examples of German modern art in the United States; wrote one: “What are the German painters doing? We see comparatively little contemporary German art in the course of a season’s exhibition. The French output reaches our shores regularly in extremely generous consignments.”<sup>3</sup>

The Armory Show of 1913, the first large-scale exhibition of European modern art in the United States, clearly manifested the American institutional preference for French art. This exhibition focused primarily on the French Post-Impressionist, Fauve and Cubist artists, and included only a handful of German-Expressionist works, including Wilhelm Lehmbruck’s sculpture *Kneeling Woman* of 1911. The organizers of the Armory Show, contemporary accounts indicate, omitted German Expressionism essentially because they believed it to be derivative of Fauvism.<sup>4</sup> Prior to the Armory Show the only other concerted effort to introduce European art of the twentieth century to the United States—albeit for a much smaller audience—came from Alfred Stieglitz, who mounted shows of modern art in his gallery “291” and published reproductions of paintings and sculpture as well as articles about modernism in his periodical *Camera Work*. Stieglitz, like the organizers of the Armory Show, also gave pride of place to French art: no exhibitions of German-Expressionist artists occurred at “291.”<sup>5</sup> None of the institutions usually credited with introducing twentieth-century European art to the United States took much interest in German modernism in these early years.

The few exhibitions in the United States at this time that were devoted to German art of the twentieth century concentrated exclusively on graphic art. In 1912 an exhibition of etchings by Käthe Kollwitz opened in the Print Room of the New York Public Library, and the New York Branch of the Berlin Photographic Company mounted a comprehensive exhibition of German graphic art, including works by Max Pechstein and Lehmbruck.<sup>6</sup> Reviewing these two exhibitions critics invoked a well-established American contemporary critical practice of equating strong graphic lines with masculine vigor. The critic for the *New York Times* wrote of Kollwitz: “Frau Kollwitz is one of the new school of German thinkers who express their attitude toward social problems in various forms of art. She is also one of the few women ... whose work has masculine force and energy of execution.”<sup>7</sup> Rebecca Zurier has argued that by 1910 American art critics used the terms “big,” “virile” and “energetic” to formulate an ideal of manhood linked to sensation and

physicality; most often critics relied on these terms to characterize the sketchy style and urban subject matter of artists Robert Henri, Everett Shinn, George Luks, and George Bellows.<sup>8</sup> The taste that linked a forceful drawing style and masculine vigor cut across national boundaries, embracing German graphic art as well as emerging American realists.

After the Armory Show, interest in European modern art from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries blossomed, manifesting itself in a surge of exhibitions and in the establishment of a number of new art galleries and collections.<sup>9</sup> Not until the 1920s, however, did several members of the art world initiate the first serious efforts to introduce paintings and sculptures by German-Expressionist artists to the American public. Katherine S. Dreier, who founded the Société Anonyme in 1920, pioneered the practice by exhibiting during the 1920-21 art season several German artists whom she labeled "Expressionist." In addition to publishing critical accounts of some of these artists, she also incorporated books written in German on *Expressionismus* into the Research Library of the Société Anonyme.<sup>10</sup>

Dreier's efforts were joined by three European dealers, born in either Germany or Austria, who beginning in the mid-1920s promoted German Expressionism in the United States. William R. Valentiner, who trained in the history of Dutch art in Germany, first came to the United States in 1908. Having returned to Germany during the First World War, Valentiner began collecting German Expressionist works in 1920. Once back in the United States, he advised the Detroit Institute of Arts, where he served as director from 1924 to 1945, to purchase several German-Expressionist works. Moreover, in 1923 he organized, at the Anderson Galleries in New York, the first major show since the First World War devoted solely to German modern art.<sup>11</sup> Like Valentiner, J. B. Neumann, who had directed a bookstore and gallery in Berlin, arrived in the United States in the early 1920s; his venture was motivated by the dire economic situation in Germany and his desire to find a wealthy clientele in the United States.<sup>12</sup> Neumann opened a gallery in New York in 1924 where, in subsequent years, he exhibited works by Ernst Barlach, Max Beckmann, Otto Dix, Lyonel Feininger, George Grosz, Erich Heckel, Karl Hofer, Paul Klee, Gerhard Marcks, and Emil Nolde.<sup>13</sup> Similarly, Galka Scheyer arrived in 1924 in the United States where she undertook to disseminate information about the "Blue Four"—Klee, Feininger, Alexej von Jawlenski and Wassily Kandinsky. In 1925 the first exhibition of the Blue Four organized by Scheyer took place at the Daniel Gallery, and thereafter she lectured and arranged exhibitions of their work, primarily on the west coast.<sup>14</sup> The annual Carnegie International Exhibition compounded the efforts of these three entrepreneurs by including a selection of works by German Expressionists beginning in 1925; Max Beckmann earned an honorable



mention at the Carnegie International in 1929.<sup>15</sup>

Cumulatively, by 1933 a number of exhibits had been devoted to individual German Expressionists, regular reports had appeared in American art journals and newspapers on overseas exhibitions of German art of the twentieth century, and museums such as the Museum of Modern Art and the Detroit Institute of the Arts had announced purchases of German modern art. Although most of the exhibitions received some negative criticism—especially from art critics with conservative academic taste—the preponderance of positive reviews and the numerous sales of works indicate that an audience for German modern art had begun to form during the 1920s and early 1930s.<sup>16</sup>

From the critical writings published in relation to these various museum and gallery exhibitions emerged the three main competing, and sometimes overlapping, stories told about German Expressionism in the United States. The first subsumed German Expressionism under the umbrella term “Expressionism,” and treated it as national instance of a larger international development in modern art since Cézanne. Sheldon Cheney, typical of many writers who tried to teach the precepts of modernism to the American public in the late 1910s and 1920s, defined the term Expressionism in such geographically broad terms. In his article, “German Expressionism in Wood,” published in *International Studio* in 1922, Cheney situated Expressionism in opposition to Naturalism:

Primarily Expressionism is pre-occupation with the emotion evoked by an object, or purely creatively out of the artist's consciousness, and the conveying of that emotion by aesthetic form, as against preoccupation with the outward aspect of the object and technical display in imitating it. The Expressionist turns around and says that it makes absolutely no difference whether an artist's completed work is like or unlike anything in nature, so long as he conveys that aesthetic emotion which he has experienced.<sup>17</sup>

Cheney employed Expressionism as a label for all modern art that communicated subjective values and emotional intensity through the formal elements of the medium. Hence, he treated German-Expressionist prints as only one, albeit “extremist,” manifestation of Expressionism: “One hears most, of course, of the extremist group, beginning with such prints as Nolde's and carrying on with the still looser and coarser work of that seething, searching, powerfully creative, but often wild group of ‘Junge Kunst’ painters that includes Pechstein, Kirchner, Klein, Schmidt-Rotluff, Rohls and Heckel.”<sup>18</sup>

Max Deri basically concurred with the evolution Cheney had described between art that was “near-to-nature” and art that was “far-

from-nature” in his article “Principles of Modern German Art,” published in *International Studio* one month after Cheney’s article had appeared in that same journal. Deri located the turning point between Impressionism, which he categorized as a naturalistic art of “delicate vibrations,” and contemporary art, exemplified by the paintings of Cézanne, Vincent van Gogh and Edvard Munch (he did not use the term “Expressionism” in this article). Praising recent art for its “powerful construction” emanating from the soul or imagination, Deri proposed that the principles of “strength, courage, force” were particularly self-evident in paintings produced in Germany. The article was illustrated with reproductions of works by Feininger, Heckel, Otto Mueller, and Pechstein.<sup>19</sup>

Against the tendency of some critics to treat German Expressionism’s emotionalism as typical of international developments in modernism, the three commercial promoters of German Expressionism who arrived in the United States from central Europe encouraged a reading of German Expressionism that stressed its specifically German national character. In his introduction to the exhibition *Modern German Art* at the Anderson Galleries in 1923—an installation heavily weighted toward the German Expressionists—Valentiner did situate German modernism within an evolution from naturalism, which he claimed had dominated art from the Renaissance through Impressionism, toward abstract, spiritual art: “It seems that in the history of mankind, the development of art comes in great waves, in which a more naturalistic expression alternates with the more abstract, spiritual expression.”<sup>20</sup> But he also discussed German modern art as a purely indigenous movement: “The exhibition in New York of a collection of modern German art is an experiment. Many are entirely unacquainted with the German phase of the modern art movement; many are hostile to it. It is indeed very difficult to understand the artistic spirit of a country that has been cut off from the world for years and has developed an art more indigenous than almost ever before in its history.” The experience of the German people, argued Valentiner, above all their recent defeat in the First World War, inevitably expressed itself in the art Germans produced. “One does not expect,” he concluded, “that an art born out of the soul of the people, and expressing its deepest suffering, shall ingratiate itself through charm and surface agreeability.”<sup>21</sup>

When F. E. Washburn Freund previewed the exhibition at the Anderson Galleries in *International Studio*, he agreed with Valentiner that German modern art, for which Freund used the term “Expressionism,” demonstrated virile and passionate emotions nourished by the native soul. He too associated this type of visual language with the tragedy of war, even quoting Valentiner’s statement that “Germany, in war, humiliated, impoverished, torn by revolution and counter-revolution, finds in art a refuge.”<sup>22</sup> Freund, however, went further than Valentiner and credited the

German-Expressionist artists with the capacity to have foretold the war: "Real artists are always in advance of their time, and thus the German artists had felt the world catastrophe, which, as we now know, was inevitable for so many reasons, approaching years before the first gun was fired."<sup>23</sup> While few writers joined Freund in crediting the German-Expressionist artist with such prescience, the view that German Expressionism served as an anguished national response to the war and its aftermath found its way into many reviews of individual German artists at this time. As one critic wrote in 1927: "Beckmann communicates this static disquiet of Germany's spiritual life ... It is a selective mirror of life in a post-war Central Europe."<sup>24</sup> To perceive German Expressionism as an outpouring of Germany's spiritual torment both before and after the war and thus to position the German Expressionists as victims rather than perpetrators of the war indicated the lessening of anti-German sentiment in the United States during the 1920s and the growing sympathy for the plight of Germany during its post-war period of economic duress.

The third story told about German Expressionism, developing from where the second had ended, imagined this art movement as the necessary precursor to the return to order in German art that had followed in the wake of the war. A number of critics publishing accounts of German modern art in the late 1920s, while extending the interpretation of German Expressionism as part of a national tradition dating to the Gothic period and recently revived by the war, also located the movement within a more temporally specific narrative about the development of German modern art before and after 1918. This story opened with the prophetic powers of Expressionism, climaxed with the war, and ended on a reassuring note of discipline, objectivity and purification ensured by the advent of New Objectivity. For the catalogue to the International Exhibition of Paintings at the Carnegie Institute in 1927, which subsequently traveled to the Brooklyn Museum of Art, Alexander Amersdorffer provided the following description of the history of German modern art: "Just as in the years preceding, the overwhelming events of the war drove the artist to exaggerated expression, so in the years following, peace and calmness have made their impress."<sup>25</sup> Likewise Alfred Kuhn in his article "German Art of the Present Day" of 1929, explained the difference between Expressionism and New Objectivity in terms of the artist's reaction to the war. After the excesses of the war, Kuhn implied, artists had turned to the machine as a model of discipline and objectivity: "Europe was battered, bleeding from many wounds, humanity was impoverished and divided into larger and smaller groups. The wild beasts of passion had been allowed to escape too far from the charitable prisons in which discipline and order had kept them confined for half a century. Was not a building-up of clean, objective labor the necessity of the hour?"<sup>26</sup> Kuhn, discussing German Expressionism in the past tense,

associated it with the unleashed emotions of war, which, he suggested, had finally been reigned in by the discipline of New Objectivity. The article was illustrated exclusively with reproductions of art work from the 1920s, including contemporary Verist and New Objectivity images and recent work by former Expressionists such as Pechstein that now ostensibly demonstrated a new “objective” style.

Most often, this evolutionary tale cast German Expressionism as a pathological movement superseded by the salubrious style of New Objectivity. New Objectivity promised, as French critic Waldemar George reported to American readers after viewing an exhibit of German paintings in 1927, to cleanse the German nation of its former excesses: “Men ... cannot fail to hear the dramatic message of German expressionism—the last attempt of a foundering people to rediscover their old feeling of Gothic reality ... But the soul is a matter of almost no importance to the devotees of the *Neue Sachlichkeit*. Their aim is to make Germany healthy, and to make her healthy involves making her lose her taste for phantasmagorias and insane dreams.”<sup>27</sup> Critics such as George treated German Expressionism as symptomatic of a nation’s mental aberration, using terms such as “pathology” and “insanity,” and implied that the clinical and disciplined attitude of New Objectivity marked the nation’s renewed health and well-being. This interpretation, rather than seeing German Expressionism as a reaction against war, considered the movement an expression of its belligerent spirit; the rationality of New Objectivity, accordingly, overcame both the irrationality of German Expressionism and war.

Alfred Barr, who in 1931 directed significant public attention to German painting and sculpture by mounting at the Museum of Modern Art the first major show of German modern art since the exhibit at the Anderson Galleries in 1923, developed the evolutionary story about German modern art in its greatest detail. Barr’s catalogue, which provided the most systematic presentation of German modern art to date by categorizing the differences between *Blaue Reiter* and *Der Brücke* and between Expressionism and New Objectivity, reiterated the same chronological development as did Amersdorffer and Kuhn; Barr distinguished between the earlier emotional excesses of Expressionism and the later discipline of New Objectivity. Beckmann, according to Barr, exemplified this transition: “During the anguish and strain of the war [Beckmann] developed expressionist tendencies to an almost pathological degree. Certain paintings of this period are veritable nightmares of a tortured spirit. But during the last ten years his art has recovered stability and has increased in power.”<sup>28</sup> The vast majority of works in Barr’s exhibit dated from the post-war period.

The health and vitality of these post-war works lay, according to Barr,

in their evident alignment with international developments in art. In his catalogue Barr linked New Objectivity to the “Architectonic” movement in Germany by which he meant Russo-German Constructivism and noted manifestations of this movement in France, Italy, England, and the United States. For other critics the international movement of New Objectivity heralded a utopian vision of the future; in advancing such claims they grafted onto New Objectivity some of the broad ideals of Bauhaus artists, the Russian Constructivists and French Purists, all of whom had in the 1920s espoused a visual language based on the simple rectilinear forms of the machine and principles of rationality and discipline in order to promote a new world order. Kuhn, for instance, ended his article on German modern art by pronouncing: “If we look across the frontiers, we see that this new style has certainly expressed itself most powerfully in Germany, and this is quite comprehensive since the necessity of building up anew was greater in Germany than elsewhere; but that, subject to certain differentiations, its has become an expression of the spirit of the age all over the world ... an international communion in objective toil, honest, earnest, bare of all romanticism, labor to re-erect the world of humanity in new beauty.”<sup>29</sup> With New Objectivity positioned as an international art movement, the national character of German Expressionism appeared even more insistent. The third interpretation of German Expressionism thus shared with the first a valorization of internationalism, yet by asserting such internationalism with New Objectivity, not German Expressionism, it concurred with the second interpretation in attributing a German national character to the earlier movement.

From the time that Hitler seized power in Germany in 1933 until the late 1930s, a noticeable lull occurred in the exhibition of German modern art in the United States. Yet around 1937 American museums and galleries, as well as the press in the United States, once again turned their attention to German modernism with an overwhelming focus on German-Expressionist painting and sculpture. Renewed American interest in German Expressionism followed from two developments: the growing awareness of Hitler’s cultural policies, particularly after the Degenerate Art Exhibition of 1937 in Munich, and the presence of a second wave of German art dealers who emigrated to the United States in the late 1930s. Although some American critics continued to express reservations about German Expressionism after 1937, most preferred to claim the moral high ground and declare their support for an art labeled “degenerate” by Hitler. In so doing their writings coalesced around one central story about German Expressionism; this story, formulated from components of the three narratives popular in the 1920s, attributed an inherently emotive and national character to German Expressionism and yet simultaneously

credited it with possessing salubrious and universal qualities as well.

The relative paucity of reports on Nazi cultural policy in the American press before 1937 undoubtedly contributed to the shock provoked by the news of the paired openings of the exhibitions of “Great German Art” and “Degenerate Art” in Munich in 1937. American writers frequently attracted their readers’ attention with particularly sensationalist quotations from Hitler’s speech given at the inauguration of the *Haus der Kunst*. A writer for *Art Digest* reported:

Sterilization of modernistic artists was advocated by Chancellor Adolph Hitler in his speech formally opening the new House of German Art, an art gallery in Munich dedicated to “the new and pure Aryan German art, uncontaminated by modernism.” Modernistic painters and sculptors, said Hitler, according to the *New York Herald Tribune*, were “dangerous lunatics” who should be handed over to the state for sterilization to prevent them from passing on their unfortunate inheritance.<sup>30</sup>

This particular excerpt—and others like it, all widely reprinted in American newspapers and magazines—introduced Americans to Hitler’s rhetorical ploy of attacking modern art using medical terms. And when Hitler described modernism as a disease that threatened to infect the purity of Germany, Americans readers could well have been reminded of the metaphors of illness and health that writers in the United States had earlier applied to German Expressionism and New Objectivity, respectively. In the days immediately following these reports, the American press published articles that in essence inverted Hitler’s pathologization of modern art and in the process also reversed the earlier American narrative hailing the healthy triumph of New Objectivity over German Expressionism. Various critics in the United States insisted in particular on the inherent health of the German art condemned by Hitler, presumably including German Expressionism. The American critic Paul Rosenfeld, for instance, wrote in the *New Republic*: “The stigmatized work is healthy, intrinsically good, capable of serving as criteria of healthiness and goodness, and in the best tradition of the art of the German past.”<sup>31</sup> By insisting additionally on the national character of this ostensibly healthy art, American writers implicitly cast Hitler as an opportunistic infection, disrupting the otherwise sound condition of the German people and their art.

Building on the foundations of the early critical reaction to the Degenerate Art Exhibition, American museums and galleries in the following years mounted a number of shows of German-Expressionist painting and sculpture in the United States that revalorized this art

movement in response to Hitler's condemnation of it. These shows included both work from the period before the First World War and more recent Expressionist work by artists in exile, for instance, paintings by Beckmann and Oskar Kokoschka. Ironically, perhaps, the greater visibility of German Expressionist art in the United States resulted in part from Nazi cultural policy itself, which increased the availability of the art work across the Atlantic.

In the late 1930s, as Stephanie Barron and Andreas Hüneke have demonstrated, the Nazi government developed a plan to sell works of modern art, many of which had been confiscated from German museums, in order to raise much-needed foreign currency.<sup>32</sup> A commission with eight members, established by the Reich minister for public enlightenment and propaganda, Joseph Goebbels, and charged with the sale of degenerate art, selected 125 works, including eighteen paintings and one sculpture from the Degenerate Art Exhibition, to be auctioned on June 30, 1939 to foreign clients at the Galerie Fischer in Lucerne, Switzerland. The commission also authorized four dealers—Bernhard A. Boehmer, Karl Buchholz, Hildebrand Gurlitt and Ferdinand Möller—to work on consignment, selling impounded works abroad for foreign currency.

During these same years two German art dealers emigrated to the United States and operated galleries in New York; their activities account in large part for the greater availability of German Expressionism in the United States in the late 1930s. Karl Nierendorf, having managed J.B. Neumann's Berlin gallery before he came to the United States in 1936, opened a gallery in 1937, which he operated until his death in 1947.<sup>33</sup> Beginning in 1934 Curt Valentin worked at the Buchholz Gallery in Berlin, and moved to the United States in 1937 to run a branch gallery for Buchholz in New York. These two dealers held many one-person exhibits of German-Expressionist artists in their Manhattan galleries. They also helped organize four of the five group shows that were mounted at various American museums in direct opposition to Hitler's Degenerate Art Exhibition.<sup>34</sup> One of these exhibitions, the "Landmarks in Modern German Art," took place at the Buchholz Gallery itself and included nineteen canvases and seven sculptures, all but two of which had formerly been the property of German museums. Many of the works banned in Germany as degenerate made their way into American museums and private collections during this time through the galleries operated by Nierendorf and Valentin.

A few retrospective texts about these dealers published in the United States after the Second World War positioned Nierendorf and Valentin as heroic missionaries committed to saving modern art and, ultimately, democracy. If the Central European dealers of the 1920s had purportedly battled American provincialism, Valentin and Nierendorf, it was

suggested, had fought the Nazi regime. Valentin's obituary published in the *New York Times* in 1954 summarized his activities in the late 1930s in a particularly telling way:

Karl Buchholz was a bookseller who continued to carry on a "back-room" business in the modern art Hitler had characterized as "degenerate." Mr. Valentin worked as a "undercover man" in rescuing many great works of modern art in German museums from potential Nazi confiscation and helped get these safely abroad. In 1937 he left Germany with a number of pictures to open a gallery in New York on West 46th Street under the Buchholz name.<sup>35</sup>

The 1950s marked the height of Valentin's reputation as a financially disinterested, secret agent engaged in the seemingly anti-Nazi cause of German Expressionism. The origins of this reputation lie in the late 1930s when American critics implicitly cast Valentin as a savior of modern art.<sup>36</sup>

Valentin's operations, however, contributed at least as much to the Nazi policy of art disposal and capital accumulation as it did to the salvation of German-Expressionist painting. His connections, particularly his affiliation with Buchholz, enabled him to obtain works of art that were being sold for the profit of the Nazi government. Valentin, as Barron has pointed out, emerged as an important bidder at the Fischer Auction despite the mounting criticism and eventual boycott of the sale by various members of the art world who (rightly, it turns out) feared that the money would go to German armaments.<sup>37</sup> Valentin purchased five works at the Fischer Auction,<sup>38</sup> and these works subsequently appeared in some of the recuperative exhibitions in the United States of art branded by the Nazis as well as in one-person shows of German-Expressionist artists at the Buchholz Gallery in New York. Moreover, after the Fischer Auction Valentin continued to buy a number of works of art from the German Ministry of Propaganda through the intermediary of Buchholz, exhibiting and selling them at the Manhattan branch of the Buchholz Gallery.<sup>39</sup> Valentin's activities therefore treaded a fine moral line, preserving German modernism, perhaps, but also benefiting the Nazi government's finances.

Although promoting several German artists who already enjoyed strong reputations in the United States—Nierendorf opened his gallery with an exhibition of Die Brücke and Blaue Reiter artists, while two of Valentin's early exhibitions featured Lehmbruck and Barlach—both Valentin and Nierendorf also drew attention to a number of little-known German painters and sculptors by capitalizing on the status of their art as degenerate in the eyes of the Nazis. Even when discussing works of art by the German Expressionists and other well-known artists, the catalogue texts that accompanied Valentin's and Nierendorf's exhibits took special



pains to point out their privileged status as Nazi rejects. “[Kokoschka’s] paintings,” trumpeted Valentin in the exhibition catalogue for Kokoschka’s one-man show at the Buchholz Gallery in October 1938, “were removed from the German museums without exception.”<sup>40</sup> The art press sensationalized the Kokoschka exhibition with headlines of the same ilk: “Kokoschka: Nazi-Banned.”<sup>41</sup> The terms “degenerate,” “exiled,” “banned,” and “purged,” in fact, appeared with remarkable consistency in reviews of works by Barlach, Beckmann, Feininger, Kirchner, Klee, Kokoschka, Kollwitz, and Lehmbruck.<sup>42</sup> Implicitly the outlaw status of the German Expressionists and other German artists invited critics, museums and collectors to demonstrate their cultural superiority over the Nazis by championing works deemed degenerate by Hitler.

The enhanced standing of art labeled degenerate played a part in a broader linking between art and politics in the United States. In the late 1930s the idea that the preservation of modern art upheld the principles of democracy was advanced on a variety of fronts. Artist Stuart Davis, for instance, referred to Hitler’s Degenerate Art Exhibition in both his private and public writings to make the case that any condemnation of abstract art was symptomatic of fascism; abstraction, according to Davis, was inherently democratic and testified to freedom of expression. Likewise, President Roosevelt’s words at the inauguration of the new building of the Museum of Modern Art explicitly stressed the relationship between art and democracy: “Arts cannot thrive except where men are free. The conditions for democracy and for art are one and the same. What we call liberty in politics results in freedom in the arts.”<sup>43</sup> He called the Museum of Modern Art “a citadel of civilization” and “an institution dedicated to the cause of peace and the pursuits of peace.”<sup>44</sup> Roosevelt’s speech was widely understood in the American press as a critique of dictatorship and its policies on art. Wrote one reporter for the *New York Herald Tribune*: “His hearers must have thought of the country in which ‘cultural life’ is restricted to the members of the Chamber of Culture.”<sup>45</sup>

The relationship between preserving modern art and promoting democracy could be formulated with particular effectiveness in the case of so-called degenerate art. Prior to the opening of the new building housing the Museum of Modern Art, newspapers announced that “Cultural Freedom” would be the theme of the initial program.<sup>46</sup> When the inaugural exhibition opened, entitled “Art of Our Times,” the installation featured five works formerly owned by German museums. Two of the five works—Kirchner’s *The Street* of 1913 and Klee’s *Around the Fish* of 1926—had actually been in the Degenerate Art Exhibition and a third, the Lehmbruck *Kneeling Woman* of 1911, had appeared—in different casts—in both the Armory Show and the Degenerate Art show. The final two works were André Derain’s *Valley of the Lot at Vers* of 1912 and Matisse’s

*The Blue Window* of 1912. In the exhibition catalogue the brief captions below works by Lehbruck, Beckmann and Kirchner emphasized that the Nazis had officially repudiated their art.<sup>47</sup>

The press heralded the Museum's eventual purchase through Valentin of all five works branded degenerate as a sign of democratic freedom in the United States.<sup>48</sup> Critic Edward A. Jewell published perhaps the lengthiest article on this subject in the *New York Times*. Entitled "The Creative Life vs. Dictatorship: Works Exiled From Reich Collections and Now Acquired by the Museum of Modern Art—Freedom in Democracy," his article exclaimed:

The sovereign significance of last week's announcement attaches, as I view it, to the fact that here we may perceive concrete illustration of principles stirringly enunciated by President Roosevelt when, over the radio, he helped dedicate the Museum of Modern Art's new building last Spring. There is dramatic cleavage between what has happened in Germany and what remains regnant in America and elsewhere.<sup>49</sup>

The Museum of Modern Art continued throughout the war to exhibit German modern art in order to signal its devotion to the paired goals of preserving modernism and safeguarding freedom of expression. In 1942, for instance, the museum exhibited recently acquired art works by Barlach, Beckmann, Kollwitz and Nolde under the banner "Free German Art." A statement in the *New York Times* by Alfred Barr concerning this exhibition claimed: "Among the Freedoms which the Nazis have destroyed, none has been more cynically perverted, more brutally stamped upon, than the Freedom of Art. But in free countries, they can still be seen, can still bear witness to the survival of a free German culture."<sup>50</sup> That same year the *Bulletin of the Museum of Modern Art*, for its issue devoted to "The Museum and the War," reproduced on its final page Lehbruck's now iconic *Kneeling Woman*.<sup>51</sup> The caption below the image read: "The masterpiece of the greatest modern German sculptor, was thrown out of the Berlin National Gallery on Hitler's order. With many other pieces now in the Museum Collection, it stands for the free art of Europe much of it now in hiding or in exile."<sup>52</sup> On this same page appeared the following proclamation, typographically set in the form of free verse:

**THE MUSEUM COLLECTION** is a symbol of one of the four freedoms for which we are fighting—the **freedom of expression** ... it is **art that Hitler hates** because it is **modern**, progressive, challenging ... because it is **international**, leading to understanding and tolerance among nations ... because it is **free**, the free expression of free men.

The sudden spurt of exhibitions devoted to individual German painters and sculptors in the United States during the late 1930s as well as the special treatment given to German Expressionism at the Museum of Modern Art ultimately gave rise to a re-evaluation of German Expressionist art. The vast majority of American critics agreed that the art banned by the Nazis as degenerate vibrated with basic universal emotions, although they differed as to whether the style of German Expressionism should be attributed to the native Gothic tradition, the international developments in modern art, or the current political situation.

If the Museum of Modern Art, following in the interpretive tradition established by Cheney, considered that the style of German Expressionism exemplified the current state of modern art world-wide, the exhibition "Landmarks in Modern German Art," which took place at the Buchholz Gallery in 1940, stressed its purely national character. Perry Rathbone, a curator at the Detroit Institute of Art who wrote the foreword to the catalogue which accompanied the exhibition, attributed the difference between German and French art to national character, thereby reviving the nativist interpretation of German Expressionism presented to the American public by a number of writers in the 1920s, including, of course, Valentiner, the Director of the Detroit Institute of Art: "Whereas French art is largely concerned with subtly calculated formal relationships, German art is impulsive and based upon emotional values. The mood and temper of the northern mind is revealed."<sup>53</sup> This exhibit, which highlighted works by artists associated with the Blaue Reiter and the Brücke circles from 1910 to 1925, described no stylistic change during this period; thus it repudiated the narrative told by Barr and others in the 1920s about the development from pathological German Expressionism to healthy New Objectivity. The text from 1940 suggested that German Expressionism had remained consistently impulsive, emotional, and implicitly healthy, over time.

Yet attributing an emotionally charged style to an inherently Germanic sensibility in no way precluded critics from including German Expressionism within the international arena. Numerous reviews of the "Landmarks in Modern German Art" show, in fact, made the connection between national and international trends; one critic, for instance, suggested that modern German art paralleled Fauvism in Paris, "though perhaps more violent and Gothic in character."<sup>54</sup> Rathbone himself acknowledged in his introduction to the exhibition that German artists had been inspired by Munch and Van Gogh as well as by medieval woodcuts. The tendency to consider German Expressionism as national and international at the same time typified much of the criticism generated by exhibitions of German-Expressionist art in the late 1930s.

Other American critics in the 1930s, however, attributed the emotional

language of German Expressionism less to national or international artistic traditions and more to traumatic political events. Generally paying most attention to German art produced in an Expressionist style during the 1930s, these critics contended that the extremely emotional and tortured images of later German-Expressionist art reflected the current political situation. Carlyle Burrows wrote that Beckmann's painting *Departure* from 1932-35 "records the horrors of the present world with a deep, impassioned cynicism."<sup>55</sup> Of the same painting Jerome Klein said: "It is a harsh, chaotic outburst against the mutilation of man in the world today."<sup>56</sup>

Critics connected the work of a wide range of artists, some of whom had only peripheral associations with the original German-Expressionist art movement, with the political turmoil in Germany. For instance, Carl Hofer, while only briefly associated with German-Expressionist groups, achieved tremendous popularity in the United States during the late 1930s. Hofer's first one-person show in the United States took place at the newly opened Nierendorf Gallery in November 1937. In 1938 Hofer won the first prize in the Carnegie International for his painting *The Wind*, marking the first time that this prestigious prize had been awarded to a German. In reporting the award, writers in the art press highlighted the grounds for Hofer's recent notoriety; wrote one, "Karl Hofer, German modernist whose work was grouped in 1937 by Chancellor Hitler in his Munich exhibition of 'Degenerate Art,' was accorded yesterday the highest possible honor in the 1938 Carnegie International."<sup>57</sup>

In the late 1930s critical reviews of Hofer's recent art not only stressed its outlaw status in Germany, but also its emotional drama, singling out in particular its psychological expressiveness. Such a perspective stood in stark contrast to critical opinion ten years earlier that had labeled his work "disciplined" and thus implicitly associated with New Objectivity.<sup>58</sup> A review published in *Art News* in 1938 attributed passion and emotion to his painting *Man With Looking Glass*:

This painting ... combines in magnificence and power, the rich surfaces, austere construction and psychological expressiveness characteristic of the artist's earlier work together with a new dramatic positivism that has become noticeable in Hofer's latest painting ... the brooding face of the man who seems to be examining not so much his image as his conscience, or perhaps the destiny of a nation which condemns as "degenerate" such masterful works as this.<sup>59</sup>

This tendency to see in Hofer's paintings a comment on the fate of the Germans under Nazi rule continued unabated until the end of the war. For instance, the exhibition catalogue of a show organized by Nierendorf, "Forbidden Art in the Third Reich: Paintings by German Artists Whose

Work Was Banned From Museums and Forbidden to Exhibit,” which opened immediately after the end of the war in November 1945 at the Institute of Modern Art in Boston, reproduced Hofer’s *Cassandra* from 1935 on the cover with the subtitle: “A warning of coming doom and defeat.”

In the end, whether they attributed the style of German Expressionism to a national or international character, to artistic or political origins, critics overwhelmingly endorsed the idea that it communicated *universal* emotions. On this point the reviews written about the retrospective exhibition at the Buchholz Gallery memorializing the death of Ernst Barlach in 1938 were particularly explicit. “Ernst Barlach wore, as if it had been a casual wrap to which one gives no thought, the mantle of universality,” proclaimed Edward A. Jewell. “Here is a plastic artist who speaks with such profound and ringing grandeur that no one, I think, can turn away from the experience unnourished and unmoved.”<sup>60</sup> Wrote Emily Genauer: “Barlach’s *Fugitive* is a bronze figure of a man clutching to him a child—a living, desperate, tormented and doomed man, yet, at the same time, the very symbol of a desperate and doomed humanity.”<sup>61</sup> As these comments indicate, the story told by critics in the late 1930s differed from those told in the 1920s in one important respect: In the late 1930s critics argued that German Expressionist painting translated personal responses to adversity into universal statements about humanity.

The promotion of German Expressionism as exile art, characterized by its tortured expressiveness and universal insight, was achieved at the expense of German artists of the political left. Artists such as George Grosz and Otto Dix had acquired a certain notoriety in the United States in the early 1930s: both were included in Barr’s exhibition “German Painting and Sculpture” at the Museum of Modern Art in 1931, and in 1932 the Museum of Modern Art added Dix’s portrait *Dr. Meyer-Hermann* to its permanent collection. Furthermore, Grosz emigrated with a certain amount of fanfare to the United States in 1933. Neither Valentin nor Nierendorf promoted these artists even though both had been pilloried by the Nazis as “degenerate” in 1937.<sup>62</sup> Valentin never organized one-person exhibitions of the works of these artists, and although Nierendorf had in Germany during the 1920s “devoted most of his energy to promoting the work of Dix and Kandinsky,”<sup>63</sup> he never mounted an exhibition of Dix’s work in New York.

Degenerate art was recuperated in the United States by stripping the category “degenerate” of overtly political German artists whose work often illustrated specific topical events. German-Expressionist paintings and sculpture could be praised as emotionally symbolic of the tragedy of the 1930s without the taint of propaganda or leftist politics. Wrote one critic about Hofer, “Whatever he may have suffered as a German artist of today there is no hint of social criticism in his work, which has a

transcendental quality ... rather than the shrill complaint of the victim of a harsh political system.”<sup>64</sup> Critics writing for the mainstream art journals and newspapers of the day championed “degenerate” art as an emotional response to German unrest which avoided the perils of propaganda.

The exhibition and recuperation of so-called degenerate art in the United States during the late 1930s and the early 1940s had specific consequences for much more than the interpretation of German-Expressionist painting alone. Many a critic, curator and collector subscribed to the idea that German-Expressionist art conveyed universal and transhistorical emotions with a visual style that was national in origin. The very contradiction between the national and the universal contained in the critical evaluation of German Expressionism functioned in a productive manner by implicitly casting Hitler and the classical tradition that he favored, rather than German Expressionism as he would have it, as the historical aberration. American critics, in short, turned the cultural battle against Nazism into a struggle to save true German art from Hitler’s ravages. The championing of German Expressionist art became tantamount to returning German culture to its ostensibly natural state, a condition in which German artists shared a seemingly universal respect for democracy and humane emotions with their international brethren. A powerful ideological formulation, this: The war against fascism could be fought in the name not only of the Allied nations, but also in that of the imperiled but true cause of German culture.

## Notes

This article is based on a talk delivered at a symposium on the “International Responses to the Condemnation of ‘Degenerate’ Art” held at the Los Angeles County Art Museum in April of 1991. My thanks to Jim Herbert for his careful reading of the text and to my research assistant, Katie Hauser, for her help. A faculty Research Grant from UCLA funded research for this essay.

- 1 John Dornberg, “Revenge of the ‘Degenerates.’” *Art News* 87 (October 1988): 28.
- 2 Reinhold Heller, for instance, writes of the reception of European modernism in the United States: “Particularly after World War I, an unhappy coalition of conservative aesthetics, cultural nationalism and political isolationism sufficed to keep purchases, gifts, or exhibitions of French Impressionism and Post-Impressionism the subject of controversy and outcry.” Later in the same article Heller claims that “the reception of German Modern Art prior to the 1930s was marked largely by its absence.” Reinhold Heller, “The Expressionist Challenge: James Plaut and the Institute of Contemporary Art,” in *Dissent: The Issue of Modern Art in Boston* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1986), 17, 29. Recently some work has been done on the reception of German art prior to 1933 that modifies Heller’s perceptions. See, in particular, Penny Bealle, “J.B. Neumann and the Introduction of Modern German Art to New York, 1923-1933,” *Archives of American Art Journal* 29 (1989): 2-15; and Penny Bealle, “Obstacles and Advocates: Factors Influencing the Introduction of Modern Art From Germany to New York City, 1912-1933; Major Promoters and

- Exhibitions” (Ph.D. dissertation, Cornell University, 1990). Bealle’s Ph.D. dissertation offers an excellent and thorough account of the various exhibitions of German modern art and the promotional efforts undertaken by various individuals in the United States prior to 1933. My account of events prior to 1933 differs from hers in its focus on the narratives about German modernism circulated by its advocates in the United States during this period.
- 3 “Düsseldorf A Mecca,” *New York Times*, June 24, 1928.
  - 4 Milton Brown writes: “According to F. J. Gregg, who was connected with the exhibition, Kuhn and Davies rejected the Germans because they felt them to be merely imitators of the French.” Milton Brown, *American Painting From the Armory Show to the Depression* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1955), 49. The complete list of all the works exhibited in the Armory Show can be found in *1913 Armory Show 50th Anniversary Exhibition 1963* (Utica: Muson-Williams-Proctor Institute, 1963). For more information on the Armory Show see Milton Brown, *The Story of the Armory Show* (Greenwich, Ct.: New York Graphic Society, 1963); and Meyer Schapiro, “The Introduction of Modern Art in America: The Armory Show,” in *Modern Art: 19th & 20th Centuries* (New York: George Braziller, 1978), 135-178.
  - 5 William Homer includes a complete list of exhibitions at “291” in *Alfred Stieglitz and the American Avant-Garde* (Boston: New York Graphic Society, 1977). *Camera Work* did publish excerpts from Kandinsky’s *On the Spiritual in Art*, translated into English, in July of 1912.
  - 6 Bealle writes that the exhibition of German graphic art at the Berlin Photographic Company included “more than three hundred thirty prints and drawings by eighty-three artists,” and she states that “after it closed in New York, the exhibition traveled to the Chicago Art Institute, the Albright Knox Art Gallery in Buffalo, the Worcester Art Museum, the St. Louis Museum, and the Carnegie Institute in Pittsburgh.” Bealle, “Obstacles and Advocates,” 49, 61.
  - 7 “Interesting Etchings by Käthe Kollwitz on Exhibition in the Print Room of the New York Public Library,” *New York Times*, September 1, 1912.
  - 8 Rebecca Zurier, “Real Life, Real Art, Real Men: Thoughts on the Changing Gender of Realism” (paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Studies Association, Baltimore, 1991). See also Bruce Robertson, “Americanism and Realism,” in *Reckoning with Winslow Homer: His Late Paintings and Their Influence* (Cleveland Museum of Art, Indiana University Press, 1990), 63-80. Martin Birnbaum, who mounted a show of German graphic art at the American branch of the Berlin Photographic Company in 1912, also exhibited works by various artists of the Ash Can School, most notably by John Sloan.
  - 9 For a discussion of the various new galleries, collections and exhibitions of modern European art after the Armory Show see Brown, *American Painting*. Brown also mentions anti-German feeling during the First World War; such sentiments could account, in part, for the delay in interest that Americans took in German Expressionism.
  - 10 In her report of the activities of the Société Anonyme for the year 1920-21, Dreier categorized the following artists as “Expressionists”: Kandinsky, Mense, Bauer, Molzahn, Muche, Topp, Stuckenberg, Campendock, and herself. She published a pamphlet on Kandinsky in 1923, and her book *Modern Art of 1926* includes biographies on numerous German artists. She continued to exhibit artists associated with the German modern art movement: in 1924, for instance, she organized a show of Klee’s work, and in 1926-27, through the auspices of the Société Anonyme, she mounted the International Exhibition of Modern Art at the Brooklyn Museum, which included works by a number of modern German artists. See Bealle, “Obstacles and Advocates,” 82-93; Ruth Bohan, *The Société Anonyme’s Brooklyn Exhibition: Katherine Dreier and Modernism in America* (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1982); Robert L. Herbert, Eleanor S. Apter, and Elise K. Kenney, *The Société Anonyme and the Dreier Bequest at Yale University: A Catalogue Raisonné* (New Haven: Yale

- University Press, 1984); and Société Anonyme, *Selected Publications of the Société Anonyme*, 3 vols. (New York: Arno Press, 1972).
- 11 For biographical information about Valentiner see Margaret Sterne, *The Passionate Eye: The Life of William R. Valentiner* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1980).
  - 12 Bealle, "J.B. Neumann," 5.
  - 13 For more information about Neumann see: J.B. Neumann Papers at the Museum of Modern Art, New York; and J.B. Neumann Papers, Archives of American Art. My thanks to Janis Ekdahl at the Museum of Modern Art for her assistance with the J.B. Neumann Papers.
  - 14 Jan Stedman, "Galka Scheyer," in *The Blue Four: Galka Scheyer Collection*, ed. Sara Campbell (Pasadena: Norton Simon Museum of Art, 1976), 9-16.
  - 15 *1896-1955 Retrospective Exhibition of Paintings from Previous Internationals* (Pittsburgh: Carnegie Institute, 1958).
  - 16 Specific details of reviews of shows and sales of individual art works can be found in Bealle, "Obstacles and Advocates."
  - 17 Sheldon Cheney, "German Expressionism in Wood," *International Studio* 75 (June 1922): 252. See also Sheldon Cheney, *Expressionism in Art* (New York: Tudor Publishing Company, 1934).
  - 18 Cheney, "German Expressionism," 254.
  - 19 Max Deri, "Principles of Modern German Art," *International Studio* 75 (July 1922): 315-317.
  - 20 W. R. Valentiner, *A Collection of Modern German Art* (New York: Anderson Galleries, 1923), 3.
  - 21 *Ibid.*, 2.
  - 22 F. E. Washburn Freund, "Modern Art in Germany," *International Studio* 78 (October 1923): 41.
  - 23 *Ibid.*, 42.
  - 24 "Beckmann's Art Portrays German Post-War Disillusion," *New York Times*, April 17, 1927.
  - 25 Alexander Amersdorffer, "German Art," in *Twenty-Sixth International Exhibition of Painting* (Pittsburgh: Carnegie Institute, 1927), [unpaginated].
  - 26 Alfred Kuhn, "German Art of the Present Day," *Survey* 61 (February 1, 1929): 595.
  - 27 Waldemar George, "New Art in France and Germany," *Living Age* 334 (January 1, 1928): 78.
  - 28 Alfred Barr, *German Painting and Sculpture* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1931), 20.
  - 29 Kuhn, "German Art of the Present Day," 595.
  - 30 "The Mailed Fist," *Art Digest* 11 (August 1, 1937): 17.
  - 31 Paul Rosenfeld, "Degenerate Art," *New Republic* 95 (June 22, 1938): 183.
  - 32 Stephanie Barron, "The Galerie Fischer Auction," and Andreas Hüneke, "On the Trail of Missing Masterpieces: Modern Art from German Galleries," in *Degenerate Art: The Fate of the Avant-Garde in Nazi Germany*, ed. Stephanie Barron (Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 1991), 135-169, 121-133.
  - 33 An incomplete list of the exhibitions Nierendorf organized at his various galleries is included in *1920-1980 Sechzig Jahre Galerie Nierendorf* (Berlin: Galerie Nierendorf, 1980).
  - 34 The one-person exhibitions are too numerous to list here, but can be reconstructed from the Curt Valentin papers at the Museum of Modern Art. The exhibitions of so-called degenerate art include "Modern German Art," a show of 42 painters and sculptors at the Museum of Fine Arts in Springfield, Massachusetts in 1939; "German Contemporary Art," including works acquired at the Fischer Auction, at the Institute of Modern Art in Boston in 1939; and "Forbidden Art of the Third Reich" at the Institute of Modern Art in Boston in 1945. Karl Nierendorf assisted in the organization of both shows at the Institute of Modern Art in Boston. The one exhibition that neither Valentin nor



- Neirendorf helped organize was “Twentieth Century German Art,” which, having opened at the New Burlington Galleries in London in 1938, traveled in 1939 without sculpture to the United States, where it began its American circuit at the Milwaukee Art Institute. In the United States this exhibition was circulated by Blanche A. Byerly with the title of “Exhibition of 20th Century (Banned) German Art.”
- 35 *New York Times*, August 21, 1954. The catalogue for an exhibition of German art at the Museum of Modern Art in 1957, which was dedicated to Curt Valentin, explained that Valentin, “the art-lover and dealer, who originally came from Germany,” had introduced leading German sculptors to the United States. Andrew Ritchie, ed., *German Art of the Twentieth Century* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1957), 141.
  - 36 Reviews in the late 1930s repeatedly linked Valentin’s name specifically to the exhibition of modern art works banned by the Nazis. For example, see reviews of the *Landmarks in Modern German Art*, which took place at the Buchholz Gallery in 1940: *Art Digest* 14 (April 15, 1940): 11; *Art News* 38 (April 13, 1940): 15; *New York Times*, April 7, 1940; *New Yorker* 26 (April 13, 1940): 71-73; *Parnassus* 12 (April 1940): 37-39.
  - 37 Some evidence exists in the press demonstrating that Americans had knowledge about the destination of money raised by sales of art from Germany. The *Art Digest*, for instance, included a report about a sale of old masters in Munich which the Nazis had organized in order to obtain money to finance military programs. *Art Digest* 11 (July 1, 1937): 9.
  - 38 These works were Ernst Barlach’s *The Avenger* of 1922 and *Monks Reading* of 1932, George Grosz’s *View of the Big City* of 1917, Gerhard Marcks’s *Joseph and Mary*, [n.d.], and Ewald Mataré’s *Wind Cow*, [n.d.].
  - 39 Hunecke, “On the Trail of Missing Masterpieces,” 130-131.
  - 40 Curt Valentin, *Kokoschka* (New York: Buchholz Gallery, 1938), [unpaginated].
  - 41 *Art Digest* 13 (October 1, 1938): 14.
  - 42 Dagmar Grimm offers a good analysis of Beckmann’s reception in the United States in “Max Beckmann’s Critical Reception in America, 1927-1950” (M.A. thesis, U.C.L.A., 1987).
  - 43 “Roosevelt’s Message to the Art Museum,” and “President Praises U.S. Art Freedom,” *New York Times*, May 11, 1939.
  - 44 *Ibid.*
  - 45 Goodyear Papers, Museum of Modern Art Archives.
  - 46 See newspaper clippings in the Goodyear Papers, Museum of Modern Art Archives.
  - 47 *Art In Our Time* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1939).
  - 48 Most major newspapers in the United States and in Europe covered this event. Clippings are collected in Notebook 39, Public Information Scrapbooks, Museum of Modern Art Archives.
  - 49 Edward A. Jewell, “The Creative Life vs. Dictatorship: Works Exiled From Reich Collections and Now Acquired by the Museum of Modern Art—Freedom in Democracy,” *New York Times*, August 13, 1939. Only the *Daily Worker*, a communist party newspaper, raised questions about the acquisition of the works: “The Museum of Modern Art announced last week that five works of art formerly owned by German museums, but expelled by official order as ‘degenerate’ have been bought by the Museum. The purchases do not reflect much credit on the Museum, for the works were bought from the Nazi government and only the Nazis will benefit from this transaction. Much better examples of the artists’ works are available elsewhere.” *Daily Worker*, August 16, 1939.
  - 50 Edward A. Jewell, “Free Art: Work Nazis Reject Shown at Museum,” *New York Times*, June 28, 1942.
  - 51 Heller has recently written that Lehbruck’s *Kneeling Woman* “became a veritable icon of the effort against the Axis powers, appearing in numerous newspaper and magazine photographs as well as on postcards.” Heller, “The

- Expressionist Challenge," 36.
- 52 *Museum of Modern Art Bulletin* 10 (October-November 1942): 19.
- 53 Perry Rathbone, *Landmarks in Modern German Art* (New York: Buchholz Gallery, 1940), [unpaginated]. The only other text to stress the purely national character of German Expressionism was the catalogue that accompanied the exhibition, "Modern German Art," at the Springfield Museum of Fine Arts (January 10-30, 1939), although it also acknowledged the movement's debt to Munch, Ferdinand Hodler and French post-impressionists.
- 54 "Landmarks in Modern German Art," *Parnassus* 12 (April 1940): 39.
- 55 Carlyle Burrows, "Max Beckmann," *New York Herald Tribune*, 16 January 1938.
- 56 Jerome Klein, "Art Comment," *New York Post*, January 15, 1938.
- 57 "Hofer, 'Classic Modern,' Wins Carnegie First," *Art Digest* 13 (October 15, 1938): 5; and, "Karl Hofer," *Magazine of Art* 31 (October 1938): 675. The Nierendorf Gallery held another one-man show of Hofer's work in November 1938, and the following year the Detroit Institute of Art, the Cleveland Museum, and the Milwaukee Art Museum all announced that they had purchased paintings by Hofer.
- 58 A. Dr., "Berlin," *Creative Art* 4 (January 1929): 62.
- 59 "One Man Show of the Carnegie First Prize Winner: Carl Hofer," *Art News* 37 (November 26, 1938): 12.
- 60 Jewell, "Local Shows," *New York Times*, December 4, 1938.
- 61 Emily Genauer, quoted in "Critics Hail Mastery of the Dead Barlach," *Art Digest* 13 (December 15, 1938): 10.
- 62 Three works by Grosz were included in the American version of the "Exhibition of 20th Century German Art" from the New Burlington Galleries, and works by Dix and Grosz appeared in the exhibit of modern German art that opened at the Springfield Museum of Fine Arts in 1939.
- 63 Bealle, "J. B. Neumann," 7.
- 64 J. L., "The Carnegie Prize-Winner and Other Carl Hofers on Exhibit," *Art News* 37 (June 3, 1939): 11.

# On Malls, Museums, and the Art World: Postmodernism and the Vicissitudes of Consumer Culture

Babette E. Babich

## Postmodernism and the Future of Art

By now it is clear that the *postmodern* has a certain currency for art critics and theorists, social analysts, and political and literary theorists, not to mention journalists and philosophers. But Charles Jencks complains that with respect to architecture, critics apply the term as a kind of catch-all, so that postmodernism is used for “everything that was different from high modernism, and usually this meant skyscrapers with funny shapes, brash colors, and exposed technology.”<sup>1</sup> Yet if Jencks himself, who has no scruples about using a term he helped to popularize, finds it necessary to warn against the imprecision of those critics who seem to have “just adopted a current phrase for discontinuity and lumped every departure under it,”<sup>2</sup> it is plain that the word postmodern also works as a red flag for the defenders of tradition and traditional usage.

However the term postmodern is expressed—via various suffices, majuscules, hyphenation or whatever, as, e.g., *postmodernity*, *postmodernism*, *postMODERN*, *POST-modern*, the less and less fashionable *post-modern*, the briefly efflorescent *hypermodern* or the tacit continuation of the provenance/inescapability of the term in the limply ironic *post-postmodern*—the very word seems to irritate thinkers and critics. Despite the recalcitrant vitality of a term in use for nearly a hundred years according to a variety of historical tracings and a concept Umberto Eco claims may be discerned even in classical authors, in spite of the referentiality of the postmodern to the old ideal of the modern which coimplicates the (ever new) modern, academic writers on the arts (particularly [analytic] philosophers), continue to refuse the idea of the postmodern as hype or exaggeration. At the very least, even those authors who employ the terminology of the postmodern seem to feel compelled to condemn its construction as irrecusably opaque.<sup>3</sup>

In what follows, I cannot hope to dissolve this prejudice. Indeed, I rather expect to bear out the darker suspicions of the more linguistically cautious and conceptually conservative. This is so especially where the topical range of this essay moves from malls to museums, city squares, art culture—politically, morally, and most particularly as a business enterprise—late-capitalism, and an extended word on the myth and cost of genius. In all, I seek to indicate the positive value of the postmodern, parodic ironized role or future of art beyond a recitation of negative valuations of the state of the postmodern world, thus raising the question of the direction of—whither?—art.

### **The Architecture of Progress: Modern Efficiency vs. Postmodern Delight**

In architecture, where the term postmodern has its least disputed provenance, the postmodern is negatively identifiable because of its referential component: the much touted parodicity or pastiche of the postmodern draws and plays upon classical as well as modern lines. The style of pastiche is the deliberate mixing of traditional symbols with decorative/functional design. The postmodern programme of pastiche as a style subverts—undermines or decodes—formally utopian and progressive elements. The object referent ordinarily invoked at this point is typically a museum, that is, a museum of the newest, postmodern kind, where the architecture of the museum is as significant an aesthetic object as the artworks housed within. Thus illustrated, postmodern decoding and subversion is a serious, cultural affair. And such serious weight, such cultural value is illuminated by example and analysis, as Charles Jencks has discussed James Stirling's design for the Turner Wing in London's Tate Gallery or Stuttgart's Neue Staatsgalerie. Following and going beyond Jencks, one may also note the social codes of recently constructed (architecturally designed) public "spaces" (or "squares") in Pittsburgh (Venturi) and New Orleans (Moore's Piazza d'Italia) and, in France, Ricardo Bofill's deliberately bastard concept of the Parisian suburb's Roman/Greek (i.e., generic classical) Amphitheatre/ Coliseum/Temple apartment complex or, finally, and really incidentally, the museum-cum-public-space construction seeking to play upon old design and reflective complement of the "new" in I.M. Pei's Louvre pyramid.

Although I shall discuss both museums and public spaces in what follows, such references can be no more than marginal in both content and figure. For I contend that the effective functioning of the postmodern as a cultural constellation can best be seen in commercial or—even better—consumer-oriented architecture. By this I refer not merely to the buildings of corporate American power (viz., the AT&T/Philip Johnson "Chippendale" building—an irreverent denomination missing the

intended classical entablature and thus illuminating the postmodern joke) but the everyday achievement that is nearly everywhere to be found, most notably of course in North America, but also abroad.

In all, I refer to shopping malls, to the abundance of new constructions of and reconstruction in—tellingly spoken of as “face-lifts”—suburban/urban shopping malls and department store complexes. These face-lifts are all the easier to accomplish where “up-to-date” construction techniques combine “ready-made” construction with modular veneers; that is, where function is a matter of form and where form is reduced to mere or pure formality. Faced with gleaming marble, brass and chrome—“gold” and “silver” glittering on blood-veined stone—the surfaces of mall architecture reflect the grand-image value scheme of monumental architecture in construction and materials.<sup>4</sup> Below, we shall see that the image-ethos of a carefully nurtured respect for the values of mass culture, be this a kitsch-similar shopping mall plaza in the streamlined late-modern (the image of consumer, “user” efficiency) mode or the postmodern, practical design (commodity “efficient”) of recent shopping malls, facilitating the movements of a mass of people is an illusion. In other words, the apparent affinity for the values of so-called “mass” culture is in the end little more than a promotional schematic for conveying the (temporary) image of an exceptional aura. Like the new techniques for cutting wafer-thin panels of marble, substance is a matter not of structure but of seeming.

### **Miracle on 32nd Street: The Mall**

A few years ago, a new “store” appeared in an obvious postmodern mode, resurrected in New York City’s Herald Square with a certain flattened fanfare for a final hurrah from the ashes of Gimbel’s Department Store. Gimbel’s, New Yorkers of even modest ages will remember, was a competitor of Macy’s, the department store long and still dominating Herald Square. The new A&S Plaza, intercalated with an eminently featureless, mirrored building, borrowing Macy’s nominal connection as Herald Center, is a pastiche of both department store—literal *super* market of linens and clothing, houseware and cosmetic goods, etc.—and the suburban style shopping mall mosaic of reduplicative individual stores. This new bid for attention in New York’s old garment district—where it is perhaps easier to be ignored than almost anywhere—signals nothing like a triumph of A&S over Macy’s, still touted as “the world’s largest store.” Like Macy’s—or like Bloomingdale’s and almost all New York City department stores—A&S is little more than the outer husk sheltering invisible financial movements so that newspaper reports of “leveraged buyouts” go hand in hand with little signs assuring customers at cash registers that near-bankruptcy (so-called “Chapter 11”) status

means nothing.

In fact, the new A&S store facing the square where Broadway and Sixth Avenue meet and diverge is not a store in the traditional sense at all. Although labelled as A&S at its entrances and on the building's edge with huge pastel neon lights—barber shop marquees, phallic top and bottom—it is not A&S, in fact, and it is not a department store. Mirrored in Herald Center's black-windowed facade, which in its turn reflects Macy's block-long presence in the same square, is not A&S as such and alone (the plurality of its name seems hardly out of place) but rather a plurality of stores, indeed, and, as of this writing, several unrented, white-soaped windows, that is potentially an even greater plurality, despite the vicissitudes of the renter's market. These stores include the wildly successful British import, the "high" postmodernism of the Body Shop, featuring green wash cloths in little baskets and devoted to "traditional" shampoos, make-up and so on, manufactured in nature- and animal-friendly fashion, in addition to the redundant abundance of clothing and music media stores that constitute American and European shopping malls as such.

Displaying its non-utopian, image-conscious, casually postmodern ethos, the external walls of the A&S "store" have been replaced with floor-to-ceiling windows, reflected in Herald Center. Repeating the same reference, the black-windowed Herald Center is decorated with a simulacral trinity borrowed from the coding of transparent corporate and hotel architecture in a perpetual, hierarchic ascent of three illuminated "elevator" rectangles. Within A&S, this external coding is repeated and (naturally) self-decoding in this repetition. Four "real" elevators, two on either side, frame the open-mall style court. At either end, ascending and descending escalators are to be found leading to blind walls and window displays. And yet the formal or progressive a-functionality of the design that seems obvious at first viewing is no more than a distraction which is soon revealed as illusory just as the gargantuan veneer of "A&S" mirrors Macy's monolithic presence.

Thus, to take the example of the escalators to the five/six/seven floors of the mall, the opposition to progress is not merely "read" out of the array with the insouciance of a discipline-violating academic's trivially critical interpretation of the design of the interior space. In practice, in effect—so to say, *when buying socks*—the schematic path of escalator-progress disrupts the intentional subject's bodily navigation of the mall and in the end converts and codifies the consumer's desire into an occupation. The problem of progress is the issue of the decoding of the *outside*—the non-progressive ascent of simulacral skeletal elevators—and the *inside*—the vermiform effect of an escalator to nowhere.

As in the Beaubourg's intestinal industrial externalized architecture,

an overtly mechanical evisceration of the modern dyad of form and function, exhibited via a roping mass of tubes and cylinders—"people movers"—the formal arrangement of the "outside inside" totalizes the import of the building's function.<sup>5</sup> Like Longfellow's American Indian Engineer, Hiawatha—who fashioned found-material, killed-animal mittens of squirrel-fur, and for warmth turned the inside outside, keeping the warmside, outside, inside—the escalators of the Beaubourg, as people movers, force and direct access to controlled and thus limited points of entrance and keep the museum-side, the object of desire, inside—*outside*—the people-side, the consumer/public side, outside—*inside*—and so correspondingly and ultimately, funnel them toward several and separate exits.

But where the Centre Pompidou (the Beaubourg so gallically named for its aesthetic appeal) ultimately directs visitors either to its roof-top cafeteria or its exits, the functional architectural design, the architectonic of the mall schematic highlights entrances above all. In the postmodern mall, exits and "food-courts" are side-issues. Once within one is hard put to find one's way about let alone to find the way out—and this is the point. As a postmodern structure, A&S's shopping mall uses the same post-Fordian industrial technique reflected in the Beaubourg escalators in design and transport to the same end. In this assembly line what is assembled is not the goods to be sold but rather the buyers themselves. In the code of its architectural integration the valences of ascent and descent are reticulated, and either way the visitor traverses broader sections of the gallery of stores than can match any desire for a product save the not incidentally and thereby generated desire to be in the mall for its own sake.

It is because A&S is a shopping mall that the evident anti-functionality (the presumptive architectonic coding) of the escalator design is as illusory as the transparent appearance of the external mock elevators. In a culture of the simulacral and the spectacle, the trek to the next escalator, whether successfully found or not, transforms the "visitor" willy nilly into a "shopper," that is, a committed, attentive tourist of shopping options. The mall shopper is a high-tech "*flaneur*"—by default. The escalators could hardly be more functional. Where the elevators have been opened by the transparency of their walls to permit the shopper a vision of the possibilities at his disposal, the escalator in turn permits the shopper to "directly" experience these actual possibilities—the commodities, the "things" themselves—on the way to (in the way of!) her destination. In this same effective vision, the escalators in the A&S store itself convey an imaginary constitution of the shopper: as one ascends one passes oneself on the mirrored wall along the descending side of the adjacent escalator. This imaginary reflection, common to most department stores

and malls, mirrors not only the shopper himself/herself, but amidst and in train with other shoppers intent on a common quest, the reflection projects the fantasy of capitalist culture, the holy grail, the challenging object that matches and fulfills perfect desire. Because these escalators too are blind, literal diverticula, alternating only by way of the reverse second double bank of escalators, any “efficient” progress through the tiers of the store is frustrated. Challenged to advance, the consumer—and thus one *becomes* a consumer—must circle to the rear of the escalator bank to continue to the next floor and so on. The procedure does not yield any straightforward compensation. Rather, to transform and conflate Benjamin’s image, the shoppers are remade as *flaneurs* in the “age of mechanical transportation” by dint of the encounter with an array of commodities more bewildering by abundance than by the scintillation of appearance much less any shock of novelty.

It is significant to note the very postmodern *advantage* of this impediment to free passage—not of course as a benefit to the time-pressured and harried consumer but rather for the corporate interests yielding the design of this “public” space. To see the contrast between postmodern and modern corporate ideals as the difference between the postmodern imaginary of marble veneer, dazzling mirrors of glass and chrome, and the modern image of effective progress, I shall offer a brief contemporary example to illustrate the articulation of public and commercial space. Returning to an even more cursory consideration of Macy’s significance as gargantua, i.e., as the “world’s largest store,” I will question the postmodern representation of the future of art and the romantic image of art and genius for art’s sake.

The architectonic of the mall, the hotel, the shopping plaza, is not only literally but figuratively reflected in Boston’s Copley Place—in the adjacent mirror wall of the Hancock Tower (Henry Cobb, I.M. Pei)—as well as in the transformation of the function of the decorative city-square as market-*place*. The newly reworked Copley Square is nothing like a new-fitted *agora*. What was once a rather unpretentious and at the very least architecturally harmonious square in front of the Richardson-Romanesque Trinity Church has thus recently been re-configured to permit, among other “functions,” an old-fashioned, more central farmer’s market. That Boston already sported such a market, indeed a traditional market which still operates under highway overpasses, amidst girders and such, at the thus traditionally named Haymarket, suggests that the impulse for the (seasonal) installation of such a market across from the classical amphitheatre-style stepped construction facing the Copley Plaza Hotel, the Mirror Side of the Hancock Tower, reflecting Trinity Church in its turn and the levelled square itself, all under the gaze of the Monumental American Classicism of the Boston Public Library, has to do



with the cultivation of the so-called but not so placed Copley Place, which is of course, not a place, plaza, or square but a mall. Beyond stylistic pomo invective or invocation, it should be noted that the city square, re-designed and capitalized in accord with the latest marketing theory or trend, represents not the differences so important to valorize for postmodern sensitivities but only the image or appearance of difference. Little vendor pushcarts on the square are replicas of the pushcarts in Faneuil Hall and in the mall itself. The new “square” is little more than a counterpiece, an echo or repetition in the age of mass/mechanical reproduction—not an ironic quotation of shopping possibilities/prospects offered either in the mall itself or else to be found on the ever imaginary Newberry Street. The result is that one barely eats lunch in the square. Instead one passes through, one recuperates, one exposes oneself (in season) to the vendors.

As *agora*, the market has always been the natural gathering place. The trick is to conduct political life in the public space that is the space of desire, the life of the marketplace. The history of the modern era suggests that this has never been easy. Nor is this achieved in Boston, as it is not in Pittsburgh or New Orleans. It is not that the spaces here are empty, rather that the kind of use, the limits of use are at issue and conspicuously so. Like the public atriums large corporations declare “open to the public,” or like the garden housing projects built in Chicago, New York, and elsewhere several decades ago, the (justifying) conception fails to match use in practice—in real life. Shoppers or passersby gather in the new city square much as they would in a shopping mall gallery.<sup>6</sup> But like the mall gallery, or the New York corporate atrium defined by city law to be made accessible to the public, the users of the new city square know themselves to be *users*, that is assigned access to the space on the terms of the provider. The new city square does not duplicate the function of an old market square, despite the proximity of the “market,” just because it is not a shared space or a *commons*. It is thus noteworthy that Boston actually features a “Commons” so named and a “working” locale reflecting the special spirit, the “*genius loci*,” to speak with Norberg-Schulz, of Boston as such. It is not irrelevant that on the Commons itself, this last genial value is there in spades, where the same local spirit is so elusive and (otherwise) so desired by designers that they even speak of designing not squares but “spaces” and “locales.” This is not to say that they fail, for where the old gods flee, some new simulacral god can come to stand. Thus the square of postmodern public life is absorbed in the simulacra of life that is the commodity and *its* desire, the functional life of the market place. If we fail to “hear old Triton blow his wreathed horn,” or miss the “sight of Proteus rising from the sea,” we have a completely fluid world of trademarks and decorations: we are pagan enough—but without antique

convention, history, or “depth.” Hence in the postmodern mall, hotel, or office building we have temple entablatures without temples, generic columns supporting nothing, generic gods no one can name, sacrificial decorations without a sacrifice.<sup>8</sup>

In the specific world of commerce, the question is whether Macy’s can be said to represent the doomed competition of the classic art-deco modern ideal or whether it too is to be taken in the image of the (here) retrofitted and thus ever more secure ascendance of the postmodern? This issue is open to debate and Macy’s is caught in the same economic maelstrom that may be said to have engendered—to combine Jameson’s terminology with Baudrillard’s image and description—the *late-capitalist* space of desire and fulfillment. Macy’s re-designs its own floorplan seasonally. Yet in the archaeological remainders of its design, in its base structure, still discernable at the edges of the retro-fitted post-modern, Macy’s remains a paragon of futuristic modern (that is: consumer-, here *customer*-oriented) efficiency. In the service of this efficient ideal, banks of elevators, batteries emblematic of an “old-fashioned” modernity, provide local as well as express service to the highest floors. Even more archaically service-oriented in this context, escalators permit direct ascent not only to the floor but even the locale of choice in a reticulated array. Such facilitation of desire is an old ideal: the new postmodern merely invites or simulates the image of desire and the ultimate end is the array of the sale, the commodity display.<sup>9</sup> The “efficiency” in this latter context is the permanent, unremitting sell.

What, if anything, has the image of the futuristic modern and the postmodern future, illustrated by the contrast between two New York City icons of consumption and the contrast between consumer/customer and market/commodity efficiency, to do with art? What has Boston’s Copley Place to do with the future of art, the question whither art?

In the wake of an extended metaphor or introductory parable, any thematic question tends to lose its spring—its legs have, as it were, gone to sleep in the meantime. To nudge this question to life once again, let me suggest that the point of comparison turns on the issue of the *future*, the fore-structure, the *avant-garde* in art. Thus we may note that just as the store of the future represents an outmoded modern ideal, the vision of the future of art in the art world, as the art of the future, is similarly dated. The old-fashioned modernism of the terms *futurism* and the *avant-garde*, even in the now almost patently quaint idea of Dadaism, work as descriptive terms providing an ethos of invention and a justification for innovation. This ethos was at once easily appropriated not only by the artists themselves but by generations of promoters and purveyors of art and by the consultants/investment advisers, curators, dealers, philosopher-aestheticians (as distinguished from those “aestheticians” who work in

hair salons), and above all critics, historians, and so on. The art work itself, so categorized, is readily recognizable and (especially in the case of the avant-garde) the cultural ethos implied by both the critical terminology and the identified/identifiable artists could win advocates among the potentially, ideationally ever-open ideal of the “modern public” of *non-artists* and *non-critics*. This last public or mass connection—that of consumer-relations—is especially important for the projects of museum and documentary film and literary, artbook, or cocktail culture.

## **Futurism and Postmodern Art Futures**

It is symptomatic of a postmodern sensibility that the vision of futurism, for example, is now regarded as “naive,” and quaintly so, rather than falsely so. Thus conceived, the future itself is *passé*, a dated phenomenon. Having reached its nadir in commercial influences as these survive (notably—instructively—largely) in print advertisements of the streamlined twenties and thirties and in the abbreviated flair of the forties and in the television commercials of the fifties and sixties,<sup>10</sup> “futurism” has been eclipsed or modified as a testimony to the factually postmodern condition of today’s “modern times.” The future, the real future opposing the future anterior of nostalgic return, is no longer presented as a streamlined, or stainless steel flared-fantasy or iconized in solid-state transistors, the latest intel chips, or reflected in the surfaces of brushed steel and metallic black, red, and transparent casings, nor is it to be found in any kind of control panel utopia. More and more, one encounters literary and cinematic representations of what one critic dubs the “new ‘bad future,’”<sup>11</sup> that is, the new, the inescapable “bad” future, the future of the Terminator, of RoboCop, of low-brow revisions of *Bladerunner*, movie or video images of mediatized danger. Yet this “bad” future trend is less dominant—and this is the crux of what it is to be postmodern after all and all along—than the sophisticatedly blasé, casual representations of anticipated “progressive” modes or fashions, proffered under the sign of imminent eclipse: *apocalypse mode*, that is, an eschatology of apocalypse without angst.

In this context, any new avatar of futurism resembles an inverted postmodernism. Technology continues its headlong expansion in its “new” projection, but without the utopian conviction, without the excelsior urgency of the modern vision. The advances of technology thus may seem without exception to yield environmental disasters but the anticipation of any technological cure-all is about as secure in the public mind as McDonald’s advertised claim for the biodegradability of their styrofoam hamburger coffins. In this new “bad” or decadent profile, the “future” fits a casually apocalyptic contour, the advances of technology keep pace with a proliferation of side-effects, trade-offs, and the balancing of catastrophic costs with the meager benefits of variations

upon the latest automotive and kitchen gadgetry, *eternally* offering, despite new lineaments and variations, ever recognizably the same. The point here, the postmodern condition again, is that we are past minding.

Of course, if the appeal of futurism as a style in art depends on the appeal of the (imaginable) future, this constraint hardly holds for the avant-garde. The avant-garde is always possible. And hence if not the “reality” or practice at least the spirit of the radical avant-garde in art and literature continues to draw thinkers on the left. Perhaps this remains so because the avant-gardist style was chameleon enough to be counted as futurist when the futurist movement had viability, while yet being flexible enough to be lodged as dadaist, then modernist, abstractionist, absolutist, etc., so too as pop-art counter-expression, in the sixties and seventies, and hence to find itself in the eighties and on the edge of the nineties still preserved as a type of postmodern *sans* blasé denigration as the critical invocation of pastiche—that is, the postmodern conceived as still parodic, still reactionary.<sup>12</sup>

The difference between the postmodern, and the avant-garde (as indeed the futurist movement understood both as the ideological political/economic planning progress of futurologists as well as the Russian and Italian practitioners of style) is to be found in the radical anti- or non-elitism of the postmodern perspective. The pastiche-parodicity of the postmodern, its double-coding, is deliberate and casual, disdaining high culture even as it offers these very icons for the consumption of mass reception or culture; conversely, the code offered to the critic is the code of this double-vantage. This anti-elitist spirit imbues even the philosophically sophisticated notion of a double coding<sup>13</sup> with a conspicuously, deliberately vulgarized ethos.<sup>14</sup>

But if (postmodern, new avant-gardist, neo-political, that is pluralist) art thus eschews any elite assignment—and with this disavowal we return to the matter at hand in the present essay—what is the future of art? Here, the ordinary query posed in the voice of the ordinary man, the so-called average consumer, asks what then is to remain special about it? In blunt consumerist terms, if art is nothing but a commodity like any other, what’s its particular worth? and where is a reliable guide to its value to be found? This question may be posed with a political edge in the (now almost buried!) wake of the Mapplethorpe-vs-Helms controversy, i.e., a recent contribution to the old pornography vs. art debate.

In the US, the controversy of funding the (potentially publically offensive) arts is not only a constitutional issue. The question of censorship here is also very much a question of financial support—indeed this is precisely what is at issue. For it is not enough that the artworks be offered for sale. The issue of freedom here—and the stuff not of erotica, which probably does not exist as such, but of pornography, which does

exist as such, has always been a hallmark issue for the freedom of speech in the US—is not a matter of unhampered productivity, as formerly counter-political, reactionary artists and authors in Eastern European countries have recently discovered to their (somewhat touching) surprise. What is at stake is *marketability and*, because this is equally important in any late-capitalist market, *subvention*.

The art and intellectual community of commodification requires an imprimatur: the endowment support of an artist not only certifies his or her market quality—thus the academic pretensions of modernity—but it also coordinates his or her marketability, while it also enables the artist like the farmer to survive (to ignore) the pressures of the same market. Despite the plethora of market-defined distinctions, the romantic, even avant-gardiste image of the artist *apart from* the market and market pressures (impurity) continues as the dominant definition of art as such. Even Warhol's deliberate mockery of the market and appeal or playing to the same was and continues to be interpreted as I have described it: that is, it is taken to be a *deliberate mockery*. Which is of course to say, Warhol's mockery of (appeal to) the market is regarded as separated from and opposed to and thus independent of market influence. This convicted innocence, the portrait of the artist as starving, tortured, but always pure, always ravaged by desires and visions beyond the market is the problem here. For by mutual and simultaneous definition *marketable* art, like the interest-free sanction required for the free approval of purely aesthetic delight, must not display its genesis or calculation in terms of the market.

Now national endowment and foundational support in the arts as in the humanities as, indeed, in the sciences themselves, is not and has never been "pure." In a circle that any grant-seeker knows well, only those artists, scholars, and scientists already recognized as successful by institutionalized professional standards, that is according to the review of established "peers," are worthy of support. In the case of the National Endowment for the Arts (hereafter: NEA) controversy no "new" (taken in the strict sense as unknown or in the proverbial or even the literal sense as "starving") artists as such were involved. Hence, and most notably, Joseph Papp (Mr. Shakespeare Marathon) could make a most public display of his post-Mapplethorpe *refusal* of his own NEA award and thus show his solidarity with the ideal of art, that is, that supported by the public and granted, administered via pure, that is peer, sanctions.

The image cultivated by the ideal of public support for the arts, suggests support for artistic endeavors apart from (values of) the marketplace. But in fact nearly all of the artists involved in the NEA debate were and are already established, meaning commercially, financially successful, recognized artists. In this sense, the artists/projects themselves had already passed muster as saleable (*the* criterion of

progress, as modern as it is postmodern) by the standards of NEA committee evaluation. What is to be emphasized here is the ordinary corollary of critical success, namely the criterion for failure. The new, the all-too-new, the unrecognizably oblique, or the simply non-standard or non-mainline, non-coopted theme or methodology, that is, anything regarded as not (yet or no-longer) art—the *non-marketable* in sum—is and has always been rejected according to the *standards* of such agencies of peers and peer judges—that is of course inevitably a collective of anticipatory *ressentiment* and recollective, retroactive collusion—as unsupportable. What the NEA supports is “Art.” That’s what a successful grant application means to an artist, and what it means to the purveyors, and hence to the consultant, to the investor, etc.; such a canonization, such recognition as attaining to the status of “Art” is the imprimatur conferred. Conversely, what the NEA rejects is, by definition once again, not-art.

This endowment canon reflects of course nothing less than the ethos of endowment support, i.e., value judgments or, in still other words, the NEA’s own moral standards. The “moral” outrage of the conservatives spearheaded by the all-too typically Southern statesman, Jesse Helms’ good (old boy) confusion is the “morality” of the (so-called) voiceless public. The “moral” standards of the art-world are different, but no less moral, hardly less sanctimonious. Corroborating this parallel with Helms’ proposed amendment, in the art world the result is the same and to the same effect: only that which is sanctioned sells. What is more, providing an indirect proof of the original market association between public endowment support and quality confirmation, the controversy itself has been an economic windfall for the purveyors of Mapplethorpe prints, as for the sale of other associated works and corporate sponsoring of performance artists. Here it should suffice to recollect that in this first case there has been no run on explicitly homoerotic or high contrast botanical black and white photographs as such: only Robert Mapplethorpe’s work—and thus his estate—has enjoyed the economic benefits of Warhol’s famously approximate fifteen minutes of public attention. Yet beyond the burst of a popular market success, the issue can and should be seen to be one of moral distinction. Not only does the NEA—and we may think of other endowment committees, including museum boards and academic and other institutions—operate by its own inquisitorial, even draconian standards but in the current political climate the challenge from Helms and the non-productive but consuming public in effect works as an indirect coefficient of those very same opposed standards.<sup>15</sup> Art for art’s sake.

Perhaps in the same way, the consequence of the decoding, massification of art suggests that art is a matter of promotion, of hype, and like the word postmodern, more than just a little exaggeration. Thus

critics and investors alike can occasionally speak on behalf of the “consuming” public to ask why art should be featured as the cultural treasure of museum exhibitions and study institutes? This is a structural, material question. Such museums and study institutes, indeed, even the departments of art history, art criticism and studio art at the university level, may not be separated from the world of commercial enterprise. Is the museum—and more indirectly but still coordinately culpable, the university study-institute—anything but the hawk of a certain vision of culture to structure and inform the possibilities of public consumption in a supplier’s hierarchic panoply of original investment and the valuation of canonical reproduction? The cultural exposition that is the business of museum work requires fund-raising and grantsmanship, but the museum is less and less any kind of public work. Indeed, like civic parks or monuments, like city squares, or country markets, one may ask whether public works exist at all.

In New York City, public admission charges\*to museums fairly match the price of admission to first-run movie theaters. Thus public—“mass”—support is offered from all sides, via civic and commercial endowment support and once again then at the door, and yet again in the profits won from the ubiquitous museum shops and mail-order catalogs. In addition, the circulation of curators from museums to commercial galleries means that charges of collusion between museum boards and these latter vending machines are no longer surprising—if, apart from the Romantic ethos of artistic purity, such charges ever were surprising, one thinks of Berenson, one thinks of Winckelmann. More recently, of course, Hans Haacke, has made an artistic career of what could be called *monumental and exhibitional ressentiment*. Given both his talent *and* his success, this designation should not be heard as a subjective psychology of his work, or as any kind of denigration, but rather as a simple description of the content of its presentation. Haacke’s work is important and its message needs to be heard—and this point must be made after the preceding discussion of art and markets—but its efficacy is questionable given the reflective critical deflation of sanctioned critique. The striking impotence of Jenny Holzer’s deliberately derivative constructions (truisms carved in polished granite and white marble, or flashed in neon lights in Times Square, or balancing the cost of success for a woman-artist and the obscene expense of an installation in the Venice Biennial) bears out this very point. If as Marcuse pointed out, the modern era is the era of one-dimensionality, the postmodern mirror schema flattens even the one-dimensional, subverting the critical effort of parody in the categorical impotence of pastiche. As Nietzsche taught in a different voice, echoed by no less a critic of the left than Adorno himself, the absorption of critique is the highest—the most dangerous because most insidious—will to power.

And yet if art is ineluctably commercial, perhaps this is only to say that it has returned to its pristine origin as an organ of civic and religious culture, for that is embodied by the commercial today—but that that return is one effected in a post-modern era. This era is beyond art, a culture of civic value after the death of the political (or its collapse into economic and ethnic competition as the current changes—now political, now violent machinations and leading more often than not to third-world style indigence/impotence—in East Europe and the Middle East suggest) and the death of the religious (or its cooption in the ethos of a technoscientific life-aesthetic). Art has always been for sale.

What does this mean? Whither art? What is its future? Is it only an element in the commodity schemas of a post-industrial economy, an economy which has absorbed culture? Is it consignment to the design of MTV backdrops and choreography? We have discussed museums and public squares, supermarkets and museums. Is art expressed in the architecture of urban/suburban shopping “spaces,” or the external “image” of massive importance or sleek technopower of a corporate city center, or by way of a selective array of investment options—“art”—for the interior decoration of banks, executive headquarters, and other office buildings? And beyond MTV’s video backdrops and technical proficiency, beyond the dancer’s choreography, what of the music? Is music no more than what is experienced day to day, in restaurants and supermarkets, as a background, head-flattening, heart-deafening experience? Beyond public music, there is private music, carried in one’s pocket or strapped to one’s waist, so that one’s body in the open world is, as it were, “wired” for sound? Is music, as art reducible to a signifier of one’s social class, as a taste, dominating one’s living room, as a sign of material success, a static *techno*-array of stereo equipment, massive speakers, and rows of gleaming CDs? Apart from the investment value of art, the social significance of style, where is art to be found? I have suggested that an answer to this question must address both the manifold pervasiveness as well as the multifarious poverty of art in late-modern, high-, and perpetually capitalist culture. If even art for art’s sake never worked for art’s sake alone, then the loss of innocence Umberto Eco characterizes as late-modern/postmodern is not only the death of illusion but the possibility of awaking to the truth of, the shock of tradition.<sup>16</sup> In this death, asking the question of the future of art, we need to be open to the possibility of being true to the past, a truth which brings the future.

This possibility is consonant with the still unthought but already celebrated value of pluralism. We do live in an age of hyper-individualism, with the very exaggerated sense of self Donald Kuspit has ironically underlined as the paradox heralding the death of the subject.<sup>17</sup> And it is to this that the myth of the artist corresponds in a democratic



massified ideal. The elite, esoteric few in our day includes *everyone*, whether by moral command (the imperative of political correctness) or capitalist convention. It is not that the idea of pluralism is to be unmasked as a fraud or revealed as impossible or as the enemy of the modern ideal of the individual, of authenticity, of the proper, but that to think genuine pluralism invites the same silence as thinking the individual *qua* individual. What is needed to prepare the possibility of a pluralistic future for art, not merely as the art of hyperindividualism with respect to (for) the other, calls for genuine solicitude: for the attention to the difficulty of the question for understanding and for action I name *reticence*. To be the consecrators of being and the now, the golden present, the moment, not just for ourselves but for others, demands that we take care to note the difficulty of pluralism beyond the value of the word and the extraordinary elusiveness of true solicitousness in the reticent respect that regards the other as other and lets what is be in being, neither for us nor unrelated to us but as it is. Such solicitude is other than the diffident distance that covers disinterest and it is not sycophancy sprung from fear or guilt, for it only works when those in power are charged to give themselves over to such reticence.

A full discussion of this moral-aesthetic imperative must be left for another day, but it is necessary to note in indicating this possible direction for the future of art that in speaking of reticence I am not advocating a politics of resentment or championing the masochistic cult of the victim. In raising the question of art and culture, of the relation between self and other, I have suggested that as a slogan, the idea of pluralism offers no ready answer to the question. This is not least because like the eclecticism so often identified with post-modernism, pluralism still needs to be thought. To advocate openness, to take the part of the other is harder than one thinks. It has yet to be done where the very conception of otherness remains a unilateral proclamation uttered from within the discourse of reason.

## Notes

- 1 Charles Jencks, "Postmodern v. Late-Modern," in Ingeborg Hoesterey, ed., *Zeitgeist in Babel* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991), 14.
- 2 *Ibid.*
- 3 A few authors, notably including Habermas, feel that the postmodern *is* the pre-modern. And Charles Jencks has recently argued that this is effectively Lyotard's conclusion as well. Some would maintain that what is called postmodern is little more than modernity—again. Jencks has sought to preserve a distinct sense of the postmodern by clarifying or better: defining the term as involving an essential irony, asserting with Margaret Rose and Linda Hutcheon that double-coding is the key which distinguishes the postmodern from late-modernity. Although it is not the aim of this paper to argue, it is worth noting that the critical advantage of the "postmodern" derives from this seemingly

inexhaustible resistance.

- 4 For a positive discussion of the image of the monumental beyond the classic expression by Alois Riehl, see Stanislaus von Moos "Verwandlungen der Modernen Architektur," in particular section 8, 142-9, "Paradigmen-wechsel. Oder: Das Novum Theatrum Architecturae," in G. Eifler, O Saame, Hrsg., *Postmoderne. Anbruch einer neuen Epoche? Eine interdisziplinäre Erörterung* (Wien: Passagen Verlag, 1990), 117-164.
- 5 Note that Jencks takes special pains to explain that Piano and Roger's Pompidou Center is *not* postmodern but "high tech." I am not classifying the building here but suggesting the difference the "high tech" or late modern makes compared with the ideals (not necessarily the much criticized lived achievements of certain exemplars of) of modern architecture. See the text of his footnote number 10, in "Postmodern v. Late-Modern," 21.
- 6 These are old issues, and, with specific reference to Boston, a theme addressed in some now dated detail by Jane Jacobs and, somewhat more recently by Christian Norberg-Schulz. Additional discussions are offered on this rather reluctantly postmodern of modern themes in the writings of Hal Foster and Marshall Berman, among many others.
- 7 Jencks, p. 9, regards this diffidence as a defining feature, and indeed, virtue of the postmodern: "Whereas a mythology was given to the artist in the past by tradition and by patron, in the postmodern world it is chosen and invented."
- 8 George Hersey discusses modern replications of antique symbols almost ritualistically preserved, on his account, without any sense of what he describes as the archaic bloody and blood-thirsty connotations of these conventions. See his *The Lost Meaning of Classical Architecture: Speculations on Ornament from Vitruvius to Venturi* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1988). Hersey offers a popular presentation of his thesis and a selective bibliography. For more theoretical and art historical studies, respectively, see Richard Broxton Onians, *The Origins of European Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1954) and Vincent Scully, *The Earth, The Temple, and the Gods: Greek Sacred Architecture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979).
- 9 Macy's escalators on the higher floors feature the old wooden treads which date the character of the design, and presage the character of modern demolition with a quaint endurance, which thus represents the luxury or patina of "an antique."
- 10 See Cecilia Ticchi, *Shifting Gears: Technology, Literature, Culture in Modernist America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1987) for an account of this phenomenon and a useful review of the literature. Cf. Stephen Kern, *The Culture of Time and Space: 1880-1918* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1983) and Russell Berman, *All That is Solid Melts into Air* (Middlesex : Penguin, 1982).
- 11 Fred Glass in *Science in Context*.
- 12 Cf. Frederic Jameson, "Postmodernism and Consumerist Society," in Hal Foster ed., *The Anti-Aesthetic* (Port Townsend, WA: Bay Press, 1983), 114.
- 13 In this context see again Glass's description of *Robocop* and Kaplan's description of *Bladerunner* in *Science in Context*.
- 14 See Jenck's commentary on Moore's *Piazza d'Italia* in New Orleans in *What is Postmodernism*, 2d rev. ed. (London: Academy Editions/St. Martin's Press, 1987).
- 15 Thus the performance artist Karen Finley—renowned as she is for performances smeared with chocolate-goo and cherry red jello, standing in for latterly and obviously blood and formerly feces/dirt—has happened into what is critically and negatively thought to be a coat-tail ride, a contaminative effect or "wind-fall" for her. Such a negative assessment criticizes the derivative provenance of Finley's recent Joseph Beuys-like success. But to this writer's knowledge, this sort of critical objection is rarely applied to estimate the "value" of Beuys' own plastic and so temporarily static art—viscously present, evanescent on the side of slow decay. Apparently the artist as static

performer is easier to take than the living, directly, dramatically mimetic art, in the lived-contemporary and so face-to-face gesture of performance. It catches in the critic's throat, who murmurs that this is, after all, not art but only a side-effect of politicized attention. In place of the applause and serious attention paid to Beuys, Finley's critics moralistically speculate about the distraction of an *illicit* attention.

- 16 See Donald Kuspit's discussion of Valéry's escape from 'the Nondescript,' p 58 ff. in "The Unhappy Consciousness of Modernism" in Ingeborg Hoesterey, ed., *Zeitgeist in Babel: The Postmodernist Controversy* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991), 50-65.
- 17 Kuspit, p. 64, expresses this hyper- or "exaggerated individuality" towards a "collective nonconformity" as "institutionalized non-conformity," as "narcissistic nonconformity," which he explains as "narcissism with a difference, the neonarcissism prevalent in our world of exaggerated individuality."



# Contributors

Babette Babich is Assistant Professor of Philosophy at Fordham University's Lincoln Center. She has published extensively on various topics in continental philosophy. Her book, *Nietzsche's Philosophy of Science* is forthcoming.

Stephanie Cash is an editorial assistant at *Art in America*.

Dina Comisarenco is completing her dissertation, entitled "Images of Childbirth in Latin American Art," at Rutgers University.

Barbara Jaffee, a practicing artist, teaches painting at The School of the Art Institute of Chicago and is completing doctoral studies in art history at the University of Chicago. "Purists and Pluralists Reconsidered" is an adaption of her M.A. thesis, submitted to the history of architecture and art department at the University of Illinois at Chicago in 1991.

Robert Jensen is Assistant Professor of Art History at Washington University in St. Louis. His book, *Marketing Modernism in Fin de Siècle Europe* is forthcoming. He recently published an article, "Selling Martyrdom," in *Art in America*.

Matthew Rohn is Associate Professor of Art History at Wittenberg University. Publications include *The Visual Dynamics in Jackson Pollock's Abstraction*.

Cécile Whiting is Assistant Professor in the Department of Art History at the University of California, Los Angeles. She has recently published *Antifascism in American Art* and *A Taste for Pop: Pop Art, Consumerism, Gender*, as well as various articles on Pop art.

## *Art Criticism*

*Editor:* Donald Kuspit

*Advisory Committee:* Ann E. Gibson  
Mel Pekarsky  
James Rubin

*Managing Editor:* Alissa Schoenfeld

*Business Editor:* Dominic Molon

*Art Criticism* is published in two issues per volume by:  
Department of Art  
State University of New York at Stony Brook  
Stony Brook, NY 11794-5400

Prospective contributors are asked to send abstracts. If, however, they do submit manuscripts, the editors request they include a return stamped envelope. Manuscripts accepted for publication must be submitted on a computer disc, preferably suitable for use on a Macintosh with the software program and version specified.

Subscriptions: \$7.50 per single issue; \$15 per year (\$20 per year outside the continental U.S.). Back issues available upon request.

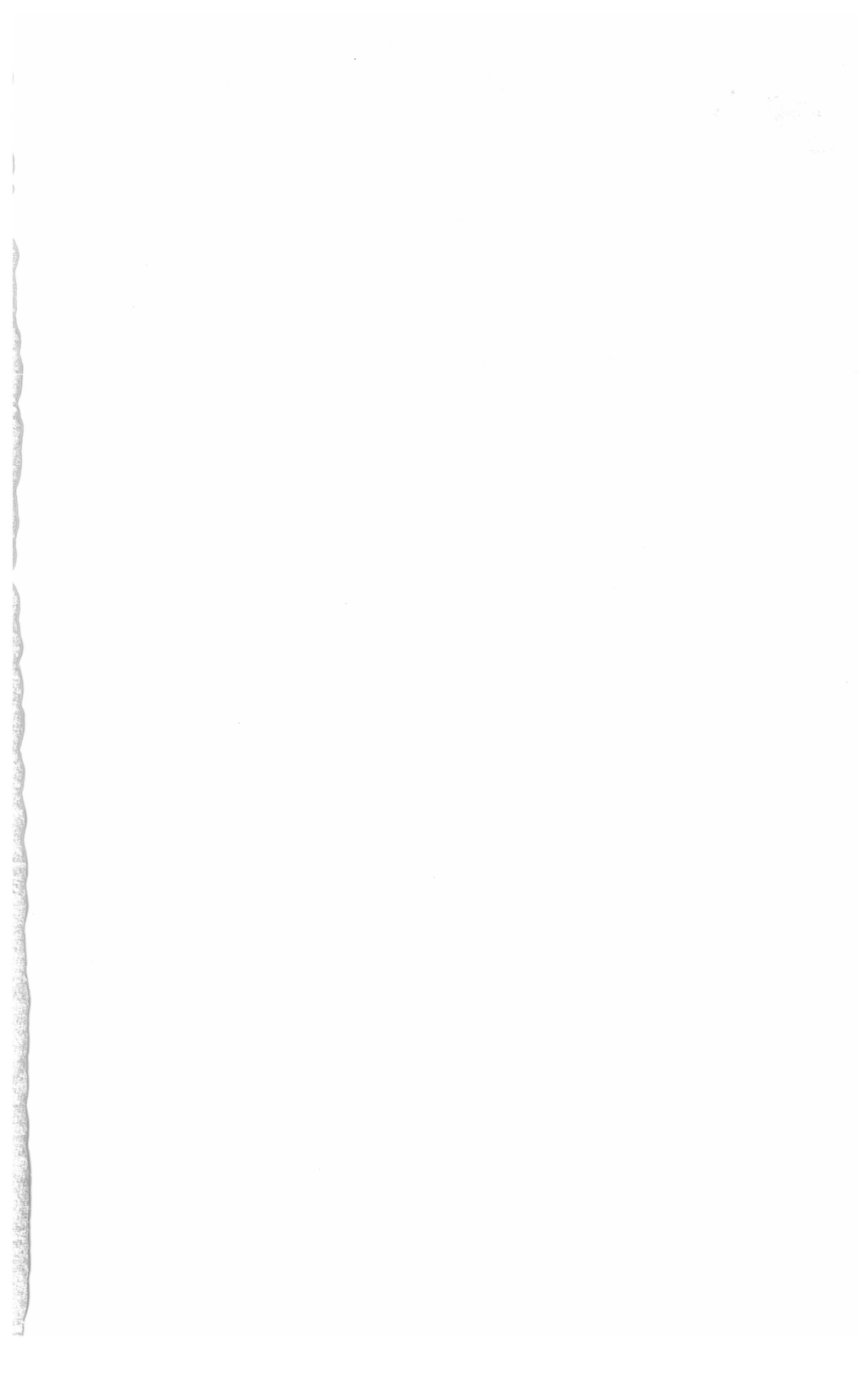












Art Department  
State University of New York at Stony Brook  
Stony Brook, NY 11794-5400

Non-Profit Org.  
U.S. Postage  
P A I D  
Permit No. 65  
Stony Brook, NY