

Volume 16, Number 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 Jamali and Art and Peace, Inc., The Stony Brook Foundation, President Shirley Strumm Kenny, Provost Rollin C. Richmond, the Dean of Humanities and Fine Arts, Paul Armstrong, for their gracious support.

Copyright 2001

State University of New York at Stony Brook

ISSN: 0195-4148

CONTENTS

- 7 THE BEAUTY FALLACY: DAVE HICKEY'S AESTHETIC REVISIONISM
Morris Yarowsky
- 12 STORYING ART (THE EVERYDAY LIFE OF TRICKY PRACTICES)
Jean Fisher
- 25 BETWEEN THE TOLKA AND THE DODDER: A PERSONAL VIEW OF
VISUAL ART IN DUBLIN
Ciaran Bennett
- 35 ARLENE RAVEN: CRITICISM AS HEALING FOR THE AUTHOR, THE
ARTIST, AND THE AUDIENCE
Meredith Moody
- 44 A VEXED TRANS-ATLANTIC RELATIONSHIP: GREENBERG AND
THE BRITISH
John A. Walker
- 62 CRAFTS AND FINE ART: AN ARGUMENT IN FAVOR OF
BOUNDARIES
Howard Risatti
- 71 TWO VERSIONS OF MARISOL, OVERLAPPING AND
UNDERLAPPING
Donald Kuspit
- 96 RE-ALIGNINGS?: ARTMAKING IN THE SOUTHEASTERN EUROPEAN
ENVIRONS OF MANIFESTA 3
Katherine A. Carl

THE BEAUTY FALLACY: DAVE HICKEY'S AESTHETIC REVISIONISM

MORRIS YAROWSKY

An unusual event has occurred in the art world. Beauty as a notion or fiction or sentimentally reconstituted category of judgement has experienced a revival in art-critical discourse. It has acquired new legitimacy after a century's dormancy as a term of description and a goal toward which works of art are directed. Beauty is, in Dave Hickey's words, "a seller of soap and sex"¹ that has the power to socialize the aesthetic. For some it has become an absolute value in art.

Hickey's version of art history is replete with elements of resentment and hostility toward modernism and its institutional setting. This is especially evident in his assertion that works of beauty as well as the very idea of beauty have been intentionally repressed by the so-called "therapeutic institution." According to Hickey, the therapeutic institution has cynically promoted the idea that looking at art—*its art*—is good for spiritual health. The repression of beauty is politically motivated, based on the therapeutic institution's distrust of beauty's rhetoric and its potential for establishing a nexus of communication between art and its audience. Beauty actively communicates art's ability to inspire dangerous social change.

"I am certain of one thing," he writes, "images can change the world."² Hickey consistently fails to distinguish between the effectiveness of images in mass culture and in works of art. He argues that because art for the sake of art neutralizes art's power, the therapeutic institution has made art-for-art's-sake the art of choice. This refers to abstraction but also encompasses all art that is not readily understood by the public.

It was not always thus, for Hickey, who prefers the good old days when art really *did* something. Art's connection with the beholder is the desired result of the "rhetoric of beauty." An active connection between the work of art and its beholder did exist at one time, but no longer. From 1850 to 1920, he states, "pictures were made *for* people, not against them." They are "beauties...and none of them died, nor have they ever."³

This sentimental view of art of the past reinforces the public's suspi-

cion of difficult modern and contemporary art. Hickey's appeal may be to those who harbor resentment of difficulty in art and bemoan the loss of beauty, whatever that might have been. The Hirshhorn Museum's exhibition, "Regarding Beauty: A View of the Late 20th Century" (October 1999/January 2000), inspired by the revival of the theme of beauty, attempted to demonstrate beauty's necessary presence in art. Inevitably, the exhibition was mired in theoretical confusion, trying to make the case that beauty is the *sine qua non* of 'beautiful' art, circularity and tautology notwithstanding. Art must 'have' beauty, either by its abundant presence or regretful absence.

Such a standard, among many emerging notions of the vaporous beauty idea, defines beauty as an aesthetic absolute. The current enthusiasm for this unstable and sentimental standard constitutes a revival of popular romantic notions of art. Hickey does not acknowledge art's position within a culture different from and higher than mass culture and does not differentiate the presumed effects of beauty in serious art from those effects in popular culture or advertising.

Moreover, Hickey identifies beauty as a pleasure producing mechanism: beauty is not an "intransitive" element, existing only as a state of mind, but rather an active "agency" in art. "Beauty is the agency that caused visual pleasure in the beholder and any theory of images that was not grounded in the pleasure of the beholder begged the question of their efficacy and doomed itself to inconsequence."⁴

Hickey's theory is in actuality a suburbanization of the idea of art's efficacy. Its emphasis on the beholder's pleasure and the requirement that art contribute to it echoes the core Epicurean belief that pleasure is the goal of a happy life. To claim that pleasurable experience is the desired effect of beauty's presence in works of art portrays art as a form of entertainment, a role ordinarily associated with the art of popular culture, or kitsch.

In Hickey's theory, art and its institutions have removed themselves from the broader culture and as a result "the practice of art is dying." "Art stops mattering to the individual citizens of the republic and begins to fade from public consciousness, where it MUST live." The resulting moribund state of art is a result of modernism's "obsession" with artists, "the people who make the work, their personal egos and identities...at the expense of those citizens who might invest it [the work of art] with value."⁵

A connection between art and *the* public—not *its* public—depends on the "vernacular of beauty" which, because of its "democratic appeal remains a potent instrument for change in this civilization."⁶ Hickey states, "I'm not interested in the intentions of artists: I'm interested in consequences."⁷ Hickey wants art to be a powerful instrument for social change, but it is also to be an experience that provides pleasure.

If beauty is the necessary quality and desired goal in art, how does a work of art acquire or achieve it? How do we recognize its presence? The catalog of the Hirschhorn's "Regarding Beauty" exhibition instructs us: "The most beautiful art is that in which formalism and content complement each other, each enhancing the other's most positive qualities."⁸ This formula purports to present the means by which the beautiful is conjured, a standard that can be deployed to identify and judge that which is worthwhile in art. Such a notion of beauty dissolves in thin air at any point of application: what of works of art that are not concerned with "formalism" or "content," and, in any case, how is it possible to identify the "most positive qualities" of formalism or content?

For Hickey the homophobic fear of identification with the feminine character of beauty is responsible for its repression. Beauty is characterized by feminine attributes of generosity but the feminine sensibility in art has been repressed and the stern quality of male judgment has taken its place. The artist is celebrated while the beholder is denied and sadistically dominated by autonomous works of art that are nurtured and promoted by the therapeutic institution.

This reactionary political/aesthetic theory is presented in the guise of an aesthetic populism that celebrates popular art and finds no moral difference between art that is clearly kitsch, art of popular and mass culture, and—for want of a better word—serious art. "Having been around both worlds," and here Hickey refers to the world of everyday life and the art world, "I really never have found any moral distinctions."⁹

Hickey identifies the historical turning point of art's decline in a scenario that connects Stalin, Hitler, and the Museum of Modern Art. In this bizarre analysis, he claims there were three historical "putsches"—one by Stalin that subordinated form to content "in the name of the proletariat," another by Joseph Goebbels, who orchestrated the use of art for the Nazi regime, and the third by Alfred Barr, who, "in the service of inherited capital, proclaimed the absolute subordination of content to form."¹⁰ According to this account, Barr promoted abstraction in order to suppress art that might encourage dangerous social or political change. Hickey states that "both Barr and Goebbels, having acquired institutional power, proceeded with roughly parallel agendas—both of them clearly operating out of an understanding that works of art, left to their own audiences, have the potential to destabilize the status quo."¹¹ In Hickey's simplistic Marxist analysis, abstract art was promoted as part of a capitalist scheme to inhibit or prevent "dangerous" political change. His claim that Alfred Barr and Joseph Goebbels had parallel agendas is historically absurd but, more seriously, denies the evil realities of the Nazi regime.

In pandering to popular taste, Hickey must attack "dated modernist

conventions"¹² that produce art devoid of beauty. The modernist work of art is depicted as a "Frankenstein's monster—a powerful, autonomous simulacrum of its creator's promethean, subterranean self, wreaking cold judgement and vengeance on all who behold it."¹³ Art is no longer "community property," a product of shared values between artists and audience, but instead is defined by the "elite bonding" of artist and the work of art. Modernist art is "a difficult autodidact" making "difficult demands."

We are now witnessing the spectacle of the painted commercial illustrations of Norman Rockwell entering the canon of serious art by way of major museum exhibitions.¹⁴ Rockwell's is the sort of art that unites artist, work and beholder, in accord with Hickey's formulation, and provides an entertaining alternative to the difficulty and complexity of serious art. The Rockwell phenomenon signals the democratization of aesthetics gone amok. Hickey says of Rockwell that it was "Norman Rockwell's great gift to see that life in 20th century America...has been exceptional in the extreme." One might just as well say that Disney's animal movies are a fair depiction of life in the forest.

Others have joined the philistine tendency to elevate kitsch as art. Robert Rosenblum writes in the Rockwell exhibition catalogue: "Now that the battle for modern art has ended in a triumph that took place in another century, the 20th, Rockwell's work may become an indispensable part of art history. The sneering, puritanical condescension with which he was once viewed by serious art lovers can swiftly be turned into pleasure. To enjoy his unique genius all you have to do is relax."¹⁵

Hickey attempts to frame beauty most majestically in his phrase, "nothing redeems but beauty"¹⁶ and deploys poetic slogans to disguise his deep distrust of culture. A program that relies on public taste must deny difficulty, complexity and true poetry in art. Hickey obscures the boundaries between serious art and mass art and implicitly encourages a lowering of standards. Hickey's is a failed theory, as all attempts to give form to amorphous beauty must be.

Notes

1. Dave Hickey, "After the Great Tsunami: On Beauty and the Therapeutic Institution" in *The Invisible Dragon: Four Essays on Beauty* (Los Angeles: Art Issues Press, 1993), 57.
2. Dave Hickey, "Prom Night in Flatland: On the Gender of Works of Art" in *The Invisible Dragon*, 39.
3. Hickey, "After the Great Tsunami," 59.
4. Hickey, "Enter the Dragon: On the Vernacular of Beauty" in *The Invisible Dragon*, 11.
5. N.A., review of "Simple Hearts: An Address regarding the Consequences of

- Supply-Side Aesthetics by Dave Hickey," *Art Issues* (Summer, 1998), quoted in "Art without Audiences" *Wilson Quarterly* (Autumn, 1998), 137.
6. Hickey, "Enter the Dragon," 24.
 7. Todd S. Purdum, "Unsettling the Art World for a Living: A Critic Resurrects Beauty as a Standard, and Finds it in Unexpected Places," *New York Times*, September 4, 1999, B7.
 8. James Demetron. Forward to the catalog of the exhibition, *Regarding Beauty: A View of the Late Twentieth Century*, (Washington: Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, 1999), 8.
 9. Purdum, 7.
 10. Hickey, "After the Great Tsunami," 54.
 11. *Ibid.*, 60.
 12. Hickey, "Prom Night in Flatland," 40.
 13. *Ibid.*, 45.
 14. *Norman Rockwell: Pictures for the American People*, High Museum of Art, Corcoran Gallery of Art, Guggenheim Museum, San Diego Museum of Art, Phoenix Art Museum, 1999-2002.
 15. Steven C. Munson, "Selling Norman Rockwell," *Commentary* (September, 2000): 67.
 16. Hickey, "After the Great Tsunami," 63.

STORYING ART (THE EVERYDAY LIFE OF TRICKY PRACTICES)

JEAN FISHER

The Grace of Writing is a rather beautiful title for a symposium, and I am very honoured to be invited to speak to it. However, it seems to ask that I give some account of myself as a writer, which I shall do as briefly as possible. In the first instant, I should apologise for my rather graceless title—Storying Art. It springs from my failure to categorise adequately my approach to writing. There are, of course, many types of art writing, ranging from the journalistic or descriptive to the contextual or interpretative. My training is in zoology and fine art practice not history or theory, and when I accidentally fell to writing it was never my intention to provide “interpretations” or “explanations” of art, nor to function as a critic, which would presuppose I possessed some superior knowledge from which I might make authoritative value judgments. Nor have I been concerned with the artist as proper name (as another transcendental subject of knowledge), but rather with the work as a particularised assemblage of signs which tells a story. Gilles Deleuze (in *Essays Critical and Clinical*) speaks of isolating a set of symptoms that figure a “new mode of existence,” and which in turn are linked to political acts of resistance. This comes closest to describing the kind of art I am referring to. The writing then might be called a kind of symptomology: an attempt to find a way of narrating how these symptoms function to produce new thoughts on existence.

Unencumbered by any strict academic affiliations, I have felt relatively free to play across disciplinary boundaries, lurching in a sometimes intoxicated fashion through the hallowed fields of literature, anthropology or philosophy, occasionally stumbling upon correspondences with the thought of art. Since the writing plots my peregrinations through an alien terrain it does not claim to present truths, so the best I can say about it is that it elaborates little fictions about art. This does not however mean that I absolve myself from any responsibility for what I write. Given the scientific premise that any observation is conditioned by the presence of the observer, there is nothing objective about my relation to the work. Like the ethnographer, art writing demands that the writer/observer becomes a participant in the observation. Thus, the writer must split herself into subject and object to become both speaker and

spoken, writer and written—an equivocation constituted through the encounter with otherness. I am bound into the story that is written.

The various peregrinations that make up my story for today circulate around the quest for a way of characterising the relationship between the viewer and the art work, which is also my way of approaching the enigmatic coupling of self and other, or self and world. (As a writer on art this has to be my first concern.) I want to argue that this is an inherently ethical relationship, and marks the moment at which art becomes capable of shifting the terms of existing discourses, opening pathways to new perspectives on our contemporary realities. If one can still speak of an ethical or political dimension to art, I would suggest it lies first and foremost not in subject matter—not, for instance, in what the work might say about issue or identity politics—but in the way it understands and mobilises its relationship with the viewer—its material and syntactical organisation.

I need to digress momentarily and explain that my understanding of ethics is in sympathy with the distinction made by Gilles Deleuze in his book on Spinoza: that is, “morality” defines any pre-given set of “constraining” rules, such as a moral code, that judges actions and intentions by reference to transcendental or putative universal values (good/evil), whereas ethics is a set of facilitative rules that evaluate what we do, say, think and feel according to the immanent mode of existence it implies (good/bad). This seems to connect with some propositions made by Bakhtin and Levinas concerning self/other relations, which interested me from another angle, as we shall presently see.

I start from the premise that this relationship with art possesses an immediate psychosomatic dynamic, involving, for the viewer, bodily affects in excess of the purely visual (for instance, touch in the haptic sense, sound, smell, rhythm, spatiality, gravity and so forth) as well as questions of language and translation – how the unique psychosocial history of each viewer resonates with what the work presents. I am calling this a “transcendent” experience of art, meaning simply what enables the self, in a rather down-to-earth way, to let go momentarily of its habitual modes of thought. In effect, to break loose from its policing ego and open freely onto what is beyond or in excess of itself—to experience otherness (which might perhaps be called a moment of grace). It has to do with a certain writing or inscription of the self into the field of possible meanings opened up by the artwork, and certainly implicates our paradoxical relation to language (as image or text): what limits the self also provides the key to its liberation from constraining patterns of thought.

When it happens (because not all artworks produce these effects!) this experience is like being transfixed, rendered speechless, often provoking nothing less than an irrepressible laughter—the ultimate profanity in the refined sobriety of the art museum. Now, this laughter is a curious thing. It

cannot be correlated with the presence of any overtly comical, beautiful or sublime subject matter, nor does it concern jokes and their relation to the unconscious. In fact, it eludes psychoanalytic scrutiny precisely because it vanquishes the individualistic ego-subject, and opens the self into a light-headed, joyous, cosmic dimension. Note also that this is an involuntary response of the lower body—spasms in the guts rise up to discombobulate reason itself.

It is important to stress that much of my enquiry stems from reflections on the practices of artists converging on the western marketplace from previously marginalised cultural positions, and the responses of its privileged agents (critics, curators, dealers) in what came to be known as “multiculturalism.” As we now know, these responses were too often characterised by a lack of understanding, or will even, to see these practices beyond the prejudices and assumptions of established western critical discourses—a willful blindness that overlooked the extent to which “other” practices have quietly had a destabilising or counter-hegemonic effect on their authority. That this effect has something to do with particular mis-uses and disarticulations of language led me from certain artworks to trickster narratives from Native America, West Africa and the Caribbean, not forgetting African America’s Signifyin’ Monkey and writer Ishmael Reed’s bricolage novel *Mumbo Jumbo*. It is noteworthy that where cultures severely traumatised by colonialism possess trickster traditions, these have been called upon to deal with modern conditions. As one artist who engages in tricky practices, Jimmie Durham, said in writing about the work of another, Native Canadian Edward Poitras, “Our grandfather coyote has come to be a symbol of survival-with-hubris for most Indian people.” Coyote always says, “Whatever you do, I am going to do something else.” (1991) And African American rap can be traced through the game called “dozens” back to African trickster practices. This is a perverse detour that has eventually led me back to Europe and, yes, Bakhtin’s reading of popular carnival.

Two aspects of trickster interest me regarding the dynamic between artwork and viewer. The first is trickster’s apparent lack of morality according to acceptable codes of polite society. Trickster is an incorrigible liar, cheat, thief, gambler, eroticist, shape-shifter, humorist, master of divination and agent provocateur with an insatiable appetite. Trickster’s activities privilege a corporeal axis connecting the voracious mouth and stomach with the lower functions of waste disposal and sex, all bound by an irreverent and bawdy laughter. But it is, of course, in challenging the legitimacy of any fixed set of meanings or protocols that we are reminded that discourses are constructs in language not in nature and therefore must be susceptible to necessary revision according to changing circumstances. Insofar as he or she pushes at the limit of prescribed boundaries, finding and taking advantage of the flaws in an apparently seam-

less system, trickster demands we revise what we mean by ethics and ethical responsibility in both creative and social processes.

Secondly, trickster traditionally functions as mediator and translator between the spheres of the divine and the human, and between different languages or discursive systems. That is, he/she articulates the space of "otherness" through language manipulations. Speaking simply, 'otherness' is what is excluded, or discarded as lacking value, from a particular discursive framework in order to give that framework some kind of coherence and legitimacy. As we know, this reductiveness has been a fundamental problem of western binary thinking, manifested at its ugliest in all forms of human discrimination. However, if it is indeed what enables a coherent discursive position to take place, then what is excluded as "other" is not marginal—"otherness" is the unacknowledged presence resonating at the very heart of any discourse.

As I understand it, the discursive is those sets of predetermined and consensual linguistic codes and procedures which enable us collectively to communicate, to make sense of the world and to formulate judgements on our actions within it. However, as representations, they do not account for the nuances, ambivalences and unforeseen events that we must negotiate on a daily basis. But, as Stuart Hall pointed out (in his essay "New Ethnicities"), "Events, relations, structures do have conditions of existence and real effects outside the sphere of the discursive; but only within the discursive, and subject to its specific conditions, limits and modalities, do they have or can they be constructed within meaning." Given that the discursive has "specific conditions and limits," how might artistic practices articulate a "radical displacement" or extend these limits in response to those "non-discursive" lived experiences that are excluded, or mis-represented, in the discursive? How might a shift be enacted in a discursive paradigm? Can we talk about a "non-discursive" artistic practice?

Following the postmodern debates of the late 1980s, it seemed clear that the kind of oppositionality to exclusionary hegemonic discourses practised by the modernist avant-garde, or early identity politics, can no longer be a viable strategy. In seeking reform, oppositionality as complaint tends to accept the language of hegemony—its systems of signification—as a "natural given," and risks being appropriated by it since any critique ultimately helps to define, even extend, the boundaries of a discursive system. With oppositionality, the art object either becomes an information carrier, much like mass media itself but without its sophisticated production techniques and audiences; or it risks reduction to a secondary, anthropologically-framed symptom or effect of the social. But art is a language and structure capable in its own right of producing meaning-effects in the viewer, which may not be easily interpretable by and assimilable to an already encoded symbolic discourse. The problem is in thinking how the discursive and mediated experience is articulated with the non-

discursive and immediate experience in the dynamic relation between art and viewer. One question, then, is how might we envision artistic and critical practices of resistance that do not depend on the binary structure of oppositionality thereby replicating exclusion? Or, are there ways of using discursive languages that do not take them as an already given truths?

This is where trickster as the translator and mediator of language becomes a useful model. I have so far come across two metaphors for tricky operations that more or less point in the same direction. One is Lewis Hyde's description of the hinge articulating differing states of being: As in Hyde's modernist example of Duchamp's notion of "delay," space and time are simultaneously suspended and not suspended. The exemplary work in this respect is Duchamp's door that opens as it closes: 11 rue Larrey. The second metaphor is Robert Pelton's limen. Liminality is a term first applied by the anthropologist Arnold van Gennep to the disarticulated and ambiguous space-time of the rite of passage when youths are physically separated from society to re-enter as adults. Liminal symbolism appears to be the antithesis of normal social order, but it refers to a movement that discloses its inner cohesion and functions as a regenerative reminder. In this schema, trickster is the symbol of the liminal state itself, his function to precipitate disorder—the move into a liminal state—especially in situations of cultural sterility, where new insights are needed to engender social renewal.

To see what the stories actually show us, I want to recount a brief episode from the Winnebago saga as narrated by Paul Radin. Trickster is extricating himself, yet again, from the consequences of his unbridled greed which has landed him, literally, in his own shit. He comes to a river where he can wash himself, and the story goes on:

As he was engaged in this cleansing he happened to look in the water and much to his surprise saw many succulent plums there. After surveying them very carefully, he dived down into the water to get some. But only small stones did he bring back in his hands. Again he dived into the water. But this time he knocked himself unconscious against a rock at the bottom. After a while he floated up and gradually came to. He was lying on the water, flat on his back and, as he opened his eyes, there on the top of the bank he saw many plums. It was then he realised that what he had seen in the water was only a reflection. "Well," he says to himself, "and what a grand piece of foolishness that was! Had I recognised this before I might have saved myself a great deal of pain."

This story of the reflected plums would seem to have little to do with Narcissus, Europe's most familiar tale of reflected foolishness. Trickster does not "misrecognise" himself but "recognises" something else altogether. On one

level, it is the distinction between the real and its representation, referent and sign: the story teaches the listener about the processes of signification. On another level, it concerns desire. Trickster's motivations are commonly described as "insatiable greed" and "hunger," that is, his "belly;" but we could equally call this "desire." If trickster is fooled by appearances, it is because he "wants" the stones in the water to be plums; even so, it is this want that drives and ultimately structures a new insight. Reflection here concerns an act of mind rather than an object of visibility. And it is worth noting also that the trickster tale is a performed narrative which does not itself offer explanation, but something that the listener can reflect upon. As Walter Benjamin says, "Actually it is half the art of storytelling to keep a story free from explanation as one reproduces it...It is left up to [the reader] to interpret things the way he understands them, and thus the narrative achieves an amplitude that information lacks."

We might connect yet another level of the narrative — where trickster knocks himself unconscious—with what Catherine Clement describes as "syncope:" held breath, or inspiration, an eclipse of thought, an asthmatic or epileptic seizure, an ecstatic flight, or a delayed beat in a syncopated jazz rhythm. Or the hinge and the limen. In this momentary fall out of space-time, the ego-self loses sense of itself to a different state of consciousness. Clement equates this process with the movement of creative insight; but in the case of the artist, he and she must return from this "other" place of being in order to put the insight to use. The lesson trickster learns from his experience of the reflected plums is that an encounter with an event that has no prior symbolic or discursive framework demands we revise our understanding of reality. It is not by chance that it is shit that triggers the chain of events leading to trickster's re-cognition, because the excremental (as we also see in the carnivalesque) belongs to the limen as matter that links death to the renewal of life.

This slippage into the regenerative space-time of liminality is how I should like to characterise the transcendent experience of art, but, of course, it depends on the nature of the practice. We could say that there are two basic approaches in art practice. The first is the closed system: an object (or text, or exhibition) consists of a singular, authoritative point of view, or discursive framework, which represents a given set of values and whose meaning can be grasped as a finite whole. We do not have to do any real work of interpretation: we are spectators to an experience which "originates" elsewhere; and we come away feeling satisfied that we have "learned" something. We might call this "academicism." The second approach is the "open system" in which meanings are not offered up readymade from some connoisseurial or idealist vantage point, but acquired through the viewer's physical and mental negotiation of the work. It presents a choreographic space open to the viewer's work of transformation. Thus the open approach is not about communication in any

obvious sense, but as Benjamin says of storytelling, it provides an amplitude that information lacks. Since each viewer construes meaning from the relation between what the work presents and his or her own history and experience there can be no definitive meaning. Of course, among viewers sharing a similar cultural space the possibilities of meaning cannot be infinite either, but the work nevertheless presents the possibility of indefinite extension, since in each viewer it provokes a new pattern of readings. I would call this a non-discursive situation, insofar as the experience offered is prior to any existing symbolic framework, though it may be in process of narrating a new discursive trajectory.

We have, then, two forms of practice that may, rather crudely, be characterised as "closed" and "open," "representation" and "presentation," "discursive" and "non-discursive." Representation tends toward the didactic and abstract, its meaning not contingent upon circumstance or experience in time and space because it is 'as if' universal. Presentation, on the other hand, is like the performance of speech itself. When meaning is not already given, the viewer slips, like trickster, into a space of uncertainty, where there are no clear co-ordinates by which it may map itself as a coherent subject. As Norman Bryson puts it, the viewer must "pull the image into its own orbit of tacit knowledge, taking it as a provocation to perform an act of interpretation which is strictly speaking an improvisation, a minutely localised reaction that cannot! be programmed in advance." In the choreographic space of art, meaning is contingent upon the "here and now" as an immediate not mediated event. This provocation to an act of improvisation is the challenge posed to the western marketplace by "other" artistic productions that upset one's expectations.

In trickster tales, the insight derived from an unexpected and unmediated event—usually precipitated by a selfish or unethical act performed by trickster—has an inherently ethical dimension: it concerns the gift of interpretation and the acquisition of respect for the otherness of the other. It is here that trickster's path converges on those of Emmanuel Levinas and Mikhail Bakhtin, two authors concerned with the ethical dimension of the self/other relation beyond institutionalised ethics, or what Deleuze defines as morality.

Levinas counterposes two ways of relating to the world. The first is as a totality, structured through rational and systematic ordering of things. The second is as the idea of infinity (or exteriority), which is the self's internal recognition of what is transcendent to it—the existence of more than it can contain. Levinas argues that the concept of totality has dominated Western philosophy, and is predicated on assumptions that truth and vision are synonymous. What he calls the 'panoramic view' assimilates, possesses and grounds knowledge in objectivity and dismisses other knowledges to the realm of the "subjective" and "irrational." And we know how this view conditioned the West's attitudes to the cultural productions of its others. For Levinas,

however, "The idea of infinity is the mind before it lends itself to the distinction between what it discovers by itself and what it receives from opinion." "The idea of infinity implies a soul capable of containing more than it can draw from itself. It designates an interior being that is capable of a relation with the exterior, and does not take its own interiority for the totality of being." Infinity is not a representation; it does not first exist, then reveal itself, but is produced in the "face to face" relationship between the self and the other, in response to and acceptance of the other's absolute alterity.

Levinas's debate concerns the search for an ethical relationship between self and other, one in which the self neither perceives the other as an extension of itself nor as a threat to be assimilated and possessed. Any attempt to assimilate the other to the terms of the self necessarily robs it of what makes it other. Self and other are not reducible to each other, nor do they exist in a symmetrical or oppositional relation. At the same time, to open oneself to the other is not to lose oneself completely since there would no longer be a consciousness capable of responding or evaluating meaning. For Levinas the infinity of otherness is exemplified by the expression of the other's face, whose meaning for the self cannot be a question of prior knowledge but must be deciphered in each instant of the encounter. It is this responsibility toward the other—answering her demand for a conversation, as it were—that constitutes ethics: there can be no ethics outside a relation with an other.

Fundamentally, our sense of selfhood and meaning are not generated internally from a sovereign self but are the effect of a continuous negotiation with others and the world. At stake here, however, is precisely what can be understood from "immediate experience" and what from the screen of ready-made interpretations that interpolates itself between the self and life, self and self that leads us into the kinds of exclusionary and reductive thinking I mentioned earlier. Mikhail Bakhtin (in *Toward a Philosophy of the Act*) believed that art was responsible to life, concentrating his thoughts on the relations between acts performed in the world. These thoughts presuppose a sociality, in turn, opening a way of considering the ethical dimension of the art/viewer relation.

Bakhtin's concern is with the untranslatable distance between the uniqueness of one's own experience as performed act and its representation in the world of culture: simply, how we negotiate the difference between subjective and objectified experience. He proposes that an ethical evaluation is narrated in the process of performing each act. That is, the remaking of the world does not occur through following prescribed rules but through the ethical decisions that have to be made in negotiating everyday experiences, and through creative activity. There is a unity to the world of events in which we all participate through the acts that each of us performs. All acts, all experiences, carry an "emotional-volitional tone" that expresses the uniqueness of the event,

a tone that is not a "passive psychic reaction," but an ethically answerable "movement of consciousness," as also is liminal space-time.

Thus, it is our ongoing answerability to our own acts that constitutes an ethical practice. Moreover, to abdicate one's unique responsibility to the dictates of institutional discourses, to surrender individual responsibility and choice into the hands of society, is to lose the real meaning of ethical agency. For Bakhtin, the "ethical principle is a mode of relating to values not a source of values." This ethical answerability is intrinsic to the artistic process: as the artist engages with life so the work of art is answerable to life.

Like Levinas, Bakhtin speaks of the absolute distinction between self and other, but it is a separation in which the self recognises its formative debt and ongoing obligation to others: "To live from within myself, from my own unique place in Being, does not yet mean at all that I live only for my own sake." Bakhtin's self is unique insofar as it exists continuously within unrepeatable moments of life that are specific to it and to its perspective on the world. But the self can have only a partial view of itself, and it is the gift of the other to offer it a more complete context. (A lesson especially common to Native American trickster tales.) Likewise, while artistic activity produces a subject, neither the activity nor the artist is autonomous since both move outward toward the consciousness of the other which gives them value.

The kinds of experiences and insights assembled here are those that cannot be thought in advance, and therefore do not belong to the "I," which is always constituted in language as the subject of the enunciation. Rather, they belong to the domain of the "it" (a de-subjected self) and arrive "unannounced," as an eclipse of thought, a syncope, a delayed beat, a "wordless" gesture, a drop into liminal spacetime.

In some way this connects to Michel de Certeau's description of "non-discursive" practices: acts (including making art) that are narratable but not framed by theory, nor yet theorisable—his "remainder" constituted by the part of human experience that has not been tamed and symbolised in language." De Certeau is concerned not with representational structures per se but the uses to which they are put, taking note of opportunistic "age-old ruses" of disguise and transformation (his examples include poaching and la perruque—stealing time from the workplace) in order to survive. He finds such "remainders" in everyday life, especially in the tension between production and consumption. Arguing that consumerism may not be as passive as is generally thought, he suggests that consumers often select mediated codes and reuse them for their own purposes, subverting those intended by the producers—a practice of reinventing oneself with whatever materials are to hand, and a tactic of re-empowerment, which is familiar from the narratives of disenfranchised peoples under colonial rule. What is suggested here is a constant weaving and re-weaving of the fictional—or mediated—with so-called

lived experience: a re-mobilisation of an already given language to fit the dimensions and meanings of an individual's own life world.

In trickster cultures the individual life-world is bound to the social and the cosmic, so it is not surprising to find that the Yoruba trickster Eshu is the reshaper of daily life through Ifa divination; he is, as Pelton says, the "iconographer of the cosmos." This involvement with language is also true of Legba of the Fon of West Africa. Lewis Hyde recounts how, "In the Fon cosmology, the high gods bore seven sons at the beginning of time. The first six of these reign over specific domains...and each son speaks a different language, a tongue unique to his territory. They cannot speak to each other, nor, it seems, can they remember how to communicate with the high god their mother." Hyde describes these and other trickster targets as entities that are so pure as to have become sterile. Legba alone can communicate with all these different deities, and likewise is the mediator between humans and gods. In other words, he is the translator "who inhabits the cracks between languages or between heaven and earth."

Trickster's affective place of action is the non-place of the marketplace at the crossroads, where different peoples, each with their own languages and customs, once gathered to bargain goods, not to mention exchanging jokes, abuse and stories, feasting, dancing and gambling. The marketplace invents its own argot, a veritable breeding-ground of neologisms. In fact, Eshu-Eleggú of Afro-Cuban santería, is called the Keeper of the Crossroads, and Hermes, the trickster of Classical Greece, is said to have invented language for the purposes of bargaining. As Hyde says, "The market at the cross-roads may be a metaphor for metaphor, or for any original speech...The mind articulates newly where there is true coincidence, where roads parallel and roads contrary suddenly converge." Trickster therefore concerns not simply linguistic translation, but language linked to economic exchange. Or rather, trickster shows how translation is linked to an economy of difference, one that is not based on equivalence of value of goods or words shared by the participants in a transaction: there is always a "remainder"—the waste matter that trickster turns to productive use.

One famous Yoruba story of trickster's mischievous attack on rigidly closed systems to engender a new pattern of thought concerns two friends who owned adjoining farms and had sworn eternal friendship. But they had not included Eshu in the equation so he decided to teach them a lesson. Dressed in a cap red on one side, white on the other, with his pipe stuck in the back of his neck, he rode the border between the two farms. Later the friends began to argue about the colour of the rider's cap and which way he was going, the fight becoming so ferocious that Eshu himself was called to settle it. Eshu admits the rider was himself and that both friends were correct, pointing out that they were so bound by habit and suppressed animosity that they could no

longer perceive the truth nor acknowledge each other's vision.

One contemporary master storiier is Anishinaabe novelist and essayist Gerald Vizenor, whose writings also not only speak about the politicised historical and contemporary life-world of Native American tricksterism, but also, through a punning humour, irony and play of neologisms, perform tricky tactics of what he calls "survivance." As he says,

The trickster narrative is a wild, imagic venture in communal discourse, an uncertain tease and humor that denies aestheticism, literal translation and representation.... The trickster is never the same in sound and silence, in oral stories and translated narratives. The trickster wavers in sound, a common native figuration, and in silence becomes chance in a comic narrative.... Tricksters are created in a language game and liberate the mind by tease and divine caprice.

In an essay on Vizenor's writings, Colin Samson points out that Vizenor's game of "tease" is a subversive tactic that precisely refuses an oppositional stance, since, as we have already mentioned, oppositionality entails accepting the terms of the dominant order. Tease is an irritant, a contagion, gaming with the language of the institution. It is not deconstruction but a play of excess: a doubling up with a parodic laughter, repeating, proliferating, saturating, insinuating; or a doubling back, adopting a guerrilla war of position designed to confuse the enemy; or a bringing back into play elements excluded by otiose patterns of thought.

As we see, trickster seems unethical because he challenges the "proper" codes of "civilised" conduct and the hierarchies that attempt to ensure that everything stays strictly in its proper place. Indeed, trickster is concerned neither with the "proper" nor with "place;" he or she is the artful, constantly moving master of liminal space-time, scatological irony, parody and dissimulation. And with regards to dissimulation, Umberto Eco points out that the sign substitutes for something else; but if something cannot be used to tell a lie it also cannot be used to tell the truth—it cannot be used "to tell" at all. Trickster's is the lie that tells the truth.

Those of you familiar with Bakhtin's writings will recognise his irrepressible spirit of the carnivalesque. Typical of our relation with the other, we have gone to Native America and Africa only to rediscover ourselves back in Europe. Bakhtin's book on Rabelais focuses on many elements that are shared with trickster: the liberatory power of laughter; synchronicity; the centrality of the marketplace (and the crossroads — "In the Rabelaisian system of images the underworld is the junction where the main lines of this system cross each other: carnivals, banquets, fights, beatings, abuses, and curses" (*Rabelais*

and *His World*, 386); the links between food, feasting, the lower body functions and the ambivalent language of death and excrement/life and renewal and its cosmic rather than individualistic dimension. "In the sphere of imagery cosmic fear (as any other fear) is defeated by laughter. Therefore dung and urine, as cosmic matter that can be interpreted bodily, play an important part in these images...Cosmic catastrophe represented in the material bodily lower stratum is degraded, humanized, and transformed into grotesque monsters. Terror is conquered by laughter." (*Rabelais*, 336) This has a deeply political meaning: trickster and the carnivalesque is a utopian urge towards change as against the conservative demands of fixed power hierarchies. Moreover, as Rabelais wrote his seriocomic narratives as a critique of the fear-laden and otiose religious culture of late Gothic, so Bakhtin wrote his analysis of Rabelais as a veiled critique of the rigid prescriptions of Stalinism. But how far can we legitimately see this as a useful model for thinking about contemporary existence? Does the trickster/carnavalesque tradition manifest itself in contemporary practice? This is Jesusa Rodriguez, Mexican performance artist and social activist on her practice:

The line I propose is a line full of humour, not as gratuitous or frivolous jokes, but humour as a manner in which to see the world from distinct angles, to stop and see the infiniteness of this world, to permit us to see it in all its ambiguity and ridiculousness, from a distance. I propose: let's be ambiguous, let's break with the tabu of ambiguity as something we permit ourselves only in dreams, like incest: let's be ambiguous, not as something involuntary, but full of intention, as objective; let's assume the ridiculous and failure as an option in order to grow, to get to know ourselves. Against order, against precision, against the rigidity of putting on a play, against the solemnity of Mexican theater. I propose ambiguity in order to achieve, not "theater of the masses" but in order to satisfy the vital necessity—like that of eating—of public expression. (Quoted in Coco Fusco, *Corpus Delecti: Performance Art of the Americas*, 67.)

In considering current tricky artistic practices, we need firstly to accept that art is not a simulation, or reflection, of "life" but a reflection upon our notions of reality. Given that our understanding of the world is largely through representations and discursive frameworks, then the first criterion of a tricky practice is the acknowledgement that we operate in a world of necessary fictions not self-evident "truths," fictions that include "Self" and "Other." Such an art practice would be an open-ended play of fictions that sends us into a spasm of cosmic laughter—the liminal space-time of becoming; a play that enables us to recognise the fallacies in habitual modes of thought, to infiltrate

their languages, to modify the meaning of their codes and shift the relationship between self and other.

If we think back to the convergence during the '90s of cultural producers from diverse backgrounds and languages in the marketplaces of western art and scholarship, we can perhaps see that, in its very play with the untranslatable, this post-colonial, trans-cultural, creolised, post-post-modern marketplace provided fertile ground for the play of tricky tactics. This is not to say that forces of hegemony have not tried to block tricky spirits at every turn: exoticisation, accusations of inauthenticity, ghettoisation, false stereotyping, and misrepresentation in general have been but a few of its strategies of containment. But the marketplace at the crossroads, as a place of convergence, of chance encounters and the expression of libidinal energies, is a richly textured site for the invention of new languages and relations with the world and others.

Interestingly enough, throughout this period there has been a mushrooming of international art exhibitions, fairs and biennales, especially in places hitherto marginal to the old western Europe-US axis (ARCO Madrid, Dakar, Kwangju, Johannesburg, Istanbul, Cairo, and shortly Guadalajara). These are the marketplaces of contemporary art and, like carnival, present unofficial peripheral artistic gestures behind their official face. Perhaps it is not so surprising that some biennale cities (Venice, Lyons, Habana!..) had a long tradition of carnival—but that's the beginning of another story!

This paper was presented in Dublin at the meeting of the Irish section of the International Association of Art Criticism in September 2000.

BETWEEN THE TOLKA AND THE DODDER A PERSONAL VIEW OF VISUAL ART IN DUBLIN

CIARAN BENNETT

The cultural nuances of postcolonial hiberno English, and the visual parochialism of the empire's second city, are intrinsic to understanding the current position of visual art in Dublin. The control of the image in any totalitarian regime is important, particularly in a colonial province of the nineteenth century's most impressive empire. The collusion with this empire extended to the control mechanisms of other outposts. It is usually considered a conservative estimate that the Irish comprised over forty per cent of the British administration in India during the Raj. The bureaucratic character of the Royal Hibernian Academy, as the arbiter of fine art conformity, hid the fine extra element beyond the Salon in Paris to maintain the British character in the representation of Irish pictorial reality.

The depiction of the wild peasants on the west coast, had all the colourful sentimentality of Robert Louis Stephenson with the urban delights of Darwin's noble savage. The development of this mythical being represented an enhanced appreciation of rural myth, especially amongst the Anglo Irish elite. The translations of Lady Gregory, the poems of W.B. Yeats and the romantic ideal of the Gaelic League, all combined with a form of mythic nationalism which espoused the nomenclature of French republicanism without the humanistic principle of that tradition. This combination of romantic Ireland, a mythical reality of saints, harpers, and warriors, easily fitted into the robust nationalism of post World War I Ireland. Intellectually the success of the guerrilla war of the nineteen twenties led to a strong Roman Catholic influence and what could be described in the thirties as a virulent form of fascism blessed by a reactionary church and sanctified by the state artists, who had mostly trained in the academy tradition of empire. A cultural eugenics excluded any cosmopolitan urban artisan tradition and government policy seemed to actively engage in the destruction of "foreign" works. The liberal policies of the eighteenth century in Ireland, the first country to offer naturalisation to Jews in Europe, was definitely a thing of the past. The Protestant community actually enquired if there was a place for them in this new country. Such polarisation of

a country or people, requires a strong image to replace its previous reality. It is as if the derogatory depiction of the Irish peasant with the "pig in the parlour" had become the motif of the new state; all others had to assume some sort of clichéd format within the now green Catholic Ireland. The dialectic within the early Soviet State on the demise of the proletarian class while still being a mechanism for their eventual utopia, always seems to parallel the attempts to impose an image of a new regime which manifested the older supposed aspirations of a vanished society.

The distinctive difference between English, Scottish, Welsh and Irish cannot be developed within the context of Britain. The whole imperial artefact of union under English rule disguises the iconoclastic characteristics of the indigenous populations. The parallel with Eastern Europe, particularly Eastern Germany, with sprawling defunct industrial infrastructures, environmental havoc and huge social transformations in a post soviet or totalitarian empire status, seems appropriate, particularly in the post-Thacherite era when the European model of social democracy was dissolved in Britain. The England of Blake became the Britain of Millais and the Pears Soap Boy. The sprawl of empire required a new persona or utility unit, a new accent standard English became the language of state and unification. The sentimental outpourings of a fictitious "home" became the kitsch of Empire and Landseers stags, the eagles of an essentially German monarchy. These new mechanisms of recognition were to maintain some element of nineteenth century social structure while allowing the so-called "bucaneering spirit" to incorporate the opium traders of Hong Kong and the exploiters of Africa as members of the new elite. Simply by knighting the more successful perpetrators, a British sensibility was maintained.

Ireland, within the context of the European Union, is dismantling the often second-rate vestiges of colonial culture simply by restoring its arts and cultural tradition to its original source. This embracing of multicultural sources within the context of Europe allows the art sector to explore the future of what the country will become. This is only pertinent within the realm of consensus if the state truly considers our culture and environment as our only real significant wealth. This depends on the overturning of Oscar Wilde's quip about knowing the price of everything and the value of nothing. If not, the North American model in which the winner takes all will eventually sever the umbilical link which eight hundred years of colonial policy could never do.

The headline in *The Times* of London in the eighteen eighties "Fog in Channel, Continent Isolated" expressed the central importance of Britain's Imperial grandeur. This combined with foreign policy since the time of Elizabeth I to divide and at all costs deny any unity in continental Europe, placed this island in a paradoxical situation of being inherently traitorous to the con-

cept of Britain simply by being European in outlook, and most predominantly in religion. This quick assessment of an historical, social, and cultural situation hopefully gives some sense of the Zeitgeist in contemporary Irish art and culture.

Dublin Overview

At the end of 2000, there were only eight private galleries showing contemporary and modernist work in Dublin. These will mostly be paintings with some sculpture. There are three graphic print spaces, two of which are associated with particular print studios and mostly show work from this source. Somewhere on the periphery are commercial sales rooms, some of which use the title "gallery" to describe their commodity-trading. These sales rooms occasionally sell very good pieces of modernist work, but the impression is always there that this is an accident when job lots or collections contains such anomalies. For a city of a million people, not including the outer suburbs over two miles from the centre (between the Tolka and the Dodder), there are very few contemporary spaces which show the work of practising art makers. The state or subsidised spaces of the RHA (Royal Hibernian Academy) Gallagher Gallery, the Irish Museum of Modern Art, and the Douglas Hyde Gallery in Trinity College, University of Dublin often show important international art, sometimes thirty years after its epoch, and hold important retrospectives of living older artists.

The Irish Museum of Modern Art (IMMA) is the most professional in both its educational outreach programmes and the quality of international shows, often combined with important mid-career assessments of contemporary Irish artists. Over the last two years major exhibitions of Kathy Prendergast, a conceptual artist, and Hughie O'Donoghue, a figurative abstract painter have shared the space with Warhol, Joseph Beuys, multiples from the Walker Art Centre, Ilya Kabakov, and most recently Leon Golub's retrospective. The interesting survey exhibition of Irish art of the last fifty years includes artists whose passports might not be Irish but for whom the concept of Diaspora considers them as such. This softening of the boundaries to be more inclusive allows for such painters as Francis Bacon, Sean Scully, and John Currin to be considered Irish, obviously a useful asset to any curator in this context.

The old Royal Hibernian Academy, the salon of official art, merged its title with that of a patron, the Gallagher Group, to build one of the best—if not the only—modern building to house art in Dublin. The often ambiguous status of the space—showing the Annual Summer Show of the RHA, gardens in Tuscany, staid portraits and other vestiges of academic realism—contrasted with some superb uses of this space, such as Barry Flannagan's complete *Hare* series and the enormous canvases of Hughie O'Donoghue's *Passion* series. This gallery, under a new director, appears to be moving towards the

North American model of a successful contemporary space.

The Douglas Hyde Gallery has a stranger pedigree developing out of the extensions to the Library and the Arts Block in Ireland's oldest university. Trinity University always had a collection of recent Irish art, for loan to students in their rooms, and this collection was a catalyst for including an art gallery in the new Arts Block. Its chequered history under various directors, combined with a certain freedom from the conventions of state-influenced spaces, originally placed the gallery at the forefront of curatorial exploration in the eighties. It's raw concrete, often dungeon like atmosphere (it is below ground level with long very high slit windows) has an affinity with certain work shown there. Particularly memorable in recent years were Patrick Graham and Louise Bourgeois.

The demise in the early eighties of the David Hendricks Gallery—sometimes considered the catalyst for modernist art work in the seventies; it showed painters, sculptors and most importantly James Coleman's early installations—left many practising artists with very few alternatives. The Dawson Gallery, with proprietor Leo Smith, who took over the business of Theo Waddington on his move to London, soon became the Taylor Galleries, and has maintained some of the country's finest exponents of late modernism. The interim saw the influx of occasional spaces the artists collective in the Project Arts Centre became the most exciting space for radical visual and political statements. This, however, having been the first major use of the old Temple Bar quarter, has now become a fully subsidised element of its commercial development, and the apparent absorption of the area into a travesty of Les Halle in Paris. The artists' lofts or studios in that area in the eighties also metamorphosed into Temple Bar Galleries and Studio's, an attempt to maintain a community of artists, amongst the five acres of bar space and other tourist essentials.

While small galleries appeared on the horizon like flotillas of wind swept dinghies, some initiated the careers of younger painters. The Riverrun Gallery, an important but temporary space, developed into the Hallward Gallery, keeping some of its younger artists. The appearance of the Rubicon, Kerlin and Green on Red Galleries, heralded a heady mix of postmodernism, business acumen and a desire to reach larger markets with contemporary work made in Ireland, but certainly not Irish in the traditional narrow sense. This art market sensibility has changed the structures in Ireland, while not noticeably affecting the existing dependence on subsidies and commercial sponsorship. The commercial viability of middle to mature artists was obviously enhanced by the speculations of the eighties boom. This mercantile character has the cachet of internationalism while maintaining what often appears to be a parochial bias.

The Kevin Kavanagh Gallery in the derelict looking Stand Street area,

something like Williamsburg distopia, often shows good youngish painters, and represents a very undernourished element of the non-subsidized sector. There are other spaces where proprietors bask in their personal egos, amidst the splendours of their mediocrity, often showing by chance the odd piece of genuine expression and content amidst the baubles. Some artists' studio complexes—the most permanent being “The Fire Station”—exhibit the work of their members on site.

I have chosen some exhibitions in Dublin at present. At the Green & Red Gallery Michael Coleman, whose work has moved from colour field abstraction to his present show of almost eviscerated paint surfaces, is making images of substance. The other is “Charles Tyrrell 1990-2000” at the RHA Gallagher Gallery, which surveys the work of one of the most consistent painters in the country as he approaches fifty.

Michael Coleman says, “I just destroy them with paint stripper, I’m taking it all off, well some of it.” These black on blue, black on black surfaces, have encrusted layers of pigment exposed through this apparently simple treatment. The historical tradition from Malevich’s black squares to the abstract expressionist gestural explorations have been part of Coleman’s work for some years. A recent series of monoprints explored the spatial, colour tones of Rothko’s paintings. This new emoliation of the surface, in this case with domestic paint stripper, exposes those lyrical underpaintings, often lost by his affection for solid surfaces. The cross pattern structure of the stretchers upon which he normally paints often occludes the finish of his work by its linear presence. In this series the pattern is also part of the process, an eviscerated piece of linear cross-hatching through the exposed vulva of these definitely nature-orientated images. I am not sure if Coleman would be content with these references to formal elements; his titles invariably negate such associations, but somehow the accidental character of this unveiling of surface equally denies him the language of Greenberg and Rosenberg, for this metaphorical autumn can only lead to a new exploration of surface and medium. The scale of the work generally is consistent, but in a large and stretched studio piece, the encrustation has a luminosity approaching the subterrestrial nature of Paul Mosse, whose reconstructed plates of plywood with infillings of sprayed paint, articulate a microscopic synecdochism for the realms of wild untrammelled nature.

In the Holocaust of Another Autumn Among the Cemeteries of Leaves
by Desmond Egan:

Smell it
Taste It
That ash is everywhere

This reading of these works, could lead to a sombre reality beyond the obvious character of the painted canvas. The very tradition of abstraction could be blind to the further exploration the cultural history of the work. Its origins in late modernism might be, just as words, because their commonality can sometimes appear to conceal their meaning in the recognisable characters of the alphabet. These lines by Desmond Egan, on the association of race and experience, evoke the charnel house, its ashes being exposed by the peeling bark of autumn trees.

The Rubicon Gallery mostly shows painters, with some sculptors like Vivienne Roche and Blaise Drummond. Drummond, who was born in Liverpool, educated in Edinburgh, and later as a painter in Dublin, is now considered indigenous; the qualifying characteristic not being his philosophy and classical art MA at Edinburgh but his visual art degree at the National College of Art in Dublin. The symbiosis of place, intent and origin is typical of those artists born in the sixties without the stereotypical concerns of nationalist promulgation. This artist makes statements about Ireland that are quixotically humorous and in some way anthropological: the outsider's view of place while being very much part of that society. This displacement of vision has parallels with Joyce's absolutist documentation of the pissing habits of certain dogs in Dublin, while writing *Ulysses* in Trieste. This ability to see, particularly in the postmodernist sense where images generate their own sensibilities, within a context often as arbitrary as the chosen motif, places his work in witty counterpoint to its themes. In the applied transfer technique of Drummond's two dimensional work small caricatures of human activity are given an individuality while still working as coherent signs in the overall composition. In the show entitled "City versus Country," he juxtaposes the activities of both experiences while articulating an almost suburban delicacy to his maps of his new home in rural Ireland. This contradiction of living in a rural place while making the structures and small surrounding territory human scale, is expressed vividly by the illustrations of the lawnmower—the ultimate arbitrator between suburban and rural life. The *Cart for Rocks*, a sculpture whose content is literally a cart and rocks built as a mound, might be a gardening chore or some rural myth evoking tradition, such as building dry stone walls. He previously articulated the rage in rural Ireland for building golf courses by having a model for such diversification of land use placed with synthetic grass, small trees, and other architectural ephemera, upon a large piece of cut turf and solid peat about two feet high. These often-complex considerations are also sympathetic with what I call "English whimsy." Thus the artist incorporates the multiplicity of contemporary experience.

AD Marginem (Towards the Edge): Gary Coyle

There are very few things as complicated, or for that matter embarrassing, in contemporary art production than "the spiritual" or "transcendent" and nothing worse than artists peddling us their spiritual product.

As I swam deeper into winter I came to view my fellow swimmers less a manqué performance artists and more like devotees of a cult.

--Gary Coyle

This documentation in notebooks, drawings, photographs, with swimming paraphernalia—togs, ear-plugs, and standing mat—chronicle the artist's decision to swim year around at one of Dublin's oldest bathing places, the Forty-Foot. In the shadow of Joyce's Tower on the Irish Sea, it is bitterly cold in winter and often harrowing in summer as well. The barren rocks of granite, the often nude swimmers, and the old bits of carpet to stand on as they attempt to warm their blue black and crimson bodies, is almost ingrained in local lore—partly insane humorous asides with the relish of the voyeur for some sadistic observance. This ritualistic immersion in freezing water has all the enthusiasm of Carlos Fuento's pilgrims at the start of *Terra Nostra*—flagellation combined with renewal.

The artist has chosen to parody the walks of Richard Long, to reference the installation body artists of the seventies, while articulating in a unique manner one of the oldest traditions of the city. This work is exhibited as conventional visual notation of mostly drawings and photographic prints of the essential element, water. Yet the idiosyncratic images are vibrantly local. As a person who used to swim there, the memory of ascending through the frozen cranium blindness to the surface conjures the warmth of the peripheral harbour pier. This image slides into view with familiarity. It is typical of this artist's pedigree that while being reared in view of the Forty Foot his training after Dublin included the New York Studio School, the Art Students League and the Royal College of Art in London. With these sources and experiences he has explored the mundane and the quixotic while orientating a parallel multiplicity rather as Buck Mulligan must have done at the same place.

Charles Tyrell 1990 – 2000 Ten Years at the RHA Gallagher Gallery

Minimalism is my base line. Looking at Sol Lewitt I appreciate its mathematical reduction, but I always come forward from that. I am not an "abstracting from" abstract painter. I start with the abstract and work towards a sense of reality, a sense of real experience.

--Charles Tyrell in conversation with Patrick Murphy

The series entitled "Angels" was previously shown at the Taylor Galleries amongst some other works where the underlying colour was hot orange/red with a black Prussian blue grid structure. This one changes the thematic elements in that the broad grid portcullis structure is modulating blue to grey purple with the heavy black squares maintaining a structural consistency. The warm asymmetrical corner shapes which accentuate the square grid canvas definition are often thought to be the angels of the title. These could be read as prisoners or fleeing shapes and levitating coloured elements which occur as abstract minimalist markings on the smaller aluminium paintings.

The smaller grid paintings, black with yellow ochre squares black with orange and green with miniature blue, have an incised architectural layout plan at irregular correspondence to the picture plane. These smaller works explore the thematic structure to almost disintegration when the grid pattern expands, leaving isolated dot patterns which float upon a gestural saturated surface. In these later works the incised plan motif often slides off the picture plane, thus reducing this obvious element to a linear articulation, suggesting earlier modernism and almost invoking Klee.

The aluminium series are a combination of the sheer enjoyment of applying paint to a surface whose fluid relationship with the material requires a method of control, and surface definition completely at variance with the larger work on canvas. The pieces have no titles and would seem to explore a form of abstract naturalness more in keeping with the abstraction of landscape and natural phenomena. These motifs, often sanded into their singular surface on the metal, allow a shadow of the paint to shimmer on the surrounding panel. The works have an organic affinity with the artist's work in the eighties before his inclusion of the grid pattern as a structural compositional articulator. Freedom of application is constantly defined by the scoring and sanding of the aluminium surface, and the medium-sized linear abstractions' strong rectangular association is made to recede by the placement of full vertical—almost a stripe, but maybe not Newman's zip. These works from the early nineties have more visual associations with their progenitor De Kooning. This exhibition endeavours to articulate something beyond the mere statement of fact and allow the progressive development of the work to be more apparent to the viewer. Patrick Murphy originally curated a show of this artist when he was Director of the Douglas Hyde Gallery in the eighties. I have known the artist's work since the early seventies, and while a public statement of intent is necessary particularly in the curatorial sense, this could be the first thorough examination of an important artist. The work of a painter developing over thirty years from gestural references to diagonal articulation of the space and surface is to be found in this exhibition, yet this is not stated. The cliché of a mid term retrospective—for the artist was born in 1950—might in this case have been a more rigorous statement of intent.

“Shifting Ground: Selected Works of Irish 1950 - 2000” at the Irish Museum of Modern Art

Five critics each chose the important or best remembered works of a decade. However, this does not mean that the best or most interesting work was in this exhibition. The fifties were apparently so dismal for art in Ireland—except for Jack Yeats—that I am surprised the Museum bothered to include it. When faced with the conflict of opinion and critical criteria in this show, one’s own perspective has the benefit of hindsight. Some of the important works, particularly the *Land Art* of Brian King and the Turf Stack installation of Brian O’Doherty (Patrick Ireland), were a pleasing recollection. As with all areas, the absence of some artists came as a shock, but this is an idiosyncratic survey of art on this island and reflects the cultural nuance of our time. The installations by James Coleman and Jaki Irvine were digitized—both artists normally use projections—and I felt suffered from this change. The work from the nineties was distinctly influenced by a small coterie of younger artists associated with a definite postmodern consensus. This did not allow for a perspective on more mature artists, whose work might have been interesting over the period.

Amongst the paintings was Paddy Graham’s *The Death of Hopalong Cassidy*, which resided on an oblique wall space somehow mirroring the attitude to his work. Nearby was a prison painting by Brian Maguire. These two painters exercise a troubled relationship with the modern sense of Ireland; they constantly articulate the unresolved social and cultural ambiguities of the island.

The recent show by Maguire at the Hugh Lane Municipal Gallery explored in detail the myths and ambiguities of contemporary experience. This gallery echoes with the history of art in Dublin, being the first city gallery of modern art in Europe. Its collection is based upon the disputed gift of Sir Hugh Lane’s Impressionist pictures. At the time of its inception in 1910, the cultural strata of Irish society, led by Lady Gregory and W.B. Yeats, fought an unrelenting campaign, just for a building to house the collection. It is somehow appropriate that this is now the home for the studio of Francis Bacon, described as “St. Francis of Parnell Square” by one critic, for the almost religious awe with which this relic of modern art has been imbued. In closing this view of art in Dublin with a look at its oldest modern art gallery, it is ironic that the future reputation of art from Dublin has been guaranteed by an artist from a British colonial background, whose studio transposed from London will become the most visited art site in the city.

Appendix

Green on Red by Michael Coleman

Underblack III

Scraped (burned by a blow torch) black over pink, blue, orange, yellow. The scraping accentuates the linear undercoat of bright hues. The stretcher cross embedded in the torn and desiccated surface works as part of the image.

Underblack IV

What's under it is green from sludge orange, green graffiti slapdash whites, and a vibrant surface movement. Storms on dark green black toned seas, a vortex without an obvious centre. The cross again is there but not so obviously intrusive. This destructive form of surface-making has more vibrancy and is richer than the normally executed image associated with this kind of work.

Underblack IX

Talking to Fergus Martin, we discussed the charred old worn surface like the peeling bark of Eucalyptus on birch paper trees or old worn leather, separating and peeling from the tanned surface. This very flamelike work evokes a sense that Coleman is no longer fighting the plane of paint with wild swipes around the wall but is concentrating on the image and his technique in a more controlled fashion, his central activity being removal rather than additive.

Charles Tyrrell

In these works there is often a direct response to water-soaked bogland, maybe a metaphorical response to the physical and political conundrum of partition. This abstraction of orientation cauterises hills and fields. It makes a rain-soaked marsh a different country by its division signposts and bunkers. This placement of regularity upon a rolling verdant landscape might have some association with the outer defining panels of the work, while the obvious border of the picture plane is a constant. The origin of his small motifs, which often decorate the linear definitions of the space, becomes the linear echo of the full modular character.

ARLENE RAVEN: CRITICISM AS HEALING FOR THE AUTHOR, THE ARTIST, AND THE AUDIENCE

MEREDITH MOODY

Women's art in the past thirty years has revolutionized our ideas of both art and women. Women have made public both materials and styles that were not considered art-worthy, in a modern sense, before the Women's Movement of the 1970s. This includes some of what Arlene Raven considers the contributions of Women's Art to the Art World: the use of soft sculpture, textiles, and small works.¹ Art criticism has similarly changed as well. The biography of the critic became more important and revealed itself in the critic's writings. Arlene Raven is a paradigmatic critic of this period. Her criticism has an autobiographical hint and reflects the importance of the artists' histories in relation to the purposes for their work. Her early criticism goes far beyond the static explanation of formal attributes of a work, and delves into the reasons, politics, and purposes behind it. In fact, she sometimes does not even include photographs or detailed descriptions of the work or performances which she is critiquing. What the work happens to look like may have little or nothing to do with why it is important to her (in relating to the movement) or why she is writing about it. She represents a new type of criticism that emerged during the Women's Movement, where the biography of the critic comes forward and is integrated into the analysis of the artwork, and where the formal aesthetics fall to the background and are not vital to the analysis.

One value of critics like Raven is the fact that she brings attention to the human aspect of the art—its stories. She partners with artists who incorporate social and human aspects into their works. The connection that she makes with each artist goes deeper than the art itself. The art is a means to an end—a medium to state what needs to be stated. In a sense, this has not changed. Art, repeatedly, has carried implied political and social messages. The messages in the art by women of the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s change, especially in the way they are formally stated. While that is not the most vital factor, the messages become blunt and forward. This frankness is a response to the situation of the times as well as the changes, evolution, and development of working artists. The Women's Movement stirred up ideas about and stereotypes of women. Women, active in the movement, were angry and tried

to force society to understand them as women rather than as objects. This was a stressful task. Their anger is apparent in many artworks. While Raven's writing during those times does not appear angry, her writing does have a supportive character. It seems that she realized the necessity of social healing. She recognized the healing intention of the woman's movement. The healing takes three forms: for the author(s), for the artist(s), and for the audience(s).

Healing is at the center of each. While not a requirement for the author, audience, and artist, healing remains a strong possibility. All three come together in a community of healing through their connections with each other, which is what allows the healing to occur. Their relationship is crucial; the artist creates works for him or herself as well as an audience. The author writes about artists and their works of art for certain audiences. The artist and author work together to interpret the work without misreading it or the artist. Raven as author is part of this healing community. She is also a part of it as a member of the audience and an artist. She uses her criticism and writings for healing purposes that reach out to all three.

By writing about artworks that are confronting ideas about women, Raven, as author, confronts her own ideas about women. As she includes her biography in her work, she relates herself directly and indirectly to the work and its messages. By creating artworks with such strong statements, the artist realizes the power of such ideas and by publicly displaying or performing them, confronts those ideas face to face. The artworks are often biographical and deal with the issues at hand; for example, something as important as violence towards women allows an artist to attempt to heal the emotional wounds of such a personal history. Art becomes therapeutic in purpose. This is experienced by the audiences. They include the viewers of the artwork or performance as well as the readers of their criticism. Simply attending an exhibition or performance to support a cause or to satisfy a need for cultural enlightenment can also indicate a need to be healed. The cumulative experience of the individuals in the audience generates a sense of community that becomes another aspect of the healing nature of this type of work. The individuals can confront their stereotypes and ideas about women and themselves. This, consciously or unconsciously, tends to wounds.

I will talk about several works that Raven has discussed. I will then examine them and her writings from the perspective of their healing power for Raven, in her multiple role as author-artist-audience, artist, and the audience(s).

First, I will concentrate on artworks and performances surrounding rape, as both experience and idea. Rape is a word, secret, fact, and horror that haunts many women. Raven discusses it from her own personal experience and perspective. Many artworks of the 1970s blatantly focused on rape. Their creators were often victims of sexual crimes and were looking for a method and venue to deal with the resulting physical and emotional pain. It required a

great deal of strength for the artist to face her feelings, and also for the audience to do so. Empathy between the audience and artist can be generated by the artwork. Those who have not come to terms with the issues involved could use it as a catalyst for their own healing process. Attending an exhibition or performance can in and of itself be healing. In Raven's case, writing about these works is a profoundly healing act for her; she herself is a rape victim. Thus, she has a personal investment in her writings about rape. While her rape is an unpleasant, difficult memory, her writing about rape oriented artworks is part of a process of self healing, and may trigger a similar process in the people who read her work.

Implicitly, women have formed communities for physical, emotional, and spiritual healing. The group creates the possibility and opportunity for healing by offering a safe haven of understanding and support. To quote Raven,

Beginning in the later 1960s, women gathered in consciousness-raising groups to share their experiences, and here many told of their rapes for the first time. In the 1970s, rape survival became a clear focus for information and support. Helen Mangelsdorf's *Rape Group* is based on her own experience in a rape survivors' group. *Rape Group* expresses not only her worn feelings and analyses but the consensus of her group.²

Raven explicitly states the importance of women coming together to form communities for the healing process to occur. Women were talking about rape in groups; a community of rape survivors was a secure and supportive venue for healing. Art has changed; has a focused, social purpose. It is not about art itself; the motivation behind the art counts more than the art itself, which signifies it. Raven focuses on the group and the need for art and the instrument of its healing. The artist has participated in a healing effort by attending the rape survivors' group, and then extended the effort by making an artwork about it.

Raven then quotes the strength of the performance of *RAPE* (later titled *Rape-Murder*) by Ana Mendieta. Mendieta realistically portrays a woman being raped. This violent act killed her, which is reflected in the name change. But the important point of this powerful piece is that it invites women to come together to face the horror of rape and its emotional consequences, and begin to heal the wound to survive. Raven states:

Ceasing to be spectators viewing an artistic rendering of sex and violence in the form of vulnerable, violated, female flesh, drawn physically into the arena of this art-of-crime scene, we too are changed. We are eyewitnesses. Our seeing attests to the actuality

of what—however unthinkable—is before us. Our shared reality with the artists can be the bedrock for building a powerful, authentic bridge from personal testimony to political analysis and practice. But first there is rage when we begin to face the truth about rape.³

The rage that occurs when “we begin to face the truth about rape” is the beginning of the healing process. It extends beyond the victims of rape. The eyewitnesses—the audience—in effect become victims, forming the community necessary for healing to occur.

Ablutions is a performance piece that can also be seen as a healing process, particularly for the performer, Suzanne Lacy, who presented *Ablutions* on June 6, 1972, in Los Angeles, but also for the “observer-participants” it was addressed to. This was Lacy’s first collaborative effort with a public audience. In the September 1978 issue of *Heresies* she stated:

Ablutions began as a collection of oral histories. For me the translation of this sociological information into art marked a synthesis of my past education in psychology, my experiences in feminist organizing, and my artmaking. In that time of the emerging feminist movement, we felt our most politically powerful art act would be to reveal this hidden experience, a substratum of horror obscured by the prevailing myth that no woman could be raped ‘against her will’.⁴

Revealing this hidden, degrading experience is the first stage in making its reality known and thus build empathy between those who suffer it and those who hear their story. The year-long period when the oral histories were collected by Judy Chicago and Suzanne Lacy, involved recording testimonial statements by women who had been raped. With the collaboration of two other artists, Aviva Rahmani and Sandra Orgel, Raven declares “they used these to portray—as art—women’s experience of violence.”⁵ Raven continues:

When I had visited Los Angeles in May of 1972, the Feminist Art Program performance workshop under the direction of Judy Chicago was preparing *Ablutions*, soon to be performed in Venice, California. Part of this performance was an audiotape that contained the stories of rape victims.

I had been raped only a week before my visit. I told my story as it was recorded for *Ablutions*. I not only had a friend silently listen to my pain, but I participated in a process of feminist art which is based on uncovering, speaking, expressing, making public the experience of women.

The release of artistic energy in the ‘second wave’ of

feminism has been a renaissance, brought about by the catalytic role of feminist ideology and politics. Conversely, feminist political action during the 1970s could not have existed without its poetic base. Metaphor can be a means for making accessible otherwise overwhelmingly difficult understanding of and sensitivity to political and personal realities.⁶

Raven's personal history is clearly implicated in her role as writer: participant. She explains how the "uncovering, speaking, expressing, making public the experience of women" was an integral part of the process of creating feminist art. Again, the art does not count as much as the process. Raven's personal involvement in it makes explicit the healing connection between the artist and author.

The identity of woman as wife, mother, and pretty face was under serious scrutiny in the 1970s. Women told the public in various ways that a woman was more than one of the three listed identities. In fact, limiting women to a definition or identity was no longer acceptable. This sanctioned artworks that explained and then closed the divide between women's actual identities and their assumed social identities and stereotypes.

A major example of a work that questions the identities, images, and roles of woman is *Womanhouse*. A page from "At Home," an essay in Raven's collected essays, explains *Womanhouse* quite well.

Womanhouse, a collaborative art environment created by the twenty-three women of the Feminist Art Program at the California Institute of the Arts, under the direction of Judy Chicago and Miriam Schapiro, was an artwork which made a house a home. Student-artists and local professional artists transformed the abandoned and condemned house at 553 Mariposa Avenue in midtown Los Angeles in to a work of art on the subject of women's lives in their homes. Its rooms became a fear bathroom, a menstruation bathroom, a lipstick bathroom; a giant-sized nursery, a woven womb room, a "Nurturant Kitchen" of fried-egg "breasts" and innumerable plates of prepared food; a bride on the staircase, a bridal train (which turned from white to dingy gray) to the kitchen; a women segmented and confined by the shelves of her linen closet, a many-shoed shoe closet. The house was a seemingly endless labyrinth in which the traditional family woman, whose own limits she could no longer clearly see, fully gave herself and finally lost herself altogether.

Womanhouse was created in six weeks and open to the public for one month—January 30 through February 28, 1972. Then it was destroyed by the city as originally condemned, but not before it had a major impact on people nationally. *Womanhouse*

turned the house inside out. The isolation and anger—that many women felt in the single-nuclear-family dwelling in every suburb of America were flung out at the public who came to see the environment and performances. Those who didn't see *Womanhouse* could experience its startling effect by reading about it in *Time* or seeing Jöhanne Demetrakas' feature film of the same name. As in Betty Friedan's 1963 *The Feminine Mystique*, from which many of the ideas and viewpoints of *Womanhouse* were taken, or in the then-new *Ms. Magazine*, the emphasis in the work presented was on frustration, fury, and despair. And this emphasis created and apprehensive tension in the audience, provoking argument and exposing a sadness which had been covered by the roofs of many of their own private homes.⁷

Raven states that women could only define themselves in relation to their family relationships. This is also Friedan's idea of a "condition so hidden and censored that even the women affected could not name it; their non-identity was 'the problem without a name'."⁸ *Womanhouse* brought these hidden and censored conditions out into the open for women themselves to face as well as those around them. This allows for healing to begin for the women themselves as well as between communities of women such as the group of students that created *Womanhouse*.

Raven continues:

Yet all of these strong emotional states and situations, the hundreds of lipsticks and shoes, sheets, plates of food, yards of material, rooms of color and stories and messages, do not finally alter what every person must face as the human condition of the modern world: We begin and end with nothing. What we make of our lives is an invention of meaning and human triumph or despair. And no one else can take up for us the burden of being ourselves.⁹

Birth Trilogy was performed during the *Womanhouse* project. Raven claims that performance is "an art form that proved especially suited to feminist work."¹⁰ This particular performance

forespoke the essential future character of the women's art movement. *Birth Trilogy* is a ritual of rebirth and new identity symbolizing the coming together of women to attend their own and one another's birth. These daughter/artists were determined to break out of the home and into the world by confronting the most troublesome of female stereotypes and, instead of living them, living through them and thus strengthening themselves in their work. And they were doing that complicated work together. The birth dance is not only a symbol but a true reflection of the relationships among a

couple of dozen women in California who set off on an odyssey.

Birth Trilogy connected. One by one the tears began. All around the amphitheater, tears streamed as a form of cheering too, until anger, grief, and relief flowed everywhere, cracking the self-treasonous, simulated, synthetic Stepford Wives-style smiles. For me, a life of commitment to the values and the work of the feminist art movement was determined in a split second of archaic time, right then and there. Although twenty years have passed, I am still in that moment.¹¹

Not only was *Birth Trilogy* a part of the larger *Womanhouse* project that was boundary-breaking in its own right, but the emotional effects of *Birth Trilogy* allowed women to break through any boundaries that restricted them from realizing their self-identity and the vitality of their community. This boundary breaking is a healing act in both a political and personal sense.

To emphasize the healing nature of boundary breaking, Raven wrote a review of an exhibition called *The Office: History, Fantasy, and Irregular Protocols* in *The Village Voice*. *The Office* was a commercial space where a group of 12 women artists each installed a site-specific artwork that examined the theme of working in an office. The project did not have the same level of collaboration as *Womanhouse*, for everyone partook in the creation of everything. While Raven writes that, in terms of collaboration, *The Office* has little in common with *Womanhouse*, I see a parallel in terms of the use of space to confront ideas about women. Raven mentions that "*The Office* similarly employs a commercial building as a structure where artists can explore its pink-collar work environment."¹² She discusses the assumed roles and labor statistics about women in the workforce. Again, the confrontation of ideas and images of the roles of women begins the destruction of those images by the healing of their effect. The group of artists heal and are healed in this process, as is Raven through the writing of her review, and the incorporation of her own ideas about women's labor.

The work that these women create in their collectives and communities is meant to have an effect on society, it is art with a purpose for the greater good, which involves healing. In many of her essays, Raven mentions artwork of social concern as a means for healing, for example, in "Not a Pretty Picture: Can Violent Art Heal?" She discusses healing through community in an activist performance in 1977 by Leslie Labowitz and Suzanne Lacy called *In Mourning and Rage*, which was meant to be a community healing event in response to the Hillside Strangler murders of women.

Sixty women formed a motorcade of cars bearing funeral stickers and 'stop violence against women' stickers. They followed a hearse to City Hall, where news media reporters waited with mem-

bers of the city council. Out of the hearse climbed ten tall women robed in black mourning dress. These women each spoke of a different violence perpetrated against women as they received a scarlet red cloak. Women from the motorcade chorused after each statement: "In memory of our sisters, we fight back!"¹³

This indicates the underlying anger present at the time; the anger was not unwarranted. The audience of city council members and news media as well as performers could begin to come to terms with the murders through community support, thus beginning the healing process together.

Returning to the idea of community, Carey Lovelace, a student in Cal Arts' school of music, described the way the "women in the Feminist Art Programs banded together for the first time to give form to a new artistic identity, to create a nurturing environment, to point out inequities in a system everyone had taken for granted."¹⁴ This conveys the importance of the community of women in terms of their effort to change the way they are viewed by the public. In fact, Raven continues by saying, "Within small worlds of women, identification with other women became a political concept, a basis for art/action, and a forceful vision of a future without an unwanted baggage of the antifemale mainstream. Issues raised and values held in women's communities could be asserted to challenge those in surrounding social orders."¹⁵ This links Raven's idea of the importance of the community of women with the necessity of the healing, boundary breaking, and activism of women and women's art.

While the healing aspect of art reaches out to the authors writing about art and the artists themselves in a self-reflective manner through the therapeutic act of criticizing or making art, it stretches to the audience of criticism and art. For Raven, writing is an important factor in the history of such works. While many of the artworks she discusses were short-lived performances or temporary exhibitions, the lack of immense audiences for them (due largely to time and space constraints), is compensated by her writings, which disseminate the healing nature and effect of the work to larger audiences. She makes artwork accessible, that at the time of its conception was not always readily accessible.

I have not experienced any of the artworks Raven discusses first hand, but her articles and essays allow me to experience them and feel their power. In a sense, as audience and twice-removed author, I have been given the opportunity of being healed in the process. Perhaps my own unconscious need for healing was my motivation for writing about Raven's work in terms of the feminist ideal of social and self-healing.

After a telephone conversation with Arlene Raven, I understood her need to have what she calls "partnerships" with the artists with whom she

works. Such connection allows her to gain a deeper perspective about who and what she is writing about. Even her more recent works depend on such personal involvement. In an essay she wrote for the 20th anniversary for Hallwalls, she connected the idea of "alternative space" to her own history as well as to the space of the Hallwalls Contemporary Arts Center.¹⁶ In a sense, Hallwalls can be regarded as an alternative space for art to the extent that it can also be considered a space for healing.

In her many reviews for *The Village Voice*, Raven often links her biography and experiences with exhibitions and artists. However limited these reviews necessarily are by their character and circumstance, she nonetheless makes the art accessible in terms of its very human purpose of art, even beyond the purpose of healing. She told me that she deliberately seeks out artists who want to put human purpose back into art. She is obsessed with artists who incorporate ideas about community and healing into their creative processes and work.¹⁷ For her they are necessary if art is to have any consequence and influence, let alone historical significance.

Notes

- 1 Arlene Raven, interview by author, 2 December 1999, Brooklyn, New York, telephone conversation, Sound Beach, New York.
- 2 Arlene Raven, *Crossing Over: Feminism and Art of Social Concern* (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1988), 164-5.
- 3 *Ibid.*, 158.
- 4 *Ibid.*, 120.
- 5 *Ibid.*, 120.
- 6 *Ibid.*, 165.
- 7 *Ibid.*, 91, 99.
- 8 *Ibid.*, 99.
- 9 *Ibid.*, 111.
- 10 Arlene Raven, "The Archaic Smile," in *New Feminist Criticism: Art, Identity, Action*, ed. Joanna Frueh, Cassandra L. Langer, and Arlene Raven (New York: Harper Collins, 1994), 11.
- 11 *Ibid.*, 11, 13.
- 12 Arlene Raven, "Beaver and Broad," *The Village Voice*, 8 November 1994, 92.
- 13 *Ibid.*, *Crossing Over: Feminism and Art of Social Concern*, 194.
- 14 Arlene Raven, "The Last Essay on Feminist Criticism," in *Feminist Art Criticism: An Anthology*, ed. Arlene Raven, Cassandra L. Langer and Joanna Frueh (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1988), 230.
- 15 *Ibid.*, 230.
- 16 Raven, Arlene, "Alternative Spaces," in *Consider the Alternatives: 20 Years of Contemporary Art at Hallwalls*, ed. Ronald Ehmke (Buffalo: Hallwalls, 1996)
- 17 *Ibid.*, interview by author.

A VEXED TRANS-ATLANTIC RELATIONSHIP: GREENBERG AND THE BRITISH

JOHN A. WALKER

James Faure Walker [British artist and writer]: *Your relations with artists have sometimes been difficult.*

Clement Greenberg: *Very difficult, artists are difficult.*¹

For several decades—from the 1940s to the 1970s—Clement Greenberg's power and influence as a critic were unprecedented in the history of 20th-century art. So persuasive was he that several artists were willing to follow his advice regarding the making and future direction of their art. He was even prepared to make changes to an artist's work after his or her death when he thought he could improve it. (This happened in the case of the American sculptor David Smith.) A biography of Greenberg (1909-94), by Florence Rubinfeld, was published in 1998² and his relations with American art and artists are well documented, but less well known are his relations with British art, artists and critics. The British came into contact with Greenberg in three main ways: 1) via his writings, interviews, radio and television appearances; 2) via his visits to, and conversations with, artists in their homes and studios in Britain and talks given in British art schools; 3) via meetings with British artists and critics in New York and Bennington, Vermont.

Writings

In April 1940, *Horizon*, the British cultural journal, reprinted Greenberg's influential, theoretical essay "Avant-Garde and Kitsch" (1939), and in October 1947, the same journal published "The present prospects of American painting and sculpture."³ As a result of the latter, British readers received advance notice of the new American painting that was to have such a potent effect in the following decade when exhibitions featuring the Abstract Expressionists reached London. Another British journal he wrote for during the years 1962 and '63 was *Encounter*, which was covertly funded by the CIA for anti-communist reasons.

During the 1950s and '60s, Britons with access to art school libraries

became familiar with Greenberg's prolific output of reviews and essays in such magazines as *Artforum*, *Art in America*, *Art News*, *Art International*, *Arts Magazine* and *Partisan Review*. Beacon Press of Boston published a collection of Greenberg's articles—*Art and Culture: Critical Essays*—in 1961 (paperback edition 1965). This text was stocked by most art school libraries and was much read by British art students, fine art tutors and art historians. Greenberg was notorious for the forthrightness of his value judgments based on intuitive esthetic responses to works of art. He was also important in terms of supplying new ideas and terms to the discourse of art, for example "American-Type Painting," "Post-Painterly Abstraction" and "Modernist Painting/Sculpture." The latter were derived from Greenberg's seminal essay "Modernist Painting" which first appeared in 1960. (A number of Greenberg's essays were more ambitious and substantial than those by other critics because they attempted an analysis of the fate of avant-garde and modern art in the era of industrial capitalism and because they were underpinned by a knowledge of Marx, philosophical ideas derived from Kant and by art-historiographic ideas such as those of Wölfflin's.) Voice of America first broadcast "Modernist Painting" as one of the Forum Lecture Series in May 1960 and since this radio station was listened to by several million Europeans, one may presume numerous Britons heard it. Greenberg's reductive interpretation of the trajectory of modern art was to influence the thinking of many British artists during the 1960s but it provoked negative reactions too.

Most of Greenberg's art criticism focused upon American art and the work of leading European artists such as Cézanne, Matisse, Miró and Picasso, consequently there were far fewer commentaries on British art. (Since Greenberg believed there was a "mainstream" of modern art and that it ran through Paris before 1939 and through New York after 1945, it followed that Britain was bound to be viewed as a backwater.) Even so, during the late 1940s, he did review for *The Nation* a mixed show of British art and some one-person shows by British artists that took place in the United States. Although Greenberg was to express admiration for a few British artists—Ivon Hitchens and Anthony Caro, for instance—in general he held a dim view of Britain's artistic achievements. Greenberg thought that, in comparison to the new American art, British art lacked potency and conviction; it was marred by anemia, monotony, prettiness, by the primacy of good taste over boldness, richness and originality; furthermore, British painting was short on painterliness. One of his key critical distinctions was between 'major' and 'minor' artworks and artists. Leading figures in British art, such as Ben Nicholson and Henry Moore, were both judged to be "minor."

British art critics and art historians fared little better. In 1950, David Sylvester was accused of a lack of critical competence. Five years later Herbert

Read was also declared an "incompetent art critic" and in 1957 he was criticized for having "no taste." Since Greenberg disliked Harold Rosenberg's theory of Action painting, Lawrence Alloway was berated for endorsing and promulgating the theory in Britain during the 1950s. Alloway, for his part admired all things American and in 1961, he and his wife Sylvia Sleight migrated to America for good. However, Alloway was a fan of American mass culture as well as its Action painting, consequently, in his 1958 essay "The Arts and the Mass Media," Greenberg was faulted for his blanket condemnation of mass culture as kitsch in his famous 1939 essay. Two British writers who did meet with Greenberg's approval were Kenneth Clark and Patrick Heron.

Interviews are a more informal means of accessing the ideas of major intellectuals. Over the decades a number of British critics interviewed Greenberg, namely, Trish Evans, Peter Fuller, Charles Harrison, Edward Lucie-Smith, James Faure Walker, and the art historian T.J. Clark. Barbara Reise, an American who came to live (and die) in London, also published a two-part, critical analysis of Greenberg and his followers in the London-based journal *Studio International* in May and June 1968. From Lucie-Smith's interview with Greenberg in *Studio International* (January 1968), readers discovered some of the American's negative views on British art: Moore was judged yet again to be a "minor" sculptor; Francis Bacon was cited as an example of "inspired safe taste;" and English deficiencies were identified as "neatness" and "patness;" much of the art criticism written by British writers was condemned as "utter crap." Not all the targets of Greenberg's attacks ignored them. Bad tempered replies to Greenberg's opinions were published and then Greenberg, rather than apologize, would respond in kind.

Visits to England, Ireland and Scotland

Greenberg made a number of trips to Europe to see examples of modern art, to undertake research and to meet artists and writers. His first visit occurred during April-June 1939. After the Second World War, he visited England, France, Italy, Switzerland during the summer of 1954 and he visited France, London and Cornwall in July 1959. In the following decade, he was in Britain during September 1963 and November 1965. Then, in 1967 and 1971, he visited Ireland to review the *Rosc* exhibitions held in Dublin. He came to London again in the mid-1970s and gave talks at the Royal College of Art and the Slade, and took part in a panel discussion at Art Net (a London exhibitions and events venue established by Peter Cook of Archigram fame). A difference of opinion with the British Pop artist Richard Hamilton occurred at Art Net. Greenberg also lectured in Edinburgh.

Let us now consider some of these trips in more detail. In the early 1950s, Patrick Heron—the critic and painter—lived in the Holland Park district of London. It was there in the summer of 1954 that he was visited by Greenberg

armed with a letter of introduction from the art dealer Charles Gimpel. The American, it turned out, was familiar with Heron's art criticism, which had been published in the British weekly *The New Statesman* (1947-50) and in the American journal *Arts*, and the two men quickly became friends (calling each other "Clem" and "Pat"). Heron introduced Greenberg to the painters William Scott and Roger Hilton and, at his request, showed him the bombsites of the East End. However, Heron soon discovered that Greenberg was more interested in promoting the art of his homeland than in learning about British art. Their conversation was about Jackson Pollock—examples of whose work Heron had viewed the previous year when he visited the ICA's *Opposing Forces* exhibition—and the other New York artists whose paintings Heron had not yet seen. (During his 1954 European trip Greenberg visited the Venice Biennale where he saw a show of de Koonings that he considered put to shame the work of Ben Shahn in a neighboring pavilion and indeed every other artist of a comparable age exhibiting in Venice.) Abstract Expressionism was to have a significant impact in Britain during the second half of the 1950s and Heron was one of the first critics to respond in print with praise and enthusiasm. However, there came a time when he was to rue his initial, generous response.

In July 1959, Greenberg was sent to Europe by the French & Co Gallery of New York (he was a paid consultant) to search for promising European artists. After visiting France, he traveled to Cornwall where he spent several days with Heron. During this visit, he met the artists Sandra Blow, Roger Hilton, John Wells and Bryan Wynter. Heron had given up art criticism in order to devote more time to painting colorful abstracts. The artist and critic had much in common, because they were both formalists, yet there was a disagreement. Greenberg wanted Heron to make compositional changes, that is, to bunch forms in the center of his canvas leaving empty space around them, instead of placing them in such a way as to call attention to the edges. Heron refused to follow this advice because by then, he objected to the simplicity and symmetry of so many American paintings and he advocated, as a necessary next step, the *re-complication* of the picture surface. Within a few years, Heron was to note, both American critics and painters had become edge-conscious. Naturally, Heron claimed credit for this change of mind.

After his sojourn in Cornwall, Greenberg traveled to London where he met the dealers John Kasmin, Victor and Leslie Waddington and the critic and curator Lawrence Alloway. The latter inquired: "What's happening in New York?" and Greenberg showed him slides of some stained, color-field paintings. The following year Greenberg helped to arrange for canvases by Morris Louis to be dispatched to Alloway at the ICA for Louis's first London exhibition (May 1960).

In 1959, Greenberg also visited the London studio of Anthony Caro, a figurative sculptor who was then seeking a new direction. In 1978 Caro

recalled:

Greenberg was totally involved. He more or less told me my art wasn't up to the mark...He spent all day with me talking about art and at the end of the day he had said a lot things that I had not heard before. I had wanted him to see my work because I had never had a really good criticism of it, a really clear eye looking at it. A lot of what he said hit home, but he also left me with a great deal of hope. I had come to the end of a certain way of working: I didn't know where to go. He offered some sort of pointer.⁴

Greenberg's recollection of the meeting was as follows:

I saw his stuff the first time in '59: it was quasi-expressionist, smallish figures, not monolithic figures. I said, is it good enough? And I *didn't* do some missionary work, but I said come over and look at David Smith. And when he came over he met Smith and he met Noland, and went back and *switched*. The first thing he did was *24 Hours* [an abstract metal sculpture of 1960]. He gave it to me and I sold it to the Tate [in 1975]. From then on he was on his own. He didn't need to come back here to look at Smith or anybody else.⁵

It was in November 1959 that Caro visited the United States and Mexico for three months with the financial help of a Ford/English-Speaking-Union travel grant. He met and talked with a number of American artists and critics including Smith, Kenneth Noland, Jules Olitski and, of course, Greenberg. Smith, the sculptor championed by Greenberg, made constructions from welded metal some of which he coated with strong colors. Caro knew his work from photographs and saw a few pieces in New York but he claims it was not until October 1963, when he visited Smith's mountain retreat and workshop—Bolton Landing farm in the Adirondacks, upstate New York—and saw about 80 works standing in a field that he was particularly struck by the sculpture's "character, personal expressiveness, delicacy of touch...*immense* sculptural intelligence!"⁶

Greenberg hailed Caro's dramatic change from modeled figuration to constructed abstraction as a "breakthrough" and the sculptor was dubbed "the Moses of British art." Regarding the relationship between Caro and Smith, Greenberg wrote in 1965:

He [Caro] is the only new sculptor whose sustained quality can bear comparison with Smith's...Caro is also the first sculptor to digest Smith's ideas instead of merely borrowing them. Precisely by deriving from Smith he has been the better able to establish his own individuality.⁷

Clearly, Greenberg regarded Caro as Smith's artistic heir, as the artist who would continue and develop Smith's type of constructed, metal sculpture. In 1963, the Whitechapel Art Gallery in London mounted a survey of Caro's work. Michael Fried, a young American critic who was one of Greenberg's disciples, wrote the show's catalogue essay. Fried duly paid homage to his mentor and gave a summary of Greenberg's Modernist Painting theory. (Fried was later to teach at St Martin's School of Art in London.) Peter Fuller, the trenchant British art critic writing about this show over two decades later observed caustically: "Caro's work was nothing if not of its time: it reflected the superficial, synthetic, urban commercial, American values which dominated the 1960s."⁸ On another occasion, Fuller declared that Caro's sculptures were merely "illustrations" of Greenberg's ideas.

Caro's growing international reputation was due in considerable measure to the sense of new possibilities and freedom he had gained from his exposure to America and contemporary American art, and the critical endorsement of Greenberg and Fried, plus the backing of the New York dealer André Emmerich.

During the early 1960s Caro taught part-time at St Martin's, consequently his presence was a stimulus to a number of British art students and fellow members of staff. In September 1963, Greenberg was invited to London by Caro and the St Martin's' sculptors/tutors David Annesley, Michael Bolus, Philip King, Tim Scott and William Tucker who wanted to benefit from his expertise via a series of personal 'crits'. Greenberg's airfare was raised by each of the sculptors contributing a share. When, shortly afterwards, the St Martin's sculpture course was threatened with closure, Greenberg was asked to write a letter of support to Frank Martin, Head of Sculpture. Greenberg did so and was fulsome in his praise. His letter, written in February 1964, was published in the St Martin's student magazine *Going 1.*(1964):8.

Not all of Greenberg's relationships with British artists were as harmonious and productive as that between him and Caro. As already explained, Heron refused to take Greenberg's advice and, as we shall see shortly, the relationship between Greenberg and John Latham was to prove abrasive. One of the British sculptors Greenberg visited in 1963 was Brian Wall, who was then a principal lecturer at the Central School of Art and Design. It seems Wall had constructed a flatbed, metal sculpture with a tall, vertical element of which he was proud. When Greenberg saw it, he suggested cutting it right down. Wall was so irritated by the advice that he offered Greenberg his metal-cutting torch and told him to complete the sculpture himself.

While in London in 1963, Greenberg was the guest of Sheridan Blackwood, the fifth Marquis of Dufferin and Ava, who was the business partner of John Kasmin the art dealer. Kasmin had opened a gallery at 118 New Bond Street devoted to new, avant-garde British and American art in April 1963

with a show of the target-motif, stain-paintings of Kenneth Noland, the American artist Caro and Greenberg respected so much. Through Kasmin, Greenberg also visited the painter-brothers Bernard and Harold Cohen. The importance of such art world networks is obvious and Greenberg was an assiduous net worker, socializer and traveler. Bernard Cohen had been employed by Kasmin to stretch the canvases of Morris Louis for a September 1963 London show. Louis had died the previous year and Greenberg was one of those responsible for his estate. Bernard found that the Louis canvases contained two sets of edge marks: one set by Louis, the other by Greenberg. This incident revealed that Greenberg had taken "cropping" decisions in respect of stain paintings executed on rolls of unstretched, unprimed canvas. During his studio visits, this was one of the issues he used to discuss with those artists who worked on canvas placed on the floor. Harold Cohen was familiar with American art and criticism having lived in New York from 1959 to '61 on a Harkness Fellowship. Since Harold was a tutor at the Slade School of Art, he invited Greenberg to give a talk to the student body. One of those in the audience was Terry Atkinson, a student from a Northern, working-class background, who was shortly to help form the group Fine Artz (and, later on, the group Art & Language). The future members of Fine Artz were skeptical of Greenberg's theories because of their keen interest in American and British popular culture, rock 'n' roll, and teenage fads and cults. They were reluctant, therefore, to accept Greenberg's positive/negative value distinction between avant-garde, high modernist fine art on the one hand and kitsch/mass culture on the other. In the 1990s Atkinson recalled:

If modernism was a destiny for those who wished to be good artists, as the future members of Fine Artz thought they heard Clement Greenberg advocating as they sat in an unyielding row listening to its most famous partisan...then Fine Artz would never be good artists.

...It seems that high modernist theoreticians found it more and more difficult to maintain a workable distinction between popular culture and kitsch as the notion of the avant-garde itself became both more and more popular and more and more kitsch. Modernist theorists, Greenberg for example, did not lay out what an integrated and authentic community would be like because their notions of integration and authenticity were so deeply abstract.⁹

Bernard Cohen did not attend Greenberg's lecture but he recalls three conversations with the critic (although Greenberg did most of the talking) over a period of a week or so.¹⁰ Their meetings were mainly social in character and took place at Bernard's flat in Putney, at a dinner party hosted by critic John Russell, and at Dufferin's address for martinis. On each occasion Bernard found that Greenberg presented a different persona—he could be domineering

one moment and charming the next. Bernard had read *Art and Culture* and been most impressed by Greenberg's essay on collage. The rest of the book, he thought, was marred by arbitrary judgments of taste. In 1963, Bernard was using a spray gun to paint large abstracts in a linear-doodle or Art Nouveau-type-manner. They were not flat enough for Greenberg who also complained about what he called "the Anglo-Saxon space box." Greenberg admired Pollock because he had used unstretched canvas and worked out from the center to discover the four edges, unlike those artists who preferred canvases stretched over wooden supports and who, therefore, treated "that damn rectangle" as a given. In addition, he complained about the British penchant for "idiosyncrasy."

In February 1967, Bernard traveled to New York to mount a one-man show of minimalist, almost all-white paintings at the Betty Parsons Gallery. During his stay, he visited Greenberg's apartment for drinks and was shown some "atrocious" life drawings that Greenberg and Jules Olitski had made but the critic refused to see or review Bernard's exhibition. Greenberg struck Bernard as an intellectual bully who was prescriptive in his relations with artists. Bernard became friendly with a number of American artists—Rothko, Newman, Johns and Larry Poons, for example—and he visited the United States and taught there several times. He admired the Abstract Expressionists and American society for the greater sense of liberty and the opportunities it offered compared to Britain. Nevertheless, Greenberg, he considers, was the antithesis of such American values. Bernard rejected Greenberg's ideas because they made no sense to him and he asserts that the critic had no influence on the direction of his painting.

Greenberg was in Britain again during November 1965 to chair the jury for the John Moores Liverpool Exhibition. The two other members of the jury were Heron and John Russell. The top prize-winner that year was Michael Tyzack, with a painting called *Alessio 'B'*, an abstract in red, blue and green with a centralized, symmetrical, wedge-shaped form with wavy edges. The second and third prizes were also awarded to abstract painters. Fierce arguments took place during the selection process but, given the jury's composition, it was hardly surprising that formalist abstraction swept the board.

In December 1967, Greenberg was invited by the Arts Council of Ireland to see Irish artists and to review the first *Rosc*, an international exhibition of contemporary art that was to be held in Dublin every four years. (His review appeared in *Artforum* in April 1968.) He spent ten days in Ireland imbibing its visual culture and he visited the *Rosc* show twice. Most of the work on display struck him as "dismal." In the main, he praised American artists but he did mention several British artists—Bacon, Davie, Nicholson and Pasmore—in passing. One of his longest comments was about two exhibits by John Latham:

And Latham's bas-relief construction of 1965, *Manningtree*, was the first thing of his I had ever seen that transcended mere tastefulness; as if to atone, his other piece in *Rosc*, a clutch of books in drooping canvas, managed to be in bad taste without exactly failing to be tasteful.¹¹

As we shall discover shortly, Greenberg's emphasis on taste and his dismissive attitude provoked a violent response from Latham.

British Artists and Critics in America, 1950s and '60s

From the late 1950s onwards, air travel across the Atlantic became cheaper and easier. Increasingly, British artists, critics and art students chose to visit America because by then it was evident that New York had replaced Paris as the world's art capital. When Britons arrived in New York many of them were welcomed by Greenberg who, like a tourist guide, escorted them round selected galleries. He also invited them to his apartment for drinks and introduced them to American artists. During the early 1960s, Greenberg was promoting the Washington Color School and American Post-Painterly Abstraction; consequently, it was the work of the artists constituting these tendencies that he preferred to show British visitors. It was natural too that Greenberg was more friendly with British abstract artists rather than with British Pop artists who also passed through, or who worked in New York because, of course, he was convinced that abstraction was historically inevitable and he was not interested in the mass culture iconography of Pop art and dismissed Pop as "Novelty Art." (Rubinfeld reports, however, that Greenberg enjoyed such popular culture as baseball, the movies, jazz and dancing.) Caro's crucial trips to America have already been described. Alloway visited New York in May 1958 where he visited the studios of some of the Abstract Expressionists, and talked to Lee Krasner and Harold Rosenberg. He also spent several evenings chatting with Greenberg. Alloway appears to have switched his allegiance from Rosenberg's theories to Greenberg's because he returned to London convinced that Abstract Expressionism was an art of control and order, not one of accident and chance.

Richard Smith, a painter whose work straddled the divide between abstraction and Pop, spent two years working in New York from 1959 to '61 on a Harkness Scholarship. While there he encountered Greenberg and through him Noland.

Heron paid his first visit to New York in April 1960 to attend the opening of his first, American, solo show held at the Bertha Schaefer Gallery. He and his wife Delia met up with Greenberg who took them to see a Morris Louis show the critic had arranged at French & Co. He also showed Heron some of Noland's target paintings and some abstracts by Olitski. It was the first time Heron had seen any works by these three American painters. Later

on, Heron had other exhibitions in New York. Greenberg responded to one of these by telling Heron: "it wasn't much."

Bertha Schaefer also gave Terry Frost a one-man show in 1960. He spent three weeks in New York staying with Larry Rivers. In 1981, he recalled:

Greenberg was marvelous to me, and he showed me the David Smiths and Pollocks he had and he showed me Nolands and Olitskis, and talked to me at length about art. He came to the show I was having there. I met Motherwell and Frankenthaler also.¹²

During the late 1950s John Latham began making reliefs from scorched and mutilated second-hand books, wire, spray-paint and other materials.¹³ The inclusion of his large relief *Shem* in the Museum of Modern Art's *The Art of Assemblage* (1961) show, curated by William C. Seitz, prompted Latham to cross the Atlantic for the first time. He spent three months in New York in the autumn of 1961. Kasmin, his British dealer, rented a suite at the famous Chelsea Hotel and an informal exhibition was held there. A fellow resident at the hotel with whom Latham became acquainted was Noland and it was through him that Latham met Greenberg. This brief contact was to become highly significant later in the decade. Seitz's book/catalogue for *The Art of Assemblage* made no mention of Greenberg or his theory of Modernist Painting but Seitz's exhibition surely represented an alternative to Greenberg's purist esthetic—the idea that each medium had to purify itself of all external references and everything it shared with other media—because *Assemblage* was, by definition, impure and hybrid. This was one of the reasons why Latham came to oppose Greenberg's ideas.

John Hoyland is another British abstract painter who, like Heron, adores intense colors. With the aid of a Peter Stuyvesant Foundation bursary, Hoyland paid his first visit to New York in 1964. He and Paul Huxley (who also had a Stuyvesant travel grant) were given a conducted tour of the Emmerich and Kootz galleries by Greenberg to view paintings by Louis, Noland and Hans Hofmann. Hoyland expressed doubts about the quality of the Nolands and was instructed by Greenberg to "look again." However, the British artist was much taken with Hofmann, an artist he had never heard of before.

During the 1950s and '60s, Greenberg developed a close association with the staff and students of the art faculty of Bennington College in the hills of Vermont. (The students—over 300—were all young, impressionable females, so the male staff—called by Alan Solomon 'The Green Mountain Boys'¹⁴—had a splendid time.) Greenberg's influence was so great that, according to Rubinfeld, art insiders knew Bennington as "Clemsville." David Smith and Noland lived nearby and Paul Feeley and Olitski taught there. British artists who taught and worked there because of Greenberg's influence included: Caro,

Phillip King, Isaac Witkin and Peter Stroud, plus the critic Alloway and his painter wife Sylvia Sleight. From time-to-time Greenberg visited Bennington and took part in studio "crits."

Frank Bowling, a black, figurative painter, was born in 1936 in Guyana (then a British colony), South America, and came to England in 1950 to finish his schooling. After leaving the Royal College of Art, Bowling had some success in terms of grants, exhibitions, prizes and critical acclaim. Nevertheless, having been omitted from the Whitechapel's painting exhibition *The New Generation: 1964*, he concluded that the British art world was neglecting him because of endemic racism and because his imagery was political rather than Pop. Seeing no future for himself in Britain he decided, in 1966, to settle in the United States. The American critic Frank O'Hara also advised him to do so. Bowling was to live in New York for a decade. From 1967 to '71 he struggled with the issues raised by Black consciousness, but in the end he concluded that making "good" art was more important to him than making 'Black' art. He also decided that modernism was his creed, declared he was 'a formalist' and began to be influenced by the stain painting of the American Post-Painterly Abstractionists. In London Bowling had known Latham and initially he was, like Latham, anti-Greenberg. When Bowling and Greenberg first met there was antagonism, but after a visit to Bowling's studio Greenberg relented. Bowling read Greenberg's writings and found that he agreed with the Modernist Painting theory. Curiously, Bowling has credited Greenberg with enabling him to see that modernism—the modern, international, ideological framework for making art—belonged to him as well as white artists born in Europe or North America. Alan Gouk's 1972 meetings with Greenberg in New York will be described shortly.

Anti-Greenberg, 1966-74

As Heron became familiar with the work Post-Painterly Abstractionists, he began to have reservations about its originality and quality. He also became increasingly disturbed by the "ruthless promotional techniques" underpinning the international success enjoyed by American artists and he came to resent the nationalistic boasting of Greenberg and his followers. Since many Britons are (or were) modest, reticent beings who are embarrassed to blow their own trumpets, Heron had to steel himself to make his critical thoughts about the Americans public. At the Institute of Contemporary Arts, London in July 1965, during a discussion about Morris Louis and Post-Painterly Abstraction, he dared to do so by attacking Greenberg and by claiming that he (Heron) had invented vertical-stripe painting in 1957, that is, well before Louis. There was uproar and Heron was howled down. As he later argued, it seemed as if the British art world had become completely cowed and brainwashed by American hype, so much so that questioning the chronological priority of American art

was inconceivable.

Heron maintained that the extravagant claims made by the Americans—and reiterated by compliant British critics such as Alloway and Paul Overy—had resulted in a very one-sided account that failed to credit the innovations of his generation of British artists. Younger artists were thus kept in the dark about the latter's achievements, especially since the walls of the Tate Gallery were being dominated by recent American art rather than by recent British art. Examining the history of the interaction between British and American art, Heron was driven to the conclusion that certain British artists had, via exhibitions held in New York, influenced American ones rather than vice versa. Heron's controversial views were developed in print in a trio of articles published in *Studio International* over the period 1966-70. Some years later, in October 1974, *The Guardian* daily newspaper printed three, full-page, illustrated articles by Heron charging the Americans with cultural imperialism. Greenberg later told Peter Fuller that this analysis was "preposterous!" and that Heron was being "paranoid."

Another British artist who was to become critical of the ideas and judgments of Greenberg was John Latham. The latter's most notorious assault on a book was his *Still and Chew* event of 1966-67, which involved the partial destruction and distillation of Greenberg's *Art and Culture*. This anthology was much read by art school staff and students in the 1960s, especially those at St Martin's where Latham taught part-time. The book became a prime target because Latham considered its title pretentious, and because Greenberg's emphasis on space and form conflicted with his own emphasis on time and event.

In addition, Greenberg had earlier sent Latham a postcard in which he dismissed the artist's book reliefs as "patly Cubist." When Greenberg had chaired the jury for the 1965 John Moores Liverpool Exhibition, a work submitted by Latham had been rejected. Since the critic looked down on most contemporary British art because he considered it was in "too good taste," Latham decided to invert the comment in order to discover if Greenberg "tasted good." The *Still and Chew* event was held in August 1966 at Latham's home in Holland Park. Barry Flanagan, then a sculpture student at St Martin's, helped to organize it. Guests chewed pages torn from a copy of *Art and Culture* borrowed from the art school's library. About one-third of the book received this treatment. When well chewed, the soggy pages were spat out into a flask. Afterwards Latham performed alchemical-like transformations in order to distil the book's essence into a liquid contained in a small glass phial. Months later, in May 1967, an overdue notice marked 'very urgent' arrived from the art school's librarian. Latham labeled the phial and returned it. Because of this action, he was dismissed from his teaching post. Subsequently, he gathered the objects and documents associated with the event and placed them in a

black leather case. This assemblage—now called *Art and Culture*—was acquired by New York's MoMA in 1970 and came to be regarded by certain critics as a key example of Conceptual art. The willingness of MoMA to buy this assemblage indicated that the American curators had a sense of humor and that they regarded Greenberg and Latham as significant figures.

Greenberg and British abstract painting during the 1970s

Greenberg visited Ireland, Scotland, and England several times during the 1970s. After seeing the *Rosc '71* exhibition in Dublin, Greenberg reviewed it for *Art International*. His verdict was: "even worse in terms of art *qua* art than the first *Rosc* was."¹⁵ However, somewhat surprisingly, abstract paintings by the British artists Bridget Riley and John Walker were singled out for praise. In the 1970s a number of younger, British, abstract painters emerged who were indebted to the kind of American abstract painting championed by Greenberg. According to Alan Gouk, one of a number of painters and sculptors who exhibited at the Stockwell Depot studios in South London, the ambition of these painters was to "reconcile the physicality and directness of attack of Abstract Expressionism with the colour painting which followed it."¹⁶ Although a painter (and a writer on art), Gouk had organized a forum on sculpture for the Advanced Course at St Martin's since 1967. Inevitably, he heard Caro praise Greenberg and was prompted to acquire a copy of *Art and Culture*. When the critic gave a seminar at Goldsmiths' College in 1968, a contingent from St Martin's went to listen. This was Gouk's first sight of Greenberg the man.¹⁷ He claims that Greenberg was often a poor public speaker unless he was reading from a prepared script, but that he was usually able to deal with questioners in a summary fashion. However, this time Greenberg blushed and was disconcerted when two left-wing students in the audience attacked him for being a bourgeois art critic and mystifier. Greenberg responded by explaining that his disillusionment with communism dated from the 1930s when he learnt about Stalinism.

In 1972, at the insistence of Caro, Gouk took a large (8' x 12'), rolled-up canvas across the Atlantic hoping for a helpful response from Greenberg. Caro's experience of America had been so exciting and empowering that he was keen for other British artists to follow in his footsteps but Gouk found that the mood in America had changed since Caro's time, that there was now a chauvinistic and anti-European atmosphere. Greenberg was now in his sixties and Gouk gained the impression that he was reluctant to view new art. However, Gouk was invited round to Greenberg's apartment for drinks and to meet American artists such as Larry Poons and Friedel Dzubas, and several young, female, art-history students from Toledo. They all went out for a Chinese meal and dropped in on Michael Steiner's studio and then went dancing. Two other British painters—John McLean and Jennifer Durrant—were in New York at the

same time as Gouk and they too met Greenberg.

Eventually, Greenberg agreed to look at Gouk's large abstract, which was on display at Noland's studio in the Bowery. The critic remarked on the dark, close-valued color scheme and suggested he carry on in the same way but with different hues. He advised Gouk: "There's no need to adjust each touch of color to all the others the way Cézanne used to do, just lay your colors side by side and see how far you can go with it."

When Greenberg was in London during the mid-1970s, he was persuaded by Caro to visit the Stockwell Depot studios two or three times. Greenberg thought the painters and sculptors he saw there were "damn serious—the painters very much American-influenced, and making no bones about it."¹⁸ Gouk reports that Greenberg's "crits" were generally brisk and business-like. It seems he preferred not to engage in a discussion with artists about their intentions. He would point a lot and say things like: "That's the one, go with that...When I last saw your work, you were warm. Now you are hot." He would also make more specific suggestions for adjustments in terms of composition or design.

In 1977, Gouk claimed that the value of Greenbergian modernism was as "an antidote to surrealism, the literary romanticism of artists like Newman and Rothko, the turgidity of abstract expressionism in decline."¹⁹ After acknowledging that Greenberg had made some serious errors of judgment, Gouk opined that, nonetheless:

he's probably the only non-painter that you can learn from. Since meeting him, my whole conception of what painting can be has changed. His influence is of that kind. He makes you confront yourself, your own identity, what you're capable of, and quite simple things about what really matters in painting come to the fore. He has an imagination for design, a "less is more" approach. Simple esthetic qualities are crucial, and clears away the fog for me.²⁰

Also in 1977, Greenberg was asked by Duncan Macmillan, curator of the Fruitmarket Gallery in Edinburgh, to write a catalogue introduction for the exhibition *Four Abstract Painters* (November–December 1977), that is, Douglas Abercrombie, Alan Gouk, John McLean and Fred Pollock.²¹ In a preface, Macmillan made the dubious claim that Greenberg had answered the criticism that the work of such painters was "formalist" or "merely visual" by arguing that "visual art should be visual first of all." In a brief introduction, Greenberg cited the artists' debt to North American, color-field painting but he also maintained that they were not merely slaves to this influence and had developed beyond it. Although Scottish, they had managed to do this while "exiled" in a

foreign city, that is, London. His explanation was a nationalistic one: Scotsmen possessed a mysterious ingredient called "character." (Gouk, in fact, had been born in Ireland and his mother was of Irish ancestry.) Greenberg had nothing specific to say about any of the paintings on display—because he had not seen most of them (his limited acquaintance with the artists' work was based on his earlier visits to Stockwell Depot)—however, he did express admiration for the artists' "distinctive resoluteness" and "the level of their quality" (but without specifying what level that was). Reading the catalogue today, one gains the impression that the formalist critic had been imported from America in order to bolster formalist painters who felt embattled and neglected in the South of England because, during the second half of the 1970s, several British critics were demanding and supporting art with a social purpose.

Gouk read the introduction in advance of publication and was so dissatisfied with its superficiality, inaccuracies and patronizing tone that he wrote to Greenberg in America sending him photographs of paintings and more background information in the hope of a revision. Greenberg replied that it was too late to change the text and that, in any case, catalogue introductions were not particularly important. This letter reveals the imperious way he treated artists and his preference for those who accepted his authority in silence. He wrote to Gouk: "I say please shut up."

Accompanied by Caro, Greenberg arrived in Edinburgh to give a talk at the David Hume Tower. Gouk recalls a poorly delivered, impromptu statement the gist of which was that New York was the world's art center and that Scottish curators should acquire more works by the American artists who lived there. To Gouk's surprise, the critic said almost nothing about the four abstract artists whose show he had, in fact, yet to see. At the social events associated with the talk and exhibition, Gouk tried to speak to Greenberg but was kept at bay by the critic's entourage and his latest "girlfriend," the Irishwoman Nuala O'Faolain.²² The latter seemed to be acting as a chaperone-cum-bodyguard.

Another clash between Greenberg and Gouk occurred in 1983 because of observations the painter made about the critic in articles about Heron's work published in *Artscribe* the previous year.²³ Gouk had accused Greenberg of inaccuracies and plagiarism. A critical exchange of letters followed.²⁴ This was to be Gouk's last contact with Greenberg. In 1998, recalling their encounters, Gouk claimed that he had never managed to establish a friendly, personal relationship with the American critic and that during the 1970s he (Gouk) had been trying to emancipate himself from Greenberg's influence and the impact of American painting because he wanted to be original rather than derivative. Therefore, despite his continued respect for Greenberg's achievements, Gouk's feelings towards him are ambiguous.

Contesting Greenberg's Ideas during the 1970s and 1980s

For younger, theoretically-minded, British artists such as Victor Burgin, John Stezaker, and the Art & Language group, who became dissatisfied with the degree-zero character of the American-dominated movement Minimalism—which seemed to be the logical consequence of Greenberg's reductionism—battling against Greenberg's ideas was a recurrent feature of life in the early '70s. (Rubinfeld describes the 1970s as an era of "Clebashing.") Greenberg's judgments and theories needed to be countered and overthrown in order to make way for Conceptual art and for art with sociopolitical content and functions. (One cannot imagine Greenberg having anything positive to say about the Feminist art and community murals that were produced during the 1970s.) Eventually, because of this struggle, Greenberg's influence on British artists and art students waned, but his ideas and writings continued to be chewed over in the realm of higher education. Indeed, he is still discussed in art history courses about art criticism and modernism.

During the 1970s, the discipline of art history in Europe and North America underwent a radical overhaul. Art appreciation and connoisseurship were challenged by feminism, materialist explanations of economic determinants and a stress on social and political history. Professor T.J. Clark, an ex-Situationist and expert on Courbet and Manet, was the British art historian most closely associated with the emergence of the latter. Eventually, Clark left the University of Leeds to teach in the United States. In March 1981, Clark delivered a conference paper at the University of British Columbia, Vancouver, exploring the differences between his position and that of 'comrade' Greenberg.²⁵ Greenberg was present and participated in the discussion that followed. Rubinfeld reports: "When he [Clark] had finished, Clem stood to clarify a point, a position Clark had wrongly attributed to him. Despite the years of debauchery [i.e. drink, drugs and womanizing], he remained a formidable presence."²⁶ The argument between the two men was about the question of modernist art's autonomy: what links (if any) were there between such art and morality/politics/society? Greenberg insisted that esthetic experience took place in a realm of its own and that esthetic value was an ultimate value. Exasperated, Clark was eventually driven to remark: "unfortunately...you have become a spokesman for a kind of devastating artistic self-satisfaction and laziness." Despite this harsh judgment, Greenberg ended by saying that he appreciated Clark's paper and felt complimented by it. Clearly, he was flattered by the close attention he was receiving from a new generation of scholars.

Greenberg was considered so important by British artists and art historians employed by the Open University (OU)—some of whom were members of Art & Language—that he was featured in the OU's distance-learning course "Modern Art and Modernism" (1983), which began with Manet and ended with Pollock. Four of Greenberg's essays, including "Modernist Painting," were reprinted in the course's set book.²⁷ Furthermore, Clark interviewed

Greenberg for two OU television programmes. One concerned Pollock and the other art criticism. Although more theoretically-minded and historically-informed than most art critics, Greenberg had been for many years a journalist/reviewer. His non-academic, pragmatic approach to new art—his reliance on his eye, his taste, and his strong faith in the correctness of his critical judgments—meant that the television “interview” with Clark about art criticism provided little illumination. Throughout the exchange, Greenberg chain-smoked and sipped gin or vodka while Clark tormented him with theoretical and over-complicated questions. Irritated by Clark’s verbosity, Greenberg was finally driven to exclaim: “Oh, you young ones!” As an ex-editor of several magazines, his advice was: “cut, cut, cut.” The interview was a confused collision between two very different individuals and two incompatible systems of thought and approaches to the critical understanding of art. To viewers in Britain, it was clear that Greenberg was now a historical monument whose influence over British art and artists had finally evaporated.

Notes

- 1 James Faure Walker, “Clement Greenberg” (interview), *Artscribe*, No. 10 (January 1978): 15-21.
- 2 Florence Rubenfeld. *Clement Greenberg: A Life* (New York: Scribner, 1998). This is a fascinating and detailed account but, aside from mentions of Caro and Alloway, there is little about Greenberg’s relations with the British.
- 3 For Greenberg’s writings up until the late 1960s see: John O’Brian (ed.), *Clement Greenberg: The Collected Essays and Criticism*, 4 Vols (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986-93).
- 4 P. Fuller, “An interview with Anthony Caro” (1978), *Beyond the Crisis in Art*, (London: Writers & Readers, 1980), 197.
- 5 Linda Saunders, ed., “Clement Greenberg with Peter Fuller,” *Modern Painters*, Vol. 4, No. 4 (Winter 1991), 25.
- 6 Fuller, “An interview with Anthony Caro,” 198.
- 7 C. Greenberg, “Anthony Caro” (1965), in *Anthony Caro* by R. Whelan and others (Harmondsworth, Middx: Penguin Books, 1974), 88.
- 8 P. Fuller, “The Visual Arts,” in *Modern Britain: The Cambridge Cultural History of Britain: Vol 9 Modern Britain*, ed. Boris Ford (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 139.
- 9 T. Atkinson, “Rudely Prevailed Upon,” *Mekons United* (Lakeland, Florida: Polk Museum of Art and Touch and Go Records, Inc (Chicago: Quarterstick Records/London: Ellipsis, 1996), 39.
- 10 I am grateful to Professor Bernard Cohen of the Slade School of Art for granting me an interview during March 1998.
- 11 C. Greenberg, “Poetry of Vision,” *Artforum* Vol. 6 (April 1968), reprinted in *Clement Greenberg: Collected Essays*, Vol. 4, 282-88.
- 12 Peter Davies, “Notes on the St. Ives School” (Interview with Frost and others), *Art Monthly*, No. 48 (July-August 1981), 7.

- 13 For more on Latham see: John A. Walker, *John Latham—the Incidental Person—His Art and Ideas* (London: Middlesex University Press, 1995).
- 14 A. Solomon, "The Green Mountain Boys," *Vogue* (1966), reprinted in *The Green Mountain Boys: Caro, Feeley, Noland and Olitski in the 1960s* (New York: André Emmerich Gallery, 1998), 6-page leaflet.
- 15 C. Greenberg, "Rosc '71," *Art International* Vol. 16, No. 2 (20 February 1972): 12-17.
- 16 A. Gouk, "Stockwell: A Viewpoint on the Paintings," *Artscribe* No. 20 (November 1979): 16-18. See also: Terence Maloon, "Painting and Sculpture at the Stockwell Depot," *Artscribe* No. 9 (November 1977), 44-5.
- 17 I am grateful to Alan Gouk for an interview given in April 1998 about his various contacts with Greenberg.
- 18 James Faure Walker, "Clement Greenberg" (interview), 15-21.
- 19 "Alan Gouk, Richard James, John McLean, Fred Pollock in conversation with Ben Jones," *Artscribe* No. 5 (February 1977): 10.
- 20 *Ibid.*, 11.
- 21 D. Macmillan and C. Greenberg, *Four Abstract Painters* (Edinburgh: Fruit Market Gallery/Scottish Arts Council, 1977).
- 22 N. O'Faolain's affair with Greenberg is described in her autobiography *Are You Somebody? The Life and Times of Nuala O'Faolain* (London: Sceptre, 1997).
- 23 See: A. Gouk, "Patrick Heron, I," *Artscribe* No.34 (March 1982), 40-57. "Patrick Heron, II," *Artscribe* No. 35 (June 1982): 32-43.
- 24 Greenberg's letter was published in *Artscribe* No. 41 (June 1983): 67 and Gouk's reply in *Artscribe* No. 43 (October 1983): 61-2.
- 25 T.J. Clark, "More on the Differences between Comrade Greenberg and Ourselves," *Modernism and Modernity: The Vancouver Conference Papers*, eds B. Buchloh, S. Guilbaut and D. Solkin, (Halifax, Nova Scotia: Press of the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, 1983), 169-93. Greenberg delivered a short paper entitled "To Cope with Decadence," 161-68.
- 26 Rubinfeld, *Clement Greenberg: A Life*, 305.
- 27 Francis Francina and Charles Harrison, eds, *Modern Art and Modernism: A Critical Anthology* (London: Harper & Row, 1982).

CRAFTS AND FINE ART: AN ARGUMENT IN FAVOR OF BOUNDARIES

HOWARD RISATTI

In many ways "The New Ceramic Presence," an article written in 1961 by Rose Slivka for *Craft Horizon*, anticipated the debates between Craft and Fine Arts that have ensued over the last three decades. Attempting to relate what she identifies as a "new ceramic presence" to modern industrial culture and to the new trends occurring in contemporary painting, Slivka argues that "the painter-potter avoids immediate functional association...and so, the value of use becomes a secondary or even arbitrary attribute." And to the inevitable question that this position implies (i.e., "Is it craft?"), Slivka replies that it is indeed craft unless "all links with the idea of function have been severed, [then] it leaves the field of craft."¹

Slivka's article seems to have come at the beginning of a wider debate about the status of Craft *vis-à-vis* Fine Art. This debate was spurred on, to some extent, by the astronomically high prices that Fine Art, but especially painting, was commanding at auction in the 1970s and 80s, a phenomenon that seems to have temporarily peaked in the late 1980s with the sale of works like Jasper Johns' *Out the Window* and *False Start*. According to Christin Mam'ya, *Out the Window*, which had sold for \$2,250 in 1960, fetched \$3.63 million in 1986 at a Sotheby's auction; just two years later, *False Start* sold at Sotheby's for \$15.5 million. This was the highest price paid for a work of contemporary art. However, as impressive as these prices are, they were more than eclipsed by the price for Van Gogh's *Iris*; when the bidding ended at Sotheby's New York auction on that fateful day in the fall of 1987, the final price was a staggering \$49 million.² Twelve years later even this record was shattered when Van Gogh's *Portrait of the Artist Without a Beard* (1889) sold at Christie's November 1998 auction for \$71.5 million.

Clearly the market success of Fine Art is related to the state of the economy. However, it is not just the booming economy of the "go-go" eighties and the "new technology" of the nineties that explain such prices. The high prestige in which Fine Art is held generally within the society is also a factor. In no small part this prestige can be linked to the tradition of critical discourse

surrounding modern and contemporary Fine Art that has been appearing in newspapers, journals, and magazines for well over a century. Moreover, this critical discourse is based on an even longer tradition of aesthetic theory that began with the ancient Greeks and was revived in the 18th century with philosophers like Baumgarten, Burke, and Kant, among others. What this theoretical and critical discourse has done is provide an intellectual framework within which to ground Fine Art, to transform it, as it were, from a mere object of trade or hand work into a conceptual/intellectual activity.

By contrast, the field of Craft has been woefully lacking in similar critical and theoretical support. For the most part, Craft writing is devoted to practical issues related to the problems of making, to discussions of materials and techniques. This lack of a critical and theoretical framework within which to ground the work helps explain in large part its lack of prestige (aesthetically and otherwise) and, consequently, the low regard given to contemporary Craft in the marketplace. Considering this, Slivka's article can be viewed as an early attempt to remedy this situation, to cast Craft activity in a new light. Unfortunately, in its general tone it seems to suggest this can best be achieved by ensconcing Craft within the already-existing critical and theoretical discussion surrounding Fine Art.

Later responses to the low prestige and poor market value of Craft have echoed this by claiming there is little or no difference between Craft and Fine Art; therefore, there should be no distinction, no separation between the two fields. Such claims were made mostly by people in the Craft field rather than by Fine Artists. As recently as August 1999, Paula Owen, director of the Southwest School of Art and Craft in San Antonio, curated an exhibition titled "Abstract Craft." In the exhibition brochure she writes that "the artists and objects in this exhibition argue...against fixed definitions or separate categories of art and craft." Having stated this, she goes on to postulate a specifically Craft sensibility, something that supports rather than denies a separation between the two fields.³

It seems that what writers like Owen are actually calling for is aesthetic parity between Craft and Fine Art; however desirable aesthetic parity, framing the issue around the elimination of Craft and Fine Art as separate categories is a questionable strategy. At the practical level, it faces several problems including established habits of thinking about the two fields that make this "no separation" argument difficult to accept. For one thing, viewers often simply identify Craft with craft media. An object made in a traditional Craft medium (e.g., clay/ceramic) is automatically universally regarded as a Craft object. Though such a conclusion is unfounded simply from a historical perspective—sculpture, for example, has been made of clay/ceramic as least since Etruscan times—habits of thought are difficult to overcome. If clay/

ceramic objects aren't readily able to cross over into the realm of sculpture/ Fine Art, even given the historical precedents, works in uniquely Craft media such as glass and fiber have even less of a chance of resisting being automatically relegated to the category of Craft.

The question of media acceptance aside, there is a more significant issue involved in establishing parity between the two fields based on the "no separation" argument. This has to do with the identity of Craft. What, from a theoretical/conceptual point of view, is Craft? Does Craft share the same theoretical/conceptual basis as Fine Art? In short, are Craft and Fine Art, in some real and meaningful way, actually the same? Without knowing the answers to these questions how can one relate Craft to Fine Art, much less make the claim that they should be viewed as members of the same class of objects? While these questions have been left unaddressed by the "no separation" argument, the claims of its adherents against separate categories for Craft and Fine Art have gained a degree of indirect support in recent years from the Postmodern belief in the relativism of artistic, social, and cultural values. Stemming from Nietzsche's idea that "truth" is not "something that exists and is to be found and discovered but something to be created," the New Relativism, as we shall call it, had become the basis of the deconstructive method of contemporary French philosopher Jacques Derrida and has been widely accepted in American academic circles from which it has spread into society at large.⁴ In practice it has encouraged a leveling or blurring of the distinctions between separate genre or disciplines, particularly between philosophy, literature, and sociology. German philosopher Jurgen Habermas who, writing in response to Derrida and his adherents and in defense of separate categories of literature and philosophy, notes that in any text "There can only be talk about 'contradiction' in the light of consistency requirements, which lose their authority or are at least subordinated to other demands...if logic loses its conventional primacy over rhetoric. Then the deconstructionist can deal with the works of philosophy as works of literature and adapt the critique of metaphysics to the standards of literary criticism." Habermas goes on to write that "As soon as we take the *literary* character of Nietzsche's writings seriously, the suitability of his critique of reason has to be assessed in accord with the standards of rhetorical success and not those of logical consistency."⁵

Habermas' protestations aside, in many quarters rhetoric is indeed triumphing over logic, a triumph that is affecting the separation between art and politics and, by extension, Craft and Fine Art. As a result, the discipline of art history is often treated as sociology or political science and the art work as an extension of material culture. When coupled with the rise of mixed media and new media in visual art (e.g., video, performance, computer art, installation), the New Relativism now lends a degree of theoretical support for the dissolving of boundaries between formerly separate artistic disciplines like

Craft/Fine Art, Sculpture/Theater, Sculpture/Video. Moreover, the New Relativism is used to support the rejection of qualitative distinctions in the arts and in the wider sphere of human endeavors as well.⁶

One reason the New relativism has had an impact on the visual arts is that, beginning in the 1970s, the rise of non-traditional artistic media paralleled a growing concern in the art world for social and political issues (Vietnam, Civil Rights, feminism, the environment). Together these elements produced a political and ideological reaction to the then dominant critical theory in America, formalism, especially the formalism of Clement Greenberg. Greenberg's formalism emphasized traditional media and the separation of disciplines, including art from politics. It required viewing each work of art as though a discrete, autonomous object whose aesthetic/artistic quality was to be expressed through the manipulation of the object's particular medium, not something extrinsic to the object.⁷ Because of this, formalism seemed indifferent to and incapable of addressing the pressing political and social issues of the day; it quickly became a lightning rod for political and artistic dissent.⁸

The importance of this anti-formalist reaction for the "no separation" argument in Craft is that it undermined formalism's insistence on boundaries, formalism's belief that in any enterprise of art making, whether it be poetry or painting, Craft or sculpture, both formal and conceptual boundaries or limits must exist for the artist and be understood by the viewer. Thus the unfortunate effect of discrediting formalism and the rise of the New Relativism, is that the question of how Craft and Fine Art relate as objects and as activities has not been addressed. It is in this sense that the "no separation" argument remains unsatisfactory for both Craft and Fine Art. For, without explanation, the argument implies that, on the one hand, either it is unnecessary to understand formally and conceptually exactly what is referred to when speaking of Craft and Fine Art. Or, on the other hand, that formally and conceptually Craft and Fine Art are exactly the same enterprises.

As to the first point (i.e., that understanding is not necessary), I believe it a gravely mistaken notion because understanding and, hence recognition, is essential to identity and meaning. As André Breton wrote in 1928 in *Le Surréalisme et la peinture*, "To see or hear is nothing. To recognize (or not recognize) is everything." This is something that the German hermeneutical philosopher Hans-Georg Gadamer has likewise argued. As art critic Klaus Davi notes in an interview, Gadamer's concept of games and game-playing leads to a reevaluation of the concept of mimesis.⁹ For Gadamer, mimesis involves much more than simply representation, realism, or naturalism in the Aristotelian sense of unities of time, space, and action. In Gadamer's concept the term "mimesis" has to do with how "imitation is grounded within a knowledge of cognitive meaning." In other words, the concept of "mimesis implies the concept of recognition." With a work of art, some element is "recognized

as something' [only] when its essence has been grasped."¹⁰

Gadamer's concept of mimesis is instructive because it remains at the core of how we go beyond simply looking at things we encounter in the world to seeing/perceiving, to recognizing, and then to comprehending them; it matters little whether the things we encounter are visual or literary. Furthermore, comprehension, in the sense of understanding and meaning, always occurs within limits or boundaries. Gadamer uses the notion of "games" as an example. In his sense, games refer to any structured set or system of conventions or rules that the artist or writer manipulates and the viewer or reader recognizes. Literary critic Jonathan Culler notes that a poem "has meaning only with respect to a system of conventions which the reader has assimilated." Without these conventions, a poem may seem no more than an inept attempt at prose. Culler also notes that "to speak of the structure of a sentence is necessarily to imply an internalized grammar that gives it that structure."¹¹

The idea that meaning is necessarily grounded within a system of "conventions" or rules (what Greenberg identified as each discipline's particular medium) pertains equally to the conceptual aspects of things as well as to their perceptual (formal) aspects—what is often characterized by the polarities "form and content" and "theory and praxis." Such bi-polar separations, however, misconstrue the interdependent nature of this relationship. One of the clearest examples that shows this interdependence is the way words function as vehicles of communication. A word is a word—i.e., a communicable sign as opposed to a nonsense sound, a scribble, or gibberish—because it refers to something outside itself, something that is known or "recognizable" to us. This something acts to ground the word. That is to say, we recognize a word as a word only because we know what it means (i.e., we know to what it refers). The word "t-r-e-e" (whether spoken or written) refers to a specific kind of plant and our recognition of this makes it a word (and a formally functioning sign) as opposed to nonsense like "t-r-e-j" which doesn't seem to refer to anything and looks like a typo. Because of this, we must conclude that words and all other signs as well are neither simple nor unitary, but are made of two parts: a concept and some formal element that calls attention to that concept. The word "t-r-e-e" is certainly not a plant, but it is a formal arrangement that calls attention to a plant. In linguistic theory, this formal part of the sign, that which directs attention to the actual thing, is called the signifier. The actual tree and all other trees that make up our concept of what a tree is, are the signified.

For a sign to function, the formal element (the signifier) must be linked to a conceptual element (the signified). Or in Gadamer's words, the formal element must be linked to something we recognize and understand so that "its essence" can be grasped. This is why words in a language foreign to us are incomprehensible; because we don't recognize them they seem like gibberish even though they obviously make perfect sense to speakers of that language.

When a connection cannot be made between the formal element (a word or word sound, for example) and its concept (the idea of tree, for example), the word or word-sound cannot function as a sign; it simply cannot communicate, an essence cannot be grasped. From this we can conclude that knowing and understanding /comprehending (as opposed to simply looking or hearing) are not only intimately related formally and conceptually, they are co-dependent and are essential to any system of communication.¹²

The importance of this for our discussion of Craft and Fine Art is that recognition and comprehension requires an understanding of something at an essential, elemental level, at a level that underpins the signifier and signified relationship. Only from understanding at such a level can meaning itself be given to form—form as the embodiment of a concept—by a maker. And likewise, only through understanding at such a deep level can form—as a vehicle of meaning—be understood by a viewer. In all visual Art, just as in written and spoken language, the very possibility of meaning itself is dependent upon knowing and understanding the conceptual ground (the signified) upon which the formal object (the signifier) rests. In this sense, to recognize the nature of *something* (especially *something* that is man-made) is to understand and know the thing itself.

This applies equally to Fine Art as to Craft. If one had no idea what a picture or a sculpture is, how could an artist make such a thing and how would a viewer respond to it? This may seem a foolish question, but the history of Modern art suggests otherwise for it is exactly the problem confronted by people when they saw Duchamp's 1917 *Fountain*, that simple store-bought urinal that he submitted as a work of sculpture to the Independents Exhibition in New York. Though there was to be no jurying for this exhibition, the panel of artist organizers rejected the piece, even despite the heated protestations of the artist and others about the "no jury policy." The artist organizers saw no conflict between their decision and the "no jury policy" they had established from the outset because the submission (a type of container/utilitarian object) did not possess enough of the salient, characteristic features that would have allowed it to be recognized and understood generally as a work of Fine Art and specifically *as* sculpture. Simply put, in the absence of such features it simply could not be sculpture; it did not fit the concept "sculpture" as generally understood at the time.

As I hope this example indicates, understanding the formal and conceptual basis of things is essential to recognition. Any level of understanding/comprehension of Craft and Fine Art in the sense in which we are speaking (even of urinals and sculptures) can only come about from knowing Craft and Fine Art as formal and conceptual enterprises.

As to the second assumption implied in the "no separation" argument (i.e., that Craft and Fine Art are exactly the same), this can only be demon-

strated by carefully examining Craft, both internally as a practice and externally in relation to Fine Art. And when this is done, I suspect rather than “no separation,” critical and theoretical differences between the two will emerge, differences based on essential and fundamental aspects inherent to Craft as an activity and as a unique class of material objects. The “no separation” argument, in other words, will be shown to not be tenable because the “nature” of those things we call Craft are based on a different set of “conventions” or rules than Fine Art. If Craft and Fine Art are to be seen and understood as the same, our traditional understanding of one or the other will have to change dramatically—either one or both will have to embrace a different set of “conventions” or rules. On the surface this may appear to be happening. Current demands for “no separation” between the two fields is partly justified by the fact that some Craft practitioners are now making sculpture of traditional Craft materials. This, however, needs to be recognized for what it is, the making of sculpture. Such activities are no longer Craft activities. While there is nothing inherently wrong with this shift to sculpture on the part of some traditional Crafts’ people, there is a great danger in pretending such activities are still genuine Craft activities. For to do so is to undermine Craft’s identity to such an extent that Craft simply disappears; it forces Craft to give up its identity for that of sculpture.

Thus the caution that I want to raise is that claiming there is “no separation” between Craft and Fine Art actually works to the detriment of Craft; it does not help it. This is why it makes more sense to speak directly to the heart of the “no separation” argument—the call for no separation between Craft and Fine Art is really an attempt to gain parity for Craft. However, it is mistaken to presume this can be done by sharing in Fine Art’s prestige through a sharing in Fine Art’s theoretical and critical aura. Developing an argument supporting parity between the two fields based on the unique and inherent values of Craft itself is the best way to preserve the identity of Craft; it is also a way of revealing the theoretical and critical ground upon which metaphorical values of Craft can be constructed and understood without succumbing to the aura of Fine Art. Regardless of how Craft versus Fine Art discussions stir debate, rather than argue for or against one in favor of the other, that one is somehow better than the other, if it is more important, because constructive, to show how each has a nature of its own, a nature that can and should be respected. In a very real sense, this would shift the Craft-Fine Art discussion to a higher plane. Recognizing Craft and Fine Art as different enterprises means discussion can focus on the importance of both in the development and expression of human values.

And finally, in these politically contested times of multi-culturalism, nationalism, and religious fundamentalism, times in which all values (even artistic values) are said to be relative, to be cultural constructions and there-

fore expressions of power, domination, and greed, such a discussion ultimately would show how Craft is an expression of human values and human achievement that transcend temporal and spatial boundaries. Rather than existing in the realm of the purely subjective, a close study of Craft objects will show they stake claim to a realm of the real, a realm in which all peoples can and have shared since the dawn of human time. In approaching the Craft/Fine Art debate in this way it will become evident that Craft offers a meaningful example of our shared heritage as human beings, a shared heritage that out-weighs all of our superficial differences.

Notes

- 1 Rose Slivka. "The New Ceramic Presence," *Craft Horizons* (May 1961): 36.
- 2 For more on Johns' *Out the Window* see Christin J. Mamiya, *Pop Art and Consumer Culture: American Super Market* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1992), 7-13. For the auction record for *False Start* see *The Art Sales Index*, 21st Edition, Vol. I (Weybridge, Surrey, England: Art Sales Index Ltd., 1988), 1069; for Van Gogh's *Iris*es see *The Art Sales Index 1987/88*, 20th Edition, vol. I, 720. Auction prices have once again begun to escalate after the "crash" of the late 80s. For more details on Van Gogh's *Portrait of the Artist Without a Beard*, see *Art In America* (January 1999): 41.
- 3 Paula Owen. "Abstract Craft: The Non-Objective Object," essay for the exhibition of the same name, Southwest School of Art and Craft, San Antonio, TX, 24 June -21 August, 1999.
- 4 Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, book 3, paragraph 552, quoted in Rudolf Arnheim. *To The Rescue of Art: Twenty-Six Essays* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 6. For Nietzsche and Derrida, see Ernst Behler, *Confrontations: Derrida, Heidegger, Nietzsche*, translated by Steven Taubeneck (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1991).
- 5 See Habermas, "Excursus on Leveling the genre Distinction between Philosophy and Literature," *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity: Twelve Lectures*, translated by Frederick Lawrence (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1987), 188.
- 6 For a discussion of the rejection of qualitative distinctions in art see Michael Brenson. "Is Quality an Idea Whose Time Has Gone?" *New York Times*, 22 July 1990. Arts & Leisure, 1 and 27. For more on this and the New Relativism see Risatti, "Part Six: Marginality and the Other," *Postmodern Perspectives: Issues in Contemporary Art*, 2nd edition (Upper Saddle River, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1998), 265ff. Also see Risatti, "Culturally Correct Criteria?: Questioning the Mono-Multi-Culture Dichotomy," *New Art Examiner* (October 1991): 25-28 and "The Subject Matters: Politics, Empathy, and the Visual Experience," *New Art Examiner* (April 1994): 30-35.
- 7 In "Modernist Painting," Greenberg's famous essay of 1963, he refers to Kant as he tries to build a careful argument about what he believed modernist painting to be, both as a formal and a conceptual enterprise. "The essence of Modernism lies," wrote Greenberg, "in the use of the characteristic methods of a discipline to criticize the discipline itself—not in order to subvert it, but to entrench it

- more firmly in its area of competence." See Greenberg's "Modernist Painting," reprinted in Howard Risatti, *Postmodern Perspectives: Issues In Contemporary Art*, revised 2nd edition (Upper Saddle River, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1997), 12. For an example of Kant's method, see his distinction between qualitative and quantitative in Immanuel Kant, *Analytic of the Beautiful*, translated by Walter Cerf (New York: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, Inc., 1963), 33 and note r, 109.
- 8 For more on the reaction to Greenberg and his formalism see Howard Risatti, "Art Press Review: Clement Greenberg," *New Art Examiner* (January 1988): 17-18.
 - 9 See Klaus Davi, "Hans-Georg Gadamer: A Conversation in Hermeneutics and the Situation of Art," *Flash Art*, No.136 (October 1987): 78. Games and game-playing does not refer solely to games in the usual sense, but to any set or system of conventions such as language, literature, sculpture, painting, legal system, etc.
 - 10 See Klaus Davi, "Hans-Georg Gadamer: A Conversation in Hermeneutics and the Situation of Art," *Flash Art*, No.136 (October 1987): 78.
 - 11 See Culler quoted in Jane P. Tompkins, editor, *Reader Response Criticism: From Formalism to Post-Structuralism* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980), xvii-xviii. George Kubler makes a similar point in relation to visual art when he argues that, "Every meaning requires a support, or vehicle, or a holder. These [supports] are the bearers of meaning, and without them no meaning would cross from me to you, or from you to me, or indeed from any part of nature to any other part." See his *The Shape of Time: Remarks on the History of Things* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1962), vii.
 - 12 For more on this material concerning signs, see Ferdinand de Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics*, translated by Wade Baskin (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1966), 66-67 and 114.

TWO VERSIONS OF MARISOL, OVERLAPPING AND UNDERLAPPING

DONALD KUSPIT

L

Marisol's figurative sculpture is witty, fantastic, and above all child-like and uncanny, as I hope to show. She takes a child's eye view of adults, at once respectful and ridiculing. She takes ironical revenge on them—for their power and authority, especially over children—by treating them like children. She shows their falseness, and suggests the peculiar futility and silliness of their existence—their artificiality, banality, triviality. Even more telling, she reduces them to children's toys—her toys, playthings over which she has power—completely getting the better of them. And, adding insult to injury, she takes children with the seriousness usually reserved for adults. Indeed, she even makes infants larger than most adults—literally larger than life—as her six foot high *Baby Girl* and seven-foot high *Baby Boy*, both 1964, indicate. Her work is a child's conspiracy against the world of adults. Marisol in effect refuses to grow up, even though she does grow up to be an artist—her nominally adult identity, as it were. If, as has been argued, children's art is an important model for modern art—if, as Kandinsky wrote, “children are the greatest imaginers of all time,”¹ so that artists must keep the imaginative child in them alive to be truly creative—then Marisol's toy-like sculptures are among the most imaginative examples of modern art.

Marisol has been “assigned a place in Pop art,” but, as Lawrence Alloway points out, “her art seems to belong elsewhere.”² He calls her “a sophisticated naive sculptor whose figures possess a folkloric decoration and fantasy that is quite unlike Pop art,” but he does not tell us what fantasy nor does he explain the import of “folkloric decoration,” nor, for that matter, the paradox of her sophisticated naivete. He does note, importantly, “the habitual self-references in her work”—its “content is drawn from [her] own personality”—and its “compulsive” character. Sam Hunter and John Jacobus agree. Calling her sculpture “brilliant theater,” they note that she “explicitly makes use of autobiography.”³ Indeed, “self-portraits and fantasies enter freely into the work and are a major feature of it,” confirming what Alloway calls its

"introspection." "The artist is her own heroine," they declare, suggesting that her art is ultimately about herself even when she portrays other figures. They also state that she is "fiercely alienated," appearing "in arbitrary or hallucinated images strangely dissociated from feeling."² I hope to make clear just how alienated—how looking at adults from a child's perspective is a form of alienation, indeed, alienation too deep to overcome—but also to show that her images, however apparently arbitrary, are charged with uncanny feeling, just because they are hallucinatory. Marisol's art, then, has a psychological underpinning, as she herself suggests when she describes it as "a search for identity," as Nancy Grove remarks.³

If Dostoyevsky is correct in asserting that the portraitist "seeks the moment when the model looks most like himself,"⁴ then Marisol doesn't wait for the moment, but inscribes—indeed, inserts—herself into the model, so that it in effect becomes herself.⁵ Marisol's portraits are unembarrassedly narcissistic: she always finds her identity in others, even complete strangers. Even more, strangers become her—she turns them into children like her (which also confirms their strangeness, that is, her estrangement from them). "Je suis un autre," Rimbaud famously remarked, and Marisol agrees. As Heinz Kohut says, there is "a need for...selfobject relationships...throughout the life span...Selfobject needs...mature...as the individual matures psychologically."⁶ One of the many questions that haunt Marisol's child-obsessed art is whether she ever does mature psychologically, or whether she remains bogged down in "archaic [selfobject] transferences of merger, twinship, mirroring, and idealization," as her art suggests. And yet she is mature enough to be a serious artist.

Art is clearly the privileged means to the end of basic selfhood for Marisol, rather than an abstract end in itself. It helps her find an identity of her own, indeed, as I will argue, gives her the only identity she has besides that of the child, and in fact is a way of making her identity as a child—her empathic identification with children—explicit. The question is why she is so interested in children, and feels the need to reduce the adult world to childlike absurdity. I want to suggest—on the evidence of her art—that what she is in search of is what Harry Stack Sullivan calls "a self-system for the avoiding or minimizing of anxiety or for the concealing of anxiety," and especially "to keep one safe from any possibility of passing into that extremely unpleasant state of living which can be called the uncanny emotions."⁷ I think that the bizarre playfulness of Marisol's art—its subtly nightmarish theatrical atmosphere, altogether uncanny effect of make-believe—is her defense against her "feeling of having been in the presence of something dreadful...which is the result of the most disastrous contacts with sudden and violent anxiety in the early years."⁸ It is a defense that unwittingly discloses the violent anxiety it defends against. Indeed, the violence with which she treats her figures—they are not simply

dolls or mannequins, but subtly grotesque if also subliminally tragic ones, to the extent of being absurd caricatures of human beings—reveals her own anxious violence. Indeed, the anxiety which did violence to her sense of self—which all but destroyed her, and certainly inhibited her sense of self—becomes the violence she perpetrates on other selves, under the guise of comedy. It is an anxious violence caused by adults, so adults—surrogate parental figures—must pay the price.

Again and again we see Marisol setting up a contrast—a demonstration of irreconcilability—between children and adults—subliminally anxious children and smugly complacent, implicitly indifferent adults. A case in point is the sad, shadowy face—the face of inhibition, of enforced control, masking the anxiety aroused by the control, and expressing the self-defeat imposed by it—of the little girl in *Women and Dog*, 1964. Her gloom and seriousness—the muteness that signals her depression—stands in vivid contradiction to the luminous, mask-like faces—her face is radically expressive in comparison—of the frivolous adult women (one of them is no doubt her mother). The bright red lipstick they wear, and the stylized blackness of their eyebrows, make them look like silly fools in comparison to the sober girl, passively accompanying them but inwardly elsewhere. Her feelings clearly run deep compared to their shallowness and superficiality. Similarly, in *Mi Mama Y Yo*, 1968, the child Marisol's serious, unsmiling, somewhat closed face stands in stark contrast to her mother's placid outgoing smile. It hides her inner life, while the child Marisol's face reveals hers—reveals the deadening effect of her mother on her. She has in effect been what Freud called "soul murdered." To my mind, this courageous work epitomizes Marisol's sense of the injustice—emotional criminality—of the adult-child relationship. (All adults are implicitly parents to children, and must be treated as such by them.)

Marisol treats the introverted, reflective child, as she does all children, with the same seriousness and respect with which Velazquez regarded court dwarfs, while she shows her mother to be an absurdly pretentious if ingratiating person. Children are in fact dwarfs from an adult perspective, and the child Marisol, holding an umbrella to shelter her mother from the sun, is in effect a courtier or servant currying favor with her regal mother, a somewhat stiff, even rigidly formal presence, however grandly smiling (a gesture of *noblesse oblige*?).

The strength of her mother's presence must be emphasized: she in effect gives her mother balls (her two little hands, in her lap, symbolize them), without denying her femininity, as the curves of her abstract pink body indicate. Pink is of course the color baby girls wear, to distinguish them from baby boys, who wear blue, and dangerous curves are the attribute of seductive women. In fact, the sharp angle of her mother's rather matronly breast suggests her aggressive character. Like her massiveness, the forcefully projecting

angle, making her presence all the more "pointed," is a sign of her power, indeed, omnipotence, in little Marisol's eyes. In fact, on the basis of this work, I think it is safe to say that Marisol's ideal figure is androgynous, in the sense in which a child experiences its mother as androgynous (and thus doubly—consummately—powerful). That is, her mother is a phallic woman, and, as I will later suggest, so is the artist in Marisol's unconscious mind.

To return to *Women and Dog* for a moment, in order to drive home another point. To me, the dog in its box—a disturbing, uncanny image that cannot help but arouse deep anxiety, even terror—epitomizes Marisol's vision of the nightmarish emotional situation of children. They are forced to conform—to fit in a box made by adults—denying their natural spontaneity and liveliness. They are expected to remain absolutely still, seen but not speaking, like a dumb statue. Their organic reality is denied by the mechanical constraint to which they are subject. The geometrical box is a symbol of reason, but reason is applied in an irrational way. In Marisol's world, children are not even allowed to play freely. They must remain passively present, indicating their complete obedience—total submission to the will of parental adults. The dog is in effect another child, as suggested by the fact that its "skirt" is white like that of the little girl who flanks the women on their other side. The dog and child are clearly parallel, and small animals are symbols of children, according to Freud's *Interpretation of Dreams*. It is in effect incarcerated, as though in a straightjacket or procrustean bed or in the solitude of a prison cell or even in a coffin. It is in effect placed in solitary, as punishment for misbehaving, or perhaps simply for being its natural, vital, organic self. The little detail of the "dirty" dog in the perfectly white box conveys, with a startling economy of means, the deep suffering children endure as the price of growing up—the forced socialization that robs them of their identity. It is this childhood identity that Marisol struggles to recover through her art. It is all about liberating the dog from its box so that it can run free again—continue to be frisky, like her art. If this means taking revenge on adults by treating them as toys—which is a way of letting the mischievous child out of the box (the child made mischievous by being put in a box, which is where it lost its innocence, and had to become ingeniously malevolent to survive)—so be it. Ironically, by using in a destructive way the anxiety aroused by being forced into a constricting box—by turning her childhood anxiety against the adults who caused it, wreaking havoc on them—Marisol became a serious artist. Theatricalizing her destructive anxiety liberated her natural creativity and playfulness from the social straightjacket in which she grew up. Turning her anxiety to destructive advantage, she broke out of the box. Virtually all her works repeat this moment of liberation, even as they acknowledge her enslavement.

For Marisol, then, the way out of the box—or at least the way to manage the chronic anxiety caused by the social oppression (not just repres-

sion) the box represented—was to become an artist. But Marisol did not just want to be any artist, she wanted to be a unique artist, like Georgia O'Keeffe, Pablo Picasso, and Willem de Kooning, all of whom she portrayed (the former two in 1977, the latter in 1980). To be a unique artist—to make an art that is unmistakably one's own, like a signature that remains the same however many times and different ways one writes it—means to explore the labyrinth of one's subjectivity without becoming lost in it,⁹ and finally to triumphantly emerge from the labyrinth with a sublime sense of oneself, that is, with a new identity. One has survived the heights and depths of one's subjectivity with a strengthened sense of self. This is what O'Keeffe, Picasso, and De Kooning seemed to have accomplished: their art invokes their subjectivity, in all its dynamic complexity, and their individuality, in all its singularity. Their art and identity are in effect dialectically one, meaning that their art synthesizes their most disturbing, disintegrative feelings—chronic feelings, deeply rooted in their beings—giving them a compensatory sense of integrity, and with that self-certainty. So long as they continue to practice their art, they will never lose their sense of self, whatever the pressure of their feelings. In short, they identify themselves with their art in order to sustain their sense of self, which feeds back into their art by allowing them to creatively transform and embody their feelings, that is, master them by objectifying them in works of art. Their art may be autobiographical, as Picasso said, that is, it may encode their feelings and relationships, making their work a cryptic record of their experience, but unless they made art they would have no self capable of creating the record. It is a circular process: no art, no self, to make art that is autobiographically convincing, that is, instantly readably as the spontaneously true story of the emotional reality of the artist's life, however much the story is told through symbols and aesthetics that seem to hide as much as they reveal, creating a kind of peekaboo effect—much in evidence in Marisol's works.

O'Keeffe, Picasso, and De Kooning are Marisol's mature selfobjects, the artist heroes of her adulthood. They form a vivid contrast with her mother, the selfobject who apparently dominated and strictly controlled her in childhood. (However, Marisol's O'Keeffe has an emotional resemblance to her mother, at least in terms of the detachment and power with which Marisol invests her. And however differently they are rendered, they have a similar bulk—a massive physical presence, making them all the more awesome and intimidating. Marisol's attitude to O'Keeffe is implicitly that of a worshipful daughter to a phallic mother.) Portraying them, she assumes the mantle of the artist, following their lead toward a self-system that can afford emotional security. They become models of artistic independence as well as personal independence—catalysts of innovation as well as unprecedented selfhood. Like them, Marisol in effect re-invents herself in the process of re-inventing art. But perhaps the artist who has the most special place in her personal pantheon is

Magritte. If *Magritte I-V*, 1998 is any clue, he seems to be the artist with whom she most identifies, both as a person and artist.

Her male figures seem to have stepped out of his paintings. Three-dimensionalized, they become even more uncanny. Like many of Marisol's other figures, they stare at us with a terrifying, authoritative directness—an unflinching, confrontational gaze, that seems to penetrate to the core of our being, and finally to see right through us. Writing about Magritte's *Le Mois des vendages*, 1950, a painting with similar figures, Ellen Handler Spitz remarks that Magritte "conflates the aims of looking, of voyeurism, with those of exhibitionism...like the spectator of the picture, the bowler-hatted men, personae of the artist, are simultaneously seeing and being seen while remaining anonymous."¹⁰ For Spitz, they are full of infantile desire and, ironically, offer themselves to the spectator as objects of desire. Magritte has said that the objects in his paintings "represented the realization of the real, if unconscious, desire existing in most people,"¹¹ and Spitz now tells us that his figures, with their fixed gazes, also represent desire—very primitive desire. It is clearly narcissistic desire: Magritte's figures long to be mirrored in the spectator's eyes, so that they can be real to themselves. They are not interested in the spectator, except as the instrument of their self-love.

If, as Spitz states, Magritte's figures are personae of the artist, it is the artist's narcissism that Magritte depicts. Magritte's figures are not simply toys in an epistemological game—the gaze of the spectator and the work of art ironically meet, raising the question of the relationship of reality and illusion—but emotionally perverse. In more ways than one: Marisol's Magritte figures are phallic women—stiff, erect male presences (however drab, uptight, and "wooden") with real open umbrellas—female symbols. Magritte's figure, like Marisol's, is a clever combination of male and female attributes, modelled on the infant's vision of the omnipotent mother. Thus, appropriating Magritte's portrait of his psyche, Marisol implicitly acknowledges her own deep narcissism, and suggests that art is rooted in voyeurism and exhibitionism, which in turn are expressions of infantile narcissism.

Magritte, it should be noted, used his art not only to deal with his own narcissistic problems, but with such matters as his mother's suicide (which no doubt raises narcissistic problems)—a mother he remained obsessed with to the end of his career, as his recurrent images of an ominous female body suggest. But perhaps most importantly for Marisol he was a Surrealist, and her art has clear affinities with Surrealism. It is a typically Surrealist construction of incongruities, creating an uncanny effect—a bizarre "poetic object" in the best Surrealist tradition. Marcel Jean describes the "surrealist object" as "sumptuous, usual, plastically assimilated, organically attentive, potentially functioning,"¹² terms which apply to Marisol's "objects," however much their organic character is in conflict with their mechanical appearance. Indeed, some

of them, perhaps most conspicuously *John Wayne*, 1962-63, look like Rube Goldberg contraptions, not particularly convincing as machines or human beings. *Fishman*, 1973 is the exception that proves the rule, for it is carved rather than assembled, although the fishhead is added to the carved figure—so that it is not exactly an exception. The impish little Marisol—a nasty child?—that accompanies the adult *Fishman* is an equally absurd construction. His penis, it should be noted, is “fishy,” suggesting his androgynous character, as his “fishy” head does. He is a phallic mother figure in peekaboo disguise.

The very act of assembling ordinary objects, images, and materials, left relatively undisguised (“found”), into a figurative whole “poeticizes” them. The friction generated charges them with unconscious emotional meaning and charisma they would not otherwise have. Marisol’s figures are in fact composites of irreconcilable fragments, like those of Max Ernst and Salvador Dali. Seductive desire becomes decoratively manifest in Marisol’s figures, as the purple buttocks of one of *The Bathers*, 1961 and the colorful clothing of the women in *Women and Dog* suggest, but so does the violence of anxiety, by way of their fragmentation, indicating that they are on the verge of falling apart—being emotionally annihilated. No doubt the fragmentation cuts through the social facade of the figure to symbolize its “sexual desire,” as Jean says, but the same “poetic violence,” as he calls it, also conveys the violence that anxiety does to the self. Again and again the battle between desire and anxiety—passion and constraint—is played out in Marisol’s art, even in such works as the *Blackwood Delegation to Washington*, 1916, 1993, where the geometrically abstract headdresses—a sexual fetish as well as a symbol of authority—conflict with the ruggedly grim faces of the overcontrolled not to say self-constricted Native Americans. They have lost their capacity to smile at life, even as life surges in them, expressing itself through their ornaments.

The fact that Marisol’s sculptures can be read either as mechanical totalities or organic wholes brings us to their larger social import. They reflect a conflict between society and community, in Ferdinand’s Tönnies’s sense. Tönnies distinguishes between the organic character of the community, in which there is “intimate, private, and exclusive living together,” and society, which is the “mere coexistence of people independent of each other,” that is, a “mechanical aggregate” of indifferent people.¹³ He believes that society is a modern phenomenon, while community age-old—the original form of cooperative human togetherness, modelled on the family. Marisol’s family groups have an organic, communal relationship, but they also have a mechanical social look. The tensions between family members, particularly mother and daughter, also undermine communal intimacy. Can one say that Marisol’s interest in emotionally complex communal situations—her longing for communal intimacy, whatever its difficulties—derives from her Latin American heritage (Venezuelan), while her interest in social celebrities (famous artists included) re-

flects her cosmopolitanism (born in Paris, she lives in New York) The tension between the communal and societal that informs her art parallels the tension between archaic anxiety and search for authentic selfhood that also shapes it. Her *Last Supper*, 1984 is perhaps its most climactic statement: the family of apostles is about to be torn apart by the news that its center, Christ, will be betrayed. The hatred lying just below the surface is about to explode, replacing the love that was a fantasy, and that temporarily united the incompatible figures. We are a long way from *Madonna, Child, St. Anne and St. John*, 1978, the one unequivocally harmonious family group that Marisol seems to have depicted. God the Father's presence is implicit, but it is a family of phallic women with their children—the perfect dream family.

The conflict between social persona and private person—only the artist seems to have integrated them—is epitomized by *John Wayne*. His catatonically stiff, quasi-totemic body says one emotional thing, while his famous, somewhat bland, friendly Hollywood face (too small for his heroic figure) says another. (Marisol's body is usually an inert, geometrically simple, minimalist blank slate—a wood block, at once austere and nondescript—whose features seem like quixotic ornaments, added for descriptive if diagrammatic purposes, making the figure as a whole absurd.) The private body seems to betray the public personality, that is, the completely socialized self. And yet Marisol's bodies, in effect wooden boxes, suggest the constraint that has become ingrained in her figures, while her faces have a certain expressive resonance (sometimes socially predictable). Particularly those of her children, who, as I have said, are uniquely expressive, for to Marisol they remain, however boxed in, uniquely alive beings, moreso than adults, who have become comfortable in—indeed, identified and one with—their boxes. This irony does nothing to change the fact that for Marisol the body ego is the first and most basic ego, as Sigmund Freud said, and thus the psychosomatic space where all the self's contradictions are expressed, in all their unresolvable reality. The head is, after all, a part of the body, so that the surreal conflict between body language and facial expression in Marisol's figures becomes illustrative of self-conflict at its most basic. The contradiction between body and face adds to the subtle grotesqueness of Marisol's fragmented figures. If, as Charles Baudelaire wrote, grotesqueness is the ultimate form of humor,¹⁴ then Marisol's figures are morbidly funny—not simply caricatures in the ordinary sense, but demonstrations of the hidden ruptures in the self that mock every pretense of integrity.

Again and again Marisol presents public personalities with private selves—which are often vacuous, as their immobilized bodies suggest, or else malevolent, as their expressions sometimes suggest, as in *The Kennedys*, 1960. Her figures tend to have a stupefied look, as though hypnotized by themselves—let's call it a narcissistically smug look—while the wooden solidity of

their bodies suggest that they are inwardly petrified even, paradoxically, hollow. Indeed, the solidier their bodies, the more emotionally empty they seem; their box-like bodies seem to lack feeling—seem inherently inexpressive, whatever expressive features are added to them. Marisol exploits the public posture meant for posterity, in which a figure stands still to be photographed, as though the static formal pose is a guarantee of immortality, or at least a confirmation of social authority—she works from photographs (perhaps to distance herself from human beings; her famous reticence is another distancing device)—in order to show their insignificance, indeed, debunk them, a standard goal of caricature, but carried out with original means. (One can't help thinking of Daumier's caricature of Napoleon III turning into a pear. Marisol also reduces human beings to vegetable state, as her use of wood implies.)

Marisol in effect debunks the False compliant social Self with her own True creative child Self, a self she denies to all of her subjects (which is why they seem inwardly dead or empty)—except the heroic modern artists.¹⁵ *John Wayne*—the male hero on his horse—is ridiculed by her innovative treatment of him, which makes it clear that his identity is entirely make-believe, that is, a social fraud—a bad joke—suggesting that he lacks a true self, that is, a real, creative self. Marisol emasculates Wayne by showing that he is a pseudo-person and pseudo-masculine. Not that she lets women off any easier—conventional women, also living for their appearance, are also ridiculed. She even makes fun of her phallic women, suggesting their absurdity without being able to do anything about it, that is, regard them as feminine. (Indeed, *The Bathers* and *Women and Dog* seem to mock femininity, suggesting the quandary Marisol is in: the little girl in her is not entirely happy with the phallic woman, but dismisses femininity as superficial.) It is all part of her determination to debunk adult power and authority (often unearned, she implies) and the self-idolizing illusions about themselves that adults create—illusions that children do not have, suggesting that they have a more honest sense of themselves than adults. Marisol wants to remain a child, sticking artistic pins in effigies of adults—the effigies adults have made themselves into.

As I have suggested, Marisol's figurative sculptures are in effect children's toys. Children and their attitude to adults is not only her subject matter, they supply her with her style. The toy is childhood's work of art, and she models her works on its style. For many modern artists the toy is the most authentic art, that is, the most spontaneous, personal, evocative art. As Paul Gauguin famously said, "I go back very far, even farther than the horses of the Parthenon,...as far as the toys of my infancy, the good wooden hobby-horse."¹⁶ In a sense, toys are the most surreal works of art—the most consummate surreal sculpture—for technical as well as emotional reasons. "I have retained," Charles Baudelaire wrote, "a lasting affection and a reasoned admiration for that strange statuary art which, with its lustrous neatness, its blinding

flashes of colour, its violence in gesture and decision of contour, represents so well childhood's ideas about beauty."¹⁷ Marisol gives us childhood's naive idea of beauty—the deepest, most authentic beauty, uniting desire and anxiety (beauty with something strange in its proportions, as the philosopher Francis Bacon said)—with more than a touch of modernist sophistication, as Alloway suggested, making it ironical as well as primitive.

But first and foremost Marisol is concerned with the feeling of primordial aliveness emanating from children's toys, the same feeling of "primeval vitality, the intensive, often grotesque expression of energy and life in its most elemental form" that Emil Nolde found in so-called primitive art.¹⁸ Toys are the universal, spontaneously primitive art of all children, and Marisol's sculptural toys convey the primitive feeling for life and energetic expression implicit in toys, and use it to critique the subtly deadening society of adults. One and the same figure often conveys death and life—the death in social life, the feeling for life that remains in seemingly unfeeling, self-stifling adults. More personally, she overcomes her own unconscious feeling of not being entirely alive by imbuing her catatonically anxious figures with childlike desire. Indeed, many seem to suffer from rigor mortis, or social petrification—seem frozen forever in the formal positions in which they posed for their official photograph—however much they may be touched up with the bright colors of desire. It does little or nothing to bring them to life. Only her curvaceous *Bathers* and naked *Fishman* seem inherently alive, perhaps because they are as naked as nature, as though in rebellion against the stuffiness of society.

In sum, Marisol is a social critic, satirizing adults who symbolize the absurdity of society—her criticism verges on nihilism—as well as a student of human psychology, articulating the absurdity of the self, that is, the contradictions that make it uncanny. She reveals the nothingness of the private self behind the public persona in the course of suggesting its shallowness, while conveying the discrepancy between natural desire and the nightmarish anxiety induced by the social inhibition that makes the expression of desire look unnatural and shocking, like the purple buttocks of her bather. The child is the site of this battle, and shows it at its most basic: it is a struggle to the death for a sense of independent identity, rooted in personal creativity—a struggle against all the adults who force one to conform, that is, to be an obedient child, supposedly for one's own good, but in doing so kill one's spirit, that is, destroy the child in one, still fresh with a feeling for life. Certainly Marisol's *Baby Girl* still has that spirit and freshness, however boxed in by the white babydress that puts her in her social place.

In *A Stroll Down Peachtree Street*, 1997 we see Marisol all but completely boxed in. Her inexpressive face stares out from an opening in her dark space. Standing next to her is a dapper impressario, dressed in black tuxedo and top hat. Is he an undertaker of sorts? Is she in her coffin? Has Death come

for the Maiden? Is this another kind of family portrait? She is clearly withdrawn, even as she observes the world beyond her insular space. But her curved box is marked with a diagram of a red tree—presumably the peachtree. Like Daphne, she has turned into a sacred tree of life to resist the grasp of a fatal Apollo. The paradox, of course, is that she is no longer entirely human, if not dead. It is a superb image of alienation and vitality in one—life in death and death as life. Moreover, we see a smaller version of her face on the wagon, drawn by a spirited dog, standing on its hind legs, as though mocking the top-hatted man behind the wagon, the dog's master. Marisol is still in good animal spirits—spontaneous and naturally alive, and defying the driver of the wagon—even if she remains imprisoned in herself, which is the perplexing story of her art.

Notes

- 1 Wassily Kandinsky, *Concerning the Spiritual in Art* (New York: Dover, 1977), 5.
- 2 Lawrence Alloway, *American Pop Art* (New York: Collier Macmillan and the Whitney Museum of American Art, 1974), 23.
- 3 Sam Hunter and John Jacobus, *American Art of the 20th Century* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall and New York: Harry N. Abrams), 331.
- 4 Nancy Grove, *Magical Mixtures: Marisol Portrait Sculpture* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press for the National Portrait Gallery, 1991), 15, points out that Marisol flippantly explained her use of "plaster casts of herself as parts of the figures because she was available and 'I don't charge myself anything'." She later came to realize that it was more complicated than that. Grove emphasizes the early sixties works—*From France, The Bathers, The Wedding, Dinner Date, and The Visit*—but Marisol continued to use such plaster casts throughout her career, particularly mask-like casts of her face. She is more or less omnipresent in her art, even where least expected. For example, in *The Family* "the doll held by the eldest child is a small, stuffed Marisol, like those clutched by the six-foot high Baby Girl and the seven-foot Baby Boy" (23).
- 5 Quoted in Walter J. Friedländer, *Landscape Portrait Still-Life* (New York: Schocken, 1963), 245.
- 6 Stephen M. Johnson, *Character Styles* (New York: Norton, 1994), 7.
- 7 Harry Stack Sullivan, *The Interpersonal Theory of Psychiatry* (New York: Norton, 1953), 316.
- 8 *Ibid.*, 316-17.
- 9 John E. Gedo, *Portraits of the Artist* (New York: Guilford, 1983), page 32 notes that "the history of Western painting since 1400 is a steady progression in the degree of subjectivity permitted the artist." With respect to O'Keeffe, Picasso, and De Kooning, O'Keeffe's art remains the most objective in appearance. Picasso's art seems precariously balanced between the objective and subjective, while De Kooning's art is uncompromisingly subjective. Marisol's art is perhaps best described as obliquely subjective. Like O'Keeffe she manipulates

- objective appearances to covert subjective effect.
- 10 Ellen Handler Spitz, "Looking and Longing," *Image and Insight* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), 18.
 - 11 Quoted in Sam Hunter and John Jacobus, *Modern Art* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall and New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1992, 3rd ed.), 185.
 - 12 Marcel Jean, "The Coming of Beautiful Days," *The Autobiography of Surrealism*, ed. Marcel Jean (New York: Viking, 1980), 304.
 - 13 Ferdinand Tönnies, *Community and Society* (New York: Harper & Row, 1963), 33-34.
 - 14 Charles Baudelaire, "On The Essence of Laughter," *The Mirror of Art*, ed. Jonathan Mayne (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1956), 144 calls the grotesque "the absolute comic," arguing that it "comes much closer to nature," that is, is more primitive, than "the ordinary comic," which is "easier for the man in the street to understand," because it is a response to the street, that is, a way of dealing with society.
 - 15 D. W. Winnicott, "Ego Distortion in Terms of True and False Self" (1960), *The Maturation Processes and the Facilitating Environment* (New York: International Universities Press, 1965), 140-52 elaborates a dialectic between the True Self, involving "the spontaneous gesture and the personal idea," and the False Self, "result[ing] in a feeling unreal or a sense of futility" (148). The True Self is creative, the False Self socially compliant—a social compliance which starts with blind obedience to a mother who co-opts one, that is, who interferes with the child's expression of herself (however naturally as well as socially immature her self). But, as Winnicott ironically points out, only the False Self can have social success—Marisol's adults seem socially successful—even if that comes at the expense of the True Self (which often asserts itself in telltale signs of desire, such as colorfulness), and even if that success involves mediating the True Self so that it seems socially acceptable, or at least can hold its own socially, as the True Self artists Marisol admires do.
- Winnicott's dialectic seems to be applicable across the board for an understanding of the inner dynamics of Marisol's figures: The dialectic is responsible for their unresolved tension, for it is the tension generated by the True Self's anxious struggle to separate itself from the socially presentable False Self, by expressing the desire natural to it, and thus being spontaneously alive, but finding that it is unable to become completely separate.
- 16 Quoted in Herschel B. Chipp, ed., *Theories of Modern Art* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968), 84.
 - 17 Charles Baudelaire, "A Philosophy of Toys," *The Painter of Modern Life and Other Essays*, ed. Jonathan Mayne (London: Phaidon, 1964), 199.
 - 18 Quoted in Victor H. Miesel, ed., *Voices of German Expressionism* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1970), 35.

TWO VERSIONS OF MARISOL, OVERLAPPING AND UNDERLAPPING

DONALD KUSPIT

II

"No one has deflated human pomposity with greater insight," the art critic Katherine Kuh writes about Marisol, noting "the pathos, irony and outrageous satire with which she invests her sculpture...she invariably ends up with a biting comment on human foibles."¹ In a similar vein, the sculptor George Segal observes that "Marisol's art has always had wit, but she's dead-serious."² Nancy Grove notes that there is an "implied critique of 1960s sexism" in Marisol's "witty evocations of modern society,"³ suggesting that men are the target of her irony. This seems to be confirmed by *John Wayne*, 1962-63, the archetypal Hollywood male hero, who is reduced to a trivial wooden figure on a toy horse—a merry-go-round mannequin, with a celebrity photograph for a face. He is T. S. Eliot's hollow man, for all his physical solidity. *The Generals*, 1961-62 is another example of a rather harsh critique of men. The horse and its two riders are reduced to impotent mannequins. Indeed, they become a child's toy, to be yanked around at will—the military men are not in control—as the fact that the horse has wheels on its table legs suggests. Both works are cleverly thrown together from odd wooden parts, some carved, some manufactured, and have a primitive, ineffective look that altogether belies the slick efficiency we would expect from male heroes on their high horse, emblematic of their superiority. Marisol has ingeniously undermined the traditional image of equestrian manliness, even in its vulgar Hollywood manifestation as the rough-and-ready cowboy. She has cut John Wayne and the generals down to less than human size, turning their pretentiousness into a joke, indeed, showing that they are all pretense—that their masculinity is a farce, indeed, a stupid social construction. Certainly these works speak to the classical conception of irony as an attack on the "man who pretended to be more than he was."⁴

But Marisol's women also pretend to be more than they are, and are attacked by her—reduced to comic (or is it tragicomic?) constructions. The women in *The Bathers*, 1961 and *Women and Dog*, 1964 are also wooden,

emotionally hollow mannequins—they're no different in principle than *John Wayne* and *The Generals*. Marisol's fatal, subtly corrosive wit also subverts and diminishes them. No doubt they're more glamorous and even openly erotic, as the nakedness of one of the bathers suggests—the bright, seductive colors of the dressed-up women (with nowhere to go?) also make them subliminally erotic—but they're just as fatuous as John Wayne and the generals. Marisol mocks their "false Grandeur," suggesting that our "Admiration" for them is "excessive"—these are the terms the eighteenth century philosopher Frances Hutchinson uses to define ridicule.⁵ Marisol's women are all too pompous and socially superior—their grand hats signal as much—and she subtly deflates them by presenting them in an ironical way. She cuts them down to vulnerable human size, undermining their look of invulnerability and imperviousness, and perhaps above all self-importance. The clothing of the women in *Women and Dog* is a false physical front, while the casual indifference of *The Bathers* is a false psychic front. (One bather is naked except for her hat, as though to remove it would be to lose her authority and social rank, simply becoming another anonymous body on the beach. She's clearly not worried about her dignity, as she's already completely naked. No doubt without the mental fig leaf of the hat she'd finally be embarrassed—not by her physical nakedness, but by her vacuousness, that is, she would be mentally embarrassed by her empty-headness, or at least it would be exposed. She is, after all, literally a "blockhead," that is, the wooden block that is her head is a pun for her personality.)

Marisol's witty attack doesn't go as far as Daumier did when he reduced (in four stages) King Louis Philippe to a homely pear in an 1833 cartoon, nor as far as Picasso did. Apollinaire regarded many of his analytic cubist works as "cruel jokes,"⁶ and Picasso himself thought that "all good portraits are in some degree caricatures,"⁷ a remark with a special edge in view of the fact that a caricature is a "hostile joke (serving the purpose of aggressiveness, satire, or defence)," as Freud said.⁸ As E. H. Gombrich notes, "witty distortion," resulting in a "ludicrous mock portrait"—"the charged or loaded portrait, the caricatura," a "weapon of irony" supposedly invented by Annibale Carracci as a "tease"—tends to convey "savagely aggression," or, at the least, "crude horseplay" that shows its subject in a bad light, diminishing and even entirely denying his or her importance, social and broadly human.⁹ Reducing the appearance of human reality to hollow rhetoric, the cartooning spirit tends to "dispel illusions."¹⁰ Indeed, it verges on destructive nihilism, as Gombrich suggests. Nonetheless, Marisol's target is bigger than the individual Daumier, Picasso, and Carracci worked over in their cartoons: it is society as a whole. "Satire does not necessarily imply a decadent society, though it flourishes upon the outworn features in the social system," Alfred North Whitehead

writes.¹¹ The target of Marisol's sardonic wit is the social system as such: she suggests that America is decadent behind its facile, shiny, sophisticated, new-looking facade. In America outworn features are quickly replaced by new looks, but behind it all nothing has changed, indicating hidden entropy. It is this subtle form of decadence that is Marisol's subject matter.

All satire is bitter, says Whitehead, but, as I will also argue, Marisol saves herself from bitterness by a certain primitive affection for her medium, matching its own primitive, natural character: it is usually wood (sometimes carved). Indeed, underlying Marisol's social critique is a familiar primitivism, in the sense in which Jacques Barzun describes it: "the longing to shuffle off the complex arrangements of an advanced culture," leading to the celebration of "the savage with his simple creed," for he is "healthy, highly moral, and serene, a worthier being than the civilized man, who must intrigue and deceive to prosper."¹² The apparent naiveté of Marisol's painted sculpture points to her primitivism, as does her interest in Pre-Columbian art and "hand-carved and painted South American folk-art figures in boxes,"¹³ no doubt in part because she is Venezuelan. Lawrence Alloway has described her as "a sophisticated naive sculptor whose figures possess a folkloric decoration and fantasy."¹⁴ The combination of sophistication and naiveté suggests the tension between decadence and primitivism in her work. Indeed, it is at once a critique of civilization and suggests, however subliminally, a longing for, indeed, faith in nature.

It is a belief that the naked, archaic, all natural figure of *Fishman*, 1973—he is the antithesis of *John Wayne*, a manufactured social product, indeed, a Hollywood commodity—seems to make explicit. Like an Egyptian god, the *Fishman* has an animal head, and holds an animal, as though in a votive act. An impish Marisol accompanies him, like a pet dog or a child. We are a long way from *Women and Dog*, although the child accompanying them looks more natural than they do. The tension between their civilized blankness and the expressive, melancholy child exemplifies the tension between society and the primitive—a child is a human being in a primitive physical and emotional state. So does the little brown dog in its white box. It has, indeed, been civilized—inhibited, domesticated. Geometry is at odds with the body here, the way society, with its constraints and controls, is at odds with nature, which seems spontaneous and unashamed in comparison. If wearing a hat is a sign of being civilized—covering one's head, as though to keep one's hair in place and protect oneself from the elements, suggests that one also knows one's place in society—then the unresolvable tension between civilization and nature is also conveyed by the one bather who is completely naked except for her hat, firmly on her head. It is this tension that is the source of her pathos—the pathos that Kuh notes is characteristic of all of Marisol's figures.

Irony is "a double-layered or two-storied phenomenon," writes the

literary critic D. C. Muecke, noting that "there is always some kind of opposition between the two levels, an opposition that may take the form of contradiction, incongruity, or incompatibility."¹⁵ Marisol's sculptures are full of incongruities, both structural and decorative: they are ironical objects, inside and outside. There is the discrepancy between the flat cut-out of the horse and the three-dimensional, somewhat bulky figure riding it in *John Wayne*, and between the brightly painted buttocks (blue) and hat (yellow) and the otherwise brown body of the figure reclining on her front in *The Bathers*. The fact that both these sculptures are painted constructions—composites of bodily fragments with a colorful surface—adds another level of irony. So does the fact that the bodily fragments are often conspicuously geometrical, giving the work as a whole an abstract cast, however obviously figurative. There is a certain resemblance between Marisol's surreal figurative constructions and those of Picasso, however much more explicitly social those of Marisol are. In a sense, Marisol appropriates Picasso's ironical eccentricity and general absurdity for her own social critical purpose. She in effect "popularizes" and Americanizes Surrealism—Picasso's abstract surrealism, which involves perversely bringing together incommensurate formal elements to achieve an ironical "poetic" effect, and Magritte's representational surrealism, as *Magritte I-V*, 1998, a homage to the master that replicates several of his male figures, indicates. It is worth noting that all these static, buttoned-up, totem-like figures—rather uptight, formal, indeed, quite rigid mannequins—wear hats, and hold open umbrellas, protecting them against the elements. They also exemplify the dialectic of inhibiting civilization and the forces of nature—inner (instinct) or outer, with the latter usually a symbol of the former—that informs all of Marisol's art.

The ironical structure of Marisol's sculpture is evident in figure after figure. Most of them are somewhat rigid, like those of Magritte, but within that uptightness there are bizarre tensions—weird contradictions—and small, tell-tale signs of naturalness, suggesting that there is still life in what seem to be dead, zombie-like conformist figures. The sense of bodily aliveness is generated by the friction between the abstract parts of what look like corpses or robots. Indeed, Marisol's figures seem to embody, in a very subtle way, the conflict between the machine and organic models of human being that the scientist and theorist Ludwig von Bertalanffy says is the central intellectual issue of the modern age, and beyond.¹⁶ They are in effect "living machines," perhaps more clearly machines than living, although they have the aura of life—as the best, most well-made robots do. Thus, the bodies of the somewhat important looking, stony-faced Native Americans in *Blackfoot Delegation to Washington, 1916*, 1993 are composites of blocks of wood—large for the body, small for the limbs—that suggest their emotional "woodenness" as well as physical stiffness. At the same time, their hands and faces are carved, and seem relatively natural, if also fixed in place. Indeed, their faces, however

expressive, look like masks.¹⁷ In fact, their expressions are frozen forever in the photograph on which the sculpture is based, suggesting that they are mechanical expressions—expressions that conform to expectations of how a dignified, stoic, and at the same time proverbially aggressive Native American—a savage—should look, especially for posterity. They are playing their roles, however “natural” they look. These are not wooden cigar store “Indians,” but they live up to the cliché of the dangerous, ruthless, untrustworthy “Injun.”

Similarly, the wood of which they are made, sometimes thinly painted (ironically in white, suggesting that they are honorary white men), so that its grain is visible, also conveys their naturalness and aliveness—the grain symbolizes the blood that flows in their veins—even as it confirms their peculiar artificiality. (One of the Magritte figures is also thinly covered with white paint, and in fact there is a clear resemblance, in facial expression as well as formal, stiff posture between them and the Blackfoot Delegation.) Marisol’s sympathy is clearly with these “primitives,” as suggested by the fact that she turns their feather headdresses into regal crowns—really high hats, however bizarre their shapes (the tall hats and seated figures form a surreal contrast)—and the fact that she makes them so physically prominent, lavishing a great deal of attention on them, compared to the faded figures of the government functionaries in the background (but they stand, and are clearly on a higher level, and have an ominous shadowy look, compared to the seated, forthright, luminous, that is, “pure” Native Americans). Nonetheless, the Native Americans look oddly foolish—uncannily alive yet poseurs, posturing for the camera in their outlandish outfits. They are stylized primitives, peculiarly inauthentic for all their apparent authenticity—their display of authentic difference. Like the Native Americans who joined Buffalo Bill’s circus, they are a sideshow, giving people the thrill of vicarious confrontation with the “enemy”—clearly conquered, as shown by the fact that they’re in the circus, or Washington, rather than roaming the wilderness freely. They are fighting for survival—making a treaty that will give them some social space in the country that was once theirs. In other words, they are losers for all their look of triumphant victory. (The Magritte figures also look like losers in life, despite their social success and propriety. The aura of gloom that hangs over them, as well as the Blackfoot Delegation, suggests that they have emotionally lost a lot—their joy in living—however much they may have achieved socially.)

Paradoxically, they have become as anonymous as their audience, like Magritte’s figures. They, too, have only a mechanical public identity—they are not true selves, spontaneously alive and uncannily unique despite all their show of social conformity. They cannot get beyond the situation of being on public display—on the beach, in the street, in the movies—which is the problem that all of Marisol’s figures have. That is, they are all trapped in what Guy Debord calls our society of spectacle.¹⁸ Marisol’s figures make a

spectacle of themselves, as it were, thinking they are uniquely themselves but in fact simply being part of the scene.

Erich Fromm has argued that spontaneity is rare in modern life, most people being automatons without realizing it. They are what they are for compulsive reasons, not because they are free spirits. "Spontaneous activity is not compulsive activity, to which the individual is driven by his isolation and powerlessness; it is not the activity of the automaton, which is the uncritical adoption of patterns suggested from the outside. Spontaneous activity is free activity of the self and implies, psychologically, what the Latin root of the word, *sponte*, means literally: of one's free will...spontaneity is a relatively rare phenomenon in our culture."¹⁹ In Marisol, spontaneity appears in the details—carved or colorful—of her otherwise immobilized automatons. Indeed, the conspicuous grain in the wood of *Fishman* suggests his spontaneous aliveness, and the bright colors of the middle woman in the trio of *Women and Dog*—the other two are in comparatively drab clothing, with a bit of pattern print, implying that their lives follow a predictable pattern—suggests the spontaneity and independence of her personality. Her difference is clearly conveyed by the fact that she has one face rather than a number of faces, like the other women, suggesting just how Janusfaced and narcissistic they are. They seem isolated from each other—hardly intimate—however much they resemble each other and form a group. Certainly the child seems lonely and apart, like the little dog. In their mood, these ostensibly peripheral figures have an odd affinity with the child princess and somewhat bigger dog in Velazquez's *Las Meninas*.

Not all of Marisol's figures are automatons, however much they are all mannequins of one kind or another. Marisol seems to feel warmly toward *The Family*, 1962, "based on a photograph 'of a poor American family from the South, of the types shown in Walker Evans's portraits of Alabama tenant farmers during the Depression'," as Grove notes.²⁰ This "mother-dominated group is reminiscent of the 1957 *Large Family Group*," she observes, "but enlarged to life-size and given three-dimensional details." *Mi Mama y Yo*, 1968 also suggests mother-domination, especially when one notes the grandeur of the mother in comparison to the small child—her daughter—who holds a decorative umbrella over her. It is an ironical version of Hegel's master/servant dialectic. This work, which is one of Marisol's masterpieces—all the more so because each figure is a remarkable combination of pure abstract body and realistic head (the umbrella is simultaneously abstract form and real object)—makes it clear that virtually all of Marisol's figurative groups are families in spirit. (The juxtaposition of pink body and black hair, more particularly, of the broad curves of the female bodies and the graphic details of the facial features, adds to the aesthetic piquancy.) The bathers form a kind of family, as does the Blackfoot delegation, and for that matter the Magritte figures. And all these

families are more or less troubled, however well they hide their troubles, although their contradictory body language—alive, dynamic details, over-all deadness and inertia—tends to suggest it. Indeed, the theme of troubled intimacy is an undercurrent of Marisol's groups.

They are in effect studies in human relationship—or is it the failure of human relationship? Again and again Marisol seems to depict the insidious alienation between people, as well as their subtle alienation from themselves, evident in their mechanical self-presentation. On the deepest human level, Marisol's figures are strangers to each other, however physically and socially close, and to themselves. Marisol's narrative is not simply social but psychosocial. As Erik Erikson says, social and psychological reality cannot be separated, however much now one, now the other, may seem particularly important. Indeed, Marisol's sculpture seems to affirm the truth of the feminist idea that "the personal is the [socio]political," and, one might add, the [socio]political—as in the *Blackfoot Delegation to Washington*, 1916, *Desmond Tutu*, 1988, and for that matter *The Family*—is personal. To put this another way, Marisol's figures have emotional depth as well as social surface. Indeed, they are emotionally complex despite their social superficiality.

It is only when Marisol depicts children—the younger the better—and artists that spontaneity and sociality seamlessly unite, suggesting the inner harmony and integrity of the person represented. Fromm singles out "small children" and artists as "individuals who are...spontaneous, whose thinking, feeling, and acting [are] the expressions of their selves and not of an automaton."²¹ Marisol's *Baby Girl*, 1963 is spontaneously herself—she's not playing a social role, pretending to be someone other than she is, however much she has been put in a neat white outfit, a kind of straitjacket (the literal straightness of her block-body suggests as much), in effect socializing her. She is not unlike the dog in its boxy white "jacket" in *Women and Dog*. She is in danger of altogether losing her animal friskiness and cuddliness. It seems to me noteworthy that we can see the baby girl's tongue, suggesting that she has not yet learned to control and repress herself—keep her mouth closed—the way the proper young ladies in *Mi Mama Y Yo* and *Women and Dog* have. Children indeed should be seen but not heard. Marisol seems to identify with her, as the little figurine—a self-portrait—on her lap suggests.

Similarly, *Martha Graham* and *Georgie O'Keeffe with Dogs*, both 1977—another masterpiece of characterization and construction—as well as *Bill de Kooning*, 1980 are not self-alienated. They are unequivocally who they are—they're not playing a social role, acting in a socially prescribed drama. O'Keeffe, in Marisol's rendering, has a certain resemblance to her mother, by reason of her mass and grandeur. Her fierce dogs—they're not curtailed, boxed in—bespeak her power and determination, that is, the forcefulness of her being, and by extension of her art. They are the attributes that signal her

fierce personality. Here is one female figure who is idolized rather than debunked. *Georgia O'Keeffe with Dogs* is a long way from *Women and Dogs*, indeed, at the other end of the psychosocial spectrum. So is Marisol's *Baby Girl* and *Baby Boy*, 1964. Will the girl grow up to be Georgia O'Keeffe or one of the conforming women? Will the boy grow up to be John Wayne or Bill de Kooning? Marisol's sculptures not only explore the stages of life, but seem to suggest the fundamental choice in it: to be fiercely independent and creative, like the inner-directed artist, or conformist, living for appearances and dependent on the approval of society, like her other-directed women. Marisol's works, taken together, can be read as a version of Hercules at the crossroads.

Marisol's *Baby Girl* and *Baby Boy* have a certain ironical grandeur: she's six feet and he's seven feet high. They're larger than life, suggesting that they're more meaningful than adults. There is a certain pathos in this mythologizing reversal. While it glorifies their presence and innocence, it also suggests that they represent a lost paradise of spontaneous self-expression. Marisol has said that "the boy represented America holding me—young America, still a little irresponsible."²² But Marisol welcomes that irresponsibility and youth for their spontaneity, indeed, for the *joie de vivre*—high spirits—they represent.

In *Virgin, Child, St. Anne and St. John*, 1978 Marisol shows us, at last, an unequivocally happy family scene. But there's no father—he's up above, as the pointing infant suggests. Does the work make a feminist point—relegate man, indeed, God the Father, to the periphery? This work is one of several reprises of traditional masterpieces that Marisol has made, all of them with a psychosocial edge. Thus, she has said that her version of Leonardo's *Last Supper*—a "feat of gentle audacity," one critic has said,²³ which eloquently articulates a general truth about her art—"symbolize[s] the downfall of Western culture, the loss of morality. I inserted myself because I am watching it happen."²⁴ In other words, it is a picture of the approaching decadence, but also of the artist who is not only its witness but able to survive it, by reason of her authenticity, that is, her primitive integrity, as it were. Our society may have lost its morality and our culture may be collapsing, but Marisol remains moral and constructive, for she is an artist—perhaps a Cassandra-like artist announcing the decline and fall of Western civilization. Marisol's work is not only a homage to another artist, whose work resonates with insight into the human condition—in the human capacity for destroying a good thing even when they know it is good—but about herself and her own instinct for survival. Indeed, it is Marisol's own existence, and her insight into it, that is the basic theme of her art. She is not simply self-obsessed, but wants to understand what it means to have a self, particularly a female self, although she seems to suggest that on the deepest level of selfhood the distinction between male and female disappears.

Works such as *Couple # 1*, *Couple # 2*, *The Dealers*, and *The Party* (all early sixties) use aspects of her face for the male figure. These works in effect acknowledge her male side. But in 1965 and 1966 she portrayed "almost exclusively women with her features,"²⁵ acknowledging her female side. The over-all result is a balance of forces, in which the crucial issue is selfhood as such rather than masculinity or femininity in particular. In general, she has used her face and body as "found objects," ostensibly for practical reasons—they were ready to hand—but also because, as she later acknowledged, she was in search of herself. She in effect used her physical reality to suggest and explore her inner reality. "Whatever the artist makes," Marisol has said, "is always a kind of self-portrait,"²⁶ suggesting that her portraits—some forty—of people in art, entertainment, and politics represent her own concerns. That is, her portraits of others are a form of self-recognition. Her work has been said to have the "anarchic humor of Dada,"²⁷ but she is dead serious about discovering who she is. She clearly has a humorous side, but there is a side of her that is completely sober and earnest and forbidding—very Spanish, as it were, for it involves a tragic sense of life. Or, as Kuh simply puts it, pathos—prevailing, inescapable pathos, the betrayal of life epitomized by the *Last Supper*: Strangely enough, there is an existential, even religious—certainly deeply introspective—side to Marisol's art.

"When I was 11," she has said, "I decided never to talk again. I didn't want to sound the way other people did. I really didn't talk for years except for what was absolutely necessary in school and on the street."²⁸ Even later in life, she was "famous for her reticence," once sitting through "a four-hour brunch without saying a single word."²⁹ As though she had taken a vow of silence, affirming the sacredness of her self. In a sense, Marisol's work deals with people she has seen on the street, that is, in public, but it also remains profoundly private. There is an air of deep silence about it—of something unspoken and ineffable—the self in all the completeness of its privacy. As the psychoanalyst D. W. Winnicott said, the self wants to remain undiscovered, even as it wants to be "found out." Marisol lets the social part of herself—the self that says what it is socially necessary to say—be discovered, but she keeps the innermost part to herself. Yet it resonates through the silence of her figures.

A Stroll Down Peach Street, 1997—a painted wooden ensemble—epitomizes her whole endeavor. We see the very private Marisol and next to her a very public man, a dapper impressario with a black moustache, wearing a black tuxedo and carved top hat, and holding a stick with both hands, no doubt to prod the horse drawing the wagon in front of him. Marisol stands in a simple structure marked with the sign of a tree—she is expert at the use of schematic signifiers (her figures are signifiers that have been given volume to make them seem "real" and less like stick figures)—but that at the same time looks like a

coffin. Her mask-like face peers out of this unpretentious box, as though being shown at a viewing. But it is also the face of a nun who lives a mysterious, ascetic, insular life in a cell. She peers out of the small opening in the door to see who has come to visit her, interrupting her meditation. Has a gentlemanly Death stopped for her, the way he did for Emily Dickinson? In the wagon is a smaller head of Marisol—a small bust-length self-portrait: is she being taken to heaven? Is the wagon her primitive—peasant?—version of Dickinson's coach? Both heads are pure white, but the face in the wagon wears no lipstick, unlike the one in the tree-coffin. Are we looking at Marisol as a seductive adult woman and Marisol as an innocent, indeed, angelic child, well-behaved in her wagon, however poorly behaved the horse is? Indeed, the little horse impulsively rears, standing on its hind legs, as though in rebellion—eager to be wild again, unbroken by the world. (Is this what the well-behaved children in *Mi Mama Y Yo* and *Women and Dog* thought of doing? Are they dreaming of returning to their animal nature?) Or is he just showing that he is strong enough to pull the wagon, and eager to do so? For all the horse's apparent power and action, he remains locked in place. The wheel in front of him suggests that he can make the wagon move, but also that there is no escape from his situation. It resembles that of the dog in *Women and Dog*. His spirit may be untamed, but his body is clearly housebroken. The adult Marisol seems to be remembering the child she once was, riding in a wagon pulled by a pony, with her father behind it, in charge. But better days of her childhood have passed. Reality: she is now cooped up in the box of herself—boxed in, and dreaming of being a rebellious pony, however futile the rebellion.

The work is full of contradictions—unresolved tensions. Every part of it is a symbol of Marisol. On the one hand, the primitive box, marked with primitive signs of nature, represents her own feeling of being a vital, moral primitive, in Barzun's sense. On the other hand, the male figure represents her social part, and perhaps her fear of death. The belly of the carved horse is painted gray, its mane white—another death-in-life, life-in-death contradiction. Indeed, the play of light and dark in the work, however discreetly done, suggests a certain ambivalence about life. The fancy clothing of the male figure suggests that he is playing a social role, while the fact that Marisol's body is hidden suggests that she has none—that she has given up on her social identity. She didn't want to sound the way other people did—she wanted to be unequivocally and uniquely herself—and now she makes no sound at all, her muteness and invisible body indicating her separateness, and finally radical difference from others.

Nonetheless, the adult Marisol, however enclosed—self-contained—stands next to the man, suggesting that they are married, or about to get married. Is she reconciling her private female and public male sides, even though they don't form an exactly happy couple? She is clearly searching for

a synthesis of opposites. But has she found it? We see a woman who is not clearly a person—she is too mysterious and remote and silent to be read as one—and a man who seems like a strong, silent, commanding type, but is also remote. (One wonders if Marisol's silence, which was probably bred into her as a child, is an ironical play on the obsolete cliché that a woman, like a child, should be seen but not heard—a cliché carried to an absurd extreme in this work, for we can only see her face.) Marisol's impressario seems like the ideal man, and she has ironically become the ideal woman. But they don't relate, only stand together, not even on the same plane of being. They stroll together, but not emotionally attuned to each other. This subtle, understated, paradoxical work shows how much Marisol remains at odds with herself and the world, even as it shows her becoming a more astute observer of her inner self and the outer world.

Notes

- 1 Quoted in Nancy Grove, *Magical Mixtures: Marisol Portrait Sculpture* (Washington, D. C.: Smithsonian Institution Press for the National Portrait Gallery, 1991), 19.
- 2 Quoted in *ibid.*, 9.
- 3 *Ibid.*, 9.
- 4 Norman N. Holland, *Laughing: A Psychology of Humor* (Ithaca, NY and London: Cornell University Press, 1982), 37.
- 5 Quoted in *ibid.*, 38.
- 6 Guillaume Apollinaire, *Apollinaire on Art: Essays and Reviews, 1902-1918* (New York: Viking, 1972), 260.
- 7 Dore Ashton, ed., *Picasso on Art: A Selection of Views* (New York: Viking, 1972), 112. In this context it is worth noting that "later in his career, Picasso often used the gored horse as a symbol for woman." Mary Matthews Gedo, *Picasso: Art as Autobiography* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1980), 36.
- 8 Sigmund Freud, "Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious" (1905), *Standard Edition* (London: Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psycho-Analysis, 1960), vol. 8, 73.
- 9 E. H. Gombrich, "The Cartoonist's Armoury," *Meditations on a Hobby Horse and Other Essays on the Theory of Art* (London and New York: Phaidon, 1963), 134-35.
- 10 *Ibid.*, 142.
- 11 Alfred North Whitehead, *Adventures of Ideas* (New York: Mentor, 1955), 277.
- 12 Jacques Barzun, *From Dawn to Decadence: 1500 to the Present, 500 Years of Western Cultural Life* (New York: HarperCollins, 2000), xv-xvi.
- 13 Grove, 12.
- 14 Lawrence Alloway, *American Pop Art* (New York: Collier Macmillan and the Whitney Museum of American Art, 1974), 23.
- 15 Quoted in Frank Stringfellow, Jr., *The Meaning of Irony: A Psychoanalytic Investigation* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994), 13.

- 16 Ludwig von Bertalanffy, *General System Theory* (New York: George Braziller, 1968), 140 argues that “notwithstanding its success, the machine model of the organism has its difficulties and limitations,” most of which have to do with the fact that the machine is a closed rather than open system, which is what an organism—including the human organism—is. An open system involves “the dynamic interactions of its components,” involving “feedback and information.” “A feedback mechanism can ‘reactively’ reach a state of higher organization owing to ‘learning,’ i.e., information fed into the system” (150). In contrast, the information in a closed system is finalized once and for all, with no feedback or new learning possible. It is in effect in an entropic state—like Marisol’s fixed, ostensibly undynamic figures.
- In a closed system “information can only decrease, never increase, i.e., information can be transformed into ‘noise,’ but not vice versa.” The “noisy” look of some of Marisol’s sculptures, for example, *John Wayne*, with its disintegrating, blurred information—Wayne’s profile photograph is the case in point—confirms the closed, indeed, hermetically closed character of her figures. They have been signed, sealed, and delivered by and to society—assigned their limited roles in its theater—roles they seem unable to think of leaving, indeed, never imagine leaving. They are always on stage—rigidly in place—as Marisol’s stagy sculptures suggest. Paradoxically, her performative figures are completely mechanized, at least at first glance, confirming the fact that “the organism becomes ‘mechanized’ in the course of development,” as von Bertalanffy says (150). The human organism becomes so completely regulated by society that it confuses itself with its social identity or role, thinking that it is self-regulating—that it is who it is by choice—rather than blindly conforming to social expectations. In other words, Marisol’s figures are social conformists rather than individualists—their “uprightness” has more to do with playing their social role to the hilt, that is, maintaining their social position, rather than holding their own in and against society, defiantly maintaining a personal space, however problematic. At the same time, they have a certain “natural” individuality—indeed, a curious “animal magnetism”—evident in the telltale signs of their natural body, breaking through their natural surface, and visible if one knows how to look.
- 17 Grove, 12 notes Marisol’s use of masks of her own face and other body parts, an idea she apparently derived from Jasper Johns’s *Target with Four Faces*, 1955 and, no doubt, so-called primitive masks.
- 18 Guy Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle* (New York: Zone Books, 1995), 15, describes the spectacle as “the empire of modern passivity”—which is one way of looking at Marisol’s figures as a whole—and asserts that “the spectacle proclaims the predominance of appearances and asserts that all human life, which is to say all social life, is mere appearance” (14). It is “a negation of life that has invented a visual form for itself” (14).
- 19 Erich Fromm, *Escape from Freedom* (New York: Avon, 1965), 284-85.
- 20 Grove, 20.
- 21 Fromm, 285.
- 22 Quoted in *ibid.*, 23.
- 23 Quoted in *ibid.*, 32.

- 24 Quoted in *ibid.*, 34, 38.
- 25 Grove, 23.
- 26 Quoted in *ibid.*, 9.
- 27 *Ibid.*, 11.
- 28 Quoted in *ibid.*, 10.
- 29 *Ibid.*, 17.

RE-ALIGNINGS? ARTMAKING IN THE SOUTHEASTERN EUROPEAN ENVIRONS OF MANIFESTA 3

KATHERINE A. CARL

In an attempt to exhibit the artistic production of the new Europe, the third Manifesta, the European Biennial of Contemporary Art, was sited in Ljubljana, Slovenia, in Summer 2000, addressing the curatorial theme of "Borderline Syndrome: Energies of Defense." The theme for the third Manifesta was drawn from the psychological condition of the borderline syndrome as outlined by Otto Kernberg in the mid-1970s—decades after Helene Deutsch's writing on the "as-if personality" in the mid-1930s and D.W. Winnicott's notion of the "false personality" laid out in 1965—and highlighted the proliferation of political and economic frontiers that solidified after the supposed leveling of the East-West border in Europe. Kernberg's psychological theory examined the defenses that are established as an attempt to deal with the constant painful oscillation of the borderline state.

Manifesta was conceived in the mid-1990s as a migratory team-curated biennial. The third Manifesta was curated by Francesco Bonami, Ole Bouman, Maria Hlavajova, and Kathrin Rhomberg. Coordinated by Igor Zabel, it was presented in Ljubljana's established cultural institutions: the Museum of Modern Art, the National Museum of Slovenia, the International Centre of Graphic Art, and Cankarjev dom Cultural and Congress Centre. Following from Manifesta's original mandate to present contemporary art of Europe, including East and Southeast Europe, the conceptual basis of "Borderline Syndrome: Energies of Defense" attempts to shift the relation of West and East away from the model of "self" and "other." The third Manifesta investigates the cultural workings of an entity suffering from internal oscillation that results in difficulty formulating a stable and coherent self. This framework acknowledges the relationships of Eastern Europe and Western Europe as complex systems of old and new power dynamics, hierarchies, conflict, cooperation, and mutual benefit. It is interesting to note that Manifesta's adoption of this theme and its emphasis on "Energies of Defense" is a shift from the notions that circulated in the West in the late eighties and nineties that championed openness and

hybridity. Manifesta asks the question: what are the pitfalls, not of exclusion, but of inclusion in Western systems?

As a nomadic biennial, Manifesta encourages visitors to look at the artmaking in the region of the host city—a particularly important task this year as it was the first to take place in Eastern Europe. At a distance from the international art world's capitals—Basel, London, Berlin, Paris, and New York—this biennial's siting in Southeast Europe insisted that those who made the trip must stop and take in the view. In this spirit, Manifesta 3 serves in this article as a springboard for a consideration of some of the artmaking in this region.

Manifesta 3 was met with much local criticism, particularly for the exclusion of well-respected alternative art spaces around Ljubljana like Kapelica Gallery (K4) and Skuc Gallery as sites for the exhibition. These spaces took the opportunity to stage exhibitions by young and creative curators that provided a valuable perspective on the theme of borderline syndrome in the work of artists from Southeast Europe. For example, Skuc presented focused and insightful exhibitions of engaging work from Southeast Europe including, "What Am I Doing Here?" curated by Lejla Hodzic of Bosnia and Herzegovina, and "A Small Country for a Big Vacation," curated by Ana Devic and Natasa Ilic of Croatia.

Illusive Objects

The image most reproduced in the press of Manifesta 3 (from local newspapers to *Art in America*) is Sejla Kamberic's *EU/Others* on Plecnik's revered and well-travelled Tromostovje (Three Bridges) built in 1929-1930. These central bridges connect the new and old town centers of Ljubljana, at the base of the mountain on which the medieval Ljubljana Castle is perched. In Kamberic's piece, on the two pedestrian bridges simple illuminated signs, like those that denote passport control at airports, are printed with the terms "EU" on one side and "Others" on the reverse. As pedestrians walk underneath, whether they are identified as a "member" of the European Union or as an "other" is determined simply by the direction in which they are walking. The signs' sleek graphic design contrasts sharply with the bridge's early modern form, conveying a sense of the passage of time as well as of physical spatial crossing. Multiple in itself, the Tromostovje is now cast as a point caught in oscillation and the city's pedestrians are also implicated in this metaphor.

Otto Kernberg's notion of the borderline syndrome identifies a complicated relation between the subject and other people or outside objects. The borderline person is constantly on the frontier between neurosis and psychosis, held in an in-between state of unceasing oscillation between psychic positions.¹ In most cases, the subject's boundaries are maintained and hold meaning—even an excess of meaning because of their multiplicity. This inability to

achieve stasis is intensely painful, marking a crisis point for the subject. This arises from a conflicted "relationship with people, time, and space."²

In the proximity of the object (and the object may be a person, a job, or an ideology) the borderline is terrified of closeness, which implies engulfment, loss of self, psychic annihilation. Away from the object, the borderline is terrified of distance, which implies isolation, abandonment, or premature separateness.³

In response to the inability to internalize, integrate, and differentiate reality from fantasy, borderline patients reach a unique state of "unending oscillation" in organizing their personalities.⁴ It is this equilibrium of constant vacillation, between schizoid and depressive positions in Kleinian terms, that defines the borderline personality.

Kameric's evocation of the passport control structure and the use of the two terms, one more politically desirable than the other, points to the borderline's problem of splitting objects into strictly good or bad and the confusion of these positions that ensues. In Melanie Klein's thinking, the typical split of good and bad objects attributed to borderlines becomes complicated because she asserted that borderlines perceived objects with a false appearance. "Thus 'good' may conceal corruption, and 'bad' may contain hidden, valuable parts of the personality."⁵ Further, as the borderline moves to symbolic thinking, the use of representation becomes scrambled. The borderline constructs a metaphorical external object but remains attached to it. Thus the subject does not demarcate between fantasy and reality and "lacks an inner structure or symbols mediating and making stable their commerce with reality."⁶ This confusion of good and bad objects resonates with the west's schizoid reaction to the end of the Cold War and the integration of east and west.

In Skuc Gallery's exhibition "What Am I Doing Here?" Sejla Kameric's video installation *Here* (2000) features a static image of a Sarajevo bridge and its surroundings. The image of the bridge is well-known to Sarajevo residents not because it has a particular history, or is even in a well-traveled part of the city, but rather because it is broadcast sporadically on the local television station, like a test pattern of sorts. Americans can draw connections to the American flag waving as the national anthem is played just before the television station signs off at the end of a days' programming. But these signals and associations are not operating in Southeast Europe. So, why the bridge? It holds no socially identifiable meaning, and although it seems like an "inside" joke, it is particularly those on the inside who are confounded. Instead of representing the patriotic cohesion of a state (like the use of the US flag and anthem), the random appearance of this meaningless bridge is a reminder of the

lack of a coherent functioning state and Bosnia and Herzegovina's multiple makeup that (at its best) attempts to link different, antagonistic factions. This seemingly empty image is open to being overloaded with meaning as a hyperreal home or a surreal nowhere.

Kameric's video *American Dream* (2000) made during a residency in Washington, DC, functions in reverse of *Here*. It is the glut of images marking the fictional territory in Washington, DC, of her house, her family, her car, her dog, her friends that reveals an underlying hollowness. The repetition of her format and exaggerated demonstration of belonging becomes manneristic. Despite the straightforward, seemingly amateur, rather banal appearance, its status as a fictional artwork belies a sadness that emerges from its distance from reality—in the gap created by the overdramatization. This work is a voyeuristic exercise, an overly-determined presentation, not a slice of life, thus creating a disconnection from the everyday that it is meant to depict. The interjection of veiled commentary exposes the status of the artist as a visitor. The exceedingly—embarrassingly—long shot following Capitol Hill joggers on the Mall, after only a quick jolt of the camera to point out the Washington Monument, is one such telling moment.

The young Kosovar Albanian artist Sislej Xhafa selects the Ljubljana train station for his performance *Stock Exchange* (2000) as part of Manifesta 3. Dressed in a suit, the artist stands beneath the arrivals/departures board, highly agitated and gesticulating excitedly, yelling out the train schedule to the passersby, frenetically writing notes, and immediately discarding them—as if on the floor of the New York Stock Exchange. The melding of the physical and financial modes of circulation that shape contemporary life highlights succinctly and humorously the tension between reality and fantasy that underpin both systems and allow their interchangeability.

In contrast to these fictional performance videos, the prevalent medium at Manifesta 3 was video documentary. A number of these artists pointed the cameras at their own lives. Bosnian artist Jasmila Zbanic's *After After* (1997) and *Albanian Stories* (1997) by Adrian Paci captured children telling their stories of war. The use of straightforward video recording did not provide the desired immediacy but instead disconnected the stories from a fuller sense of the human being and their life situations. The individualized galleries which housed many of the videos did not provide a flow of visual or experiential connections but instead contributed to a very fragmented layout. This may be, perhaps, an ingenious curatorial innovation relating to the disjointed experience of borderline syndrome. However, it detracted from the physical, spatial experience of the works of art instead of adding a new dimension of understanding.

On the other hand, a more recent documentary by Jasmila Zbanic titled *The Red Boots* (1999) was not included in Manifesta 3 but was screened

in September 2000 at Co.operation: the International Forum for Feminist Art and Theory held in Dubrovnik, Croatia, organized by the Women's Art Center Elektra, Zagreb and Art Workshop Lazareti, Dubrovnik. This work chronicles a woman's search for the remains of her children thought to be buried in a mass grave during the war in Bosnia. The quiet portrait of one of the mother's many unnerving but monotonous treks into the countryside holds a profound tension between recording everyday events and the unfathomable reality that life presents unexpectedly. This renders the patience, perseverance, and strength of her character and that of the man who seeks out hidden gravesites to undertake the dangerous task of proper reburial and identification of the remains. This video bears the mark of a mature artist who has mastered the subtle task of shaping fragments of real life, and who understands that emotional intensity accumulates through restraint.

Nasrin Tabatabai's 1999 video *Old House*, presented at Manifesta 3 is a lively car tour highlighting points of interest in Rotterdam. The video is the result of the collaboration between the artist and Haci Ceyhan, a Turkish man who requested that Tabatabai make the video to send to family and friends at home in Turkey. Haci narrates with pride the visits around Rotterdam to Turkish banks, the Turkish embassy, and a Turkish bakery. From the interior of the car the camera moves through the Dutch architecture to focus on the vault of a Turkish bank or a loaf of freshly-baked Turkish bread. *Old House* does not represent a schizoid split between the two sites and histories or an idealization of either, but rather a nesting of the Turkish home inside the Dutch home.

According to D.W. Winnicott, borderline disorders stem from "a sustained empathic failure in the transitional relationship."⁷ The borderline suffers from a certain lack of consistent care from the mother and does not achieve a sense of "inner security" or of being a "personal agent."⁸ On Haci's metaphorical transitional trek in *Old House* he constructs his own story replete with transitional objects. Winnicott asserted that "transitional objects" are objects that give comfort, feel familiar and seem to be a part of oneself, but are recognized as being apart from the self. The outcome of the process is the realization of the subject as an autonomous entity. Tabatabai and Haci depict three main sites (the bank, the embassy and the bakery) that are strong metaphors for economic security, political power, and nutritional sustenance that are crucial to asserting agency in a new home.

A performance by Maja Bajevic represented through video documentation at Manifesta 3 also depicts the process of creating metaphorical transitional objects. In 1999, the Sarajevo Center for Contemporary Arts, under the direction of Dunja Blazevic presented their Third Annual Exhibition, "Under Construction." With the support of Pro Helvetia, the outdoor exhibition was presented on the scaffolding of the National Gallery of Bosnia and Herzegovina, which was being repaired after the three year siege of the city.

Sarajevo artist Maja Bajevic worked with five women refugees to embroider their patterns directly onto the scaffolding mesh outside the National Museum. For five days, each evening after the workmen finished their jobs, Bajevic and the refugee women of different ages, some from Srebrenica, climbed up to embroider by lamplight. It is important to note that the participating women were paid for this work. *Women at Work* brought handcraft to the fine art museum and women to the site of men's work. It also highlighted a particularly female way of creating a space of home that refugees must perform when they come to a foreign place.⁹ As with Tabatabai's video, the inclusion of this piece in Manifesta 3 presents a transitional alternative to borderline syndrome.

Emptiness of Dispersal & Splitting

Many Southeastern European artists are travelling, creating work in the west, splitting their time, and even living in the west. To a lesser degree, western artists and curators are presenting work in southeast Europe. In his 1986 essay that is an important touchstone for the theoretical framework of the exhibition, Slavoj Žižek explains that the borderline subject gives the impression that he/she suffers from random symptoms because the ego is not integrated into a functioning whole.¹⁰ This dispersed subject is:

'held together' only by (a Hegelian) abstract negativity of undefined unattached anxiety. Unlike positive connection, this anxiety renders only unconnectedness positive; the anxious 'feeling of emptiness' signifies that the subject failed to unify or 'totalize' himself into a homogeneous existential being.¹¹

Danica Dakic, an artist from Bosnia who lives and works in both Dusseldorf and Sarajevo, situates video and audio elegantly in architectural contexts. In a September 2000 screening of *Autoportrait* (1999), two languages and stories emerge from a barely animated bust of the artist projected through an oval round window of a stone building in the Old City of Dubrovnik, Croatia. In this video image, the artist's mouth is doubled, replacing her eyes and enabling her to tell fairytales simultaneously in Bosnian and German. As this disconcerting image obscures recognition of Dakic's face by obliterating the artist's eyes, it also portrays the composite of language, stories, and homes that make up her identity.

The borderline subject can "carry several contradictory libidinal beliefs about an object which are expressed one after another."¹² Although this may seem paradoxical, the borderline person splits the contradictory statements temporally, so that they do not appear problematic to him/her. Yet the situation is still unhealthy because the subject is unable "to integrate different beliefs into a single image of the object,"¹³ and is therefore incapable of engag-

ing in a truly intersubjective relationship. As Otto Kernberg states, the narcissistic personality (which is a strong part of the borderline personality) cannot empathize with human experience in depth, and whether springing from borderline syndrome or not, the narcissist suffers most strongly from emptiness.¹⁴

Narcissism protects emptiness, causes it to exist, and thus, as lining of that emptiness, insures an elementary separation. Without that solidarity between emptiness and narcissism, chaos would sweep away any possibility of distinction, trace, and symbolization, which would in turn confuse the limits of the body, words, the real, and the symbolic.¹⁵

Dakic's self-portrayal replaces her eyes with a doubled mouth, manifesting her thoughts split into two languages. This eery portrait cannot take in her surroundings visually but only speak out fairytales. Dakic's face projected through the window of the building is a ghostlike facade: the doubled (split) mouths cover defensively but do not resolve internal conflict, resulting in a profound sense of emptiness.

On the other hand, Croatian artist Ksenija Turcic is concerned with creating and shaping space—physically, formally, emotionally and psychologically—in her video installations that grow out of sculptural practice. For example her dual projection video installation *Phase* (2001) portrays the faces of a man and a woman each occupying the space of their separate frames. Because of the placement, the two appear to be facing one another and nearly touching, yet they are occupied with wholly different concerns. The woman speaks softly and her eyes move furtively and pensively. Her voice, recounting intimate connections, trails off creating a distance: "I remember each and every one of your..." "I know the meaning of your..." The man impassively completes mundane actions of everyday personal upkeep: he shaves slowly, drinks a glass of water, and eats, accompanied by a soundtrack of his breathing. His solemn self-sufficiency co-exists with her intense attempts at interaction. The tight framing pulls them close, yet their eyes never meet and the distance between their two worlds seems vast. However, the space created here is not a gulf pervaded with melancholy but an affecting and simple observation of different people's needs and actions. The work is dualistic but not essentially binary, as here (counter to the stereotype) the woman employs language but the man is characterized by bodily sounds and gestures. She looks at the camera, whereas his eyes are often cropped out of the frame. Turcic builds, with simple means, a web of emotions and gestures within each character's personal frame.

Maja Bajevic and Danica Dakic's video installation *I love I don't love*

captures the artists in their everyday home settings. Simple separate shots of the women standing on the threshold of an elevator, in front of a window, or reclining on the couch, are accompanied by each woman's comments about what she likes or does not like about her home. Deceptively simple at first, subtle complexities begin to unravel as Bajevic speaks in French or Dakic speaks in German about her feelings for Sarajevo, sometimes in non-descript interior settings; languages mix references, locations swim irresolutely—where are they? As both artists split their lives between their native Sarajevo and a Western European city, the terms “here” and “there,” “home” and “away,” “native tongue” and “foreign language,” carry diminished meaning as binaries in their lives. Yet their mobility yields not a simple whole, but a multiple overlapping that involves the tension of boundaries.

I love I don't love was part of the exhibition “What am I doing here?” This exhibition title, taken from an included work by Damir Niksic, mixes questions of location and identity, but poses location as key. Julia Kristeva explains this primacy of the question “where?” over “who?”:

For the space that engrosses the deject, the excluded, is never *one*, nor *homogeneous*, nor *totalizable*, but essentially divisible, foldable, and catastrophic. A tireless builder, the deject is in short a *stray*.¹⁶

I love I don't love prompts the question of “where,” not “who” because each woman's identity springs from a “divisible and foldable” relationship to binaries such as “home” and “journey,” “mother tongue” and “foreign language.” Yet the answer to the question of “who?” is built precisely because these binaries retain their distinction, making their fluid interaction even more frictionous: Bajevic's and Dakic's characters exert their subjectivity in this piece through their continuous rehearsal of critical judgments as they distinguish what they love or don't love about their complex relationship to home.

In both *Phase* and *I love I don't love*, complex human characters are created out of experiences of dislocation or disconnectedness. These personas that fight emptiness evoke Julia Kristeva's support for the notion of identity as a work in progress. She states that it is useful, “to trigger a discourse where his own ‘emptiness’ and her ‘out-of-placeness’ become essential elements, indispensable ‘characters’ if you will, of a *work in progress*. What is at stake is turning the crisis into a *work in progress*,” especially one that involves imagination.¹⁷

Belgrade-based photographer Vesna Pavlovic charts the progress of these characters of “emptiness” and “out-of-placeness” in her ongoing series *Star Hotel 2000* and in her photojournalistic black and white photographs seen in newspapers around Europe. Reading these two bodies of work in

conversation evokes a provocative sense of the life of transition in Serbia and that of a travelling artist.

Some of the empty hotel rooms in *Star Hotel 2000* are sparse environments suffused with warm yellow or cool blue light, while others are decorated lushly with dark woods, hot oranges and reds, thick drapery and plush beds. In each case, Pavlovic creates stunning images that are purposely uninviting. Eerily devoid of emotional presence, the rooms could be anywhere—in the east or west, in a cold or hot climate; they do not reveal any clues about their specific situation or events that go on just outside the frame. Because of this lack of particularity, they are never “here,” but instead insist on being at a distance. Decidedly not at home, these photographs are portraits of empty frozen moments in the flux of contemporary mobility.

Pavlovic's documentary photographs provide an emotional counterpoint. In October 2000 the prominent Berlin-based newspaper *Die Zeit*, featured Pavlovic's photographs taken in the days of the revolution in Belgrade. These images show the excitement of the overthrow of the Milosevic regime without the spectacle or bravado typical of journalism. With less emphasis on the heat of the moment and more interest in people's everyday lives, their strong human presence portrays a feeling of solid endurance.

Positivization of the Void

Drawing on Lacan's notion of the *objet petit a*, Zizek explains:

The integration of the image of the object as a collection of his or her 'imaginary' characteristics implies some unimaginable aspect, a symbolic designation of a performative nature which cannot be justified by means of the object's positive characteristics.¹⁸

It is not possible for the viewer to grasp an integrated image or experience of Tomo Savic-Gecan's *Untitled 2000* architectural intervention for Manifesta 3. This might be possible only upon multiple viewings over time and only if the viewer pieces together the changing conditions of the work that he/she has experienced physically and perceptually over this time span. Walking into what appears to be a simple empty room or small gallery space merely sets up the conditions for experiencing the work. The work itself is conjured only if the viewer returns to the space to take another look. Perhaps waiting long enough in the space for the dimensions to be changed by the imperceptibly moving wall would yield an art object. Yet because the physical change to the gallery space is so gradual, to recognize even that a change had been made cannot be unravelled by a continuous line of unfolding events. An ongoing process of watching or inhabiting the space will not be productive, for its meaning is not based on presence or knowledge. An abrupt return or re-evalu-

ation is necessary, for it is the discontinuity of the experience of the work which allows it to unfold. The piece exists somewhere between the physical experience of the work, the imagination of the space at times when the viewer is not present, and the impossibility of truly knowing the work as a whole—for it is the process that we *must not* experience that constitutes the presence of the work.

The importance of return, a process of relocation as a context operating inside and referring outside the work, and the interchange of presence and absence of the viewer and the object, are all central to his oeuvre. In other project, he has reversed doorways in gallery spaces, relocated gallery walls in the forest, spread colored tape to create new boundary lines on the floor of a basketball court, switched the office and exhibition area of a commercial gallery, opened a private room to become part of an arts organization's exhibition space, and conceived works to be accessed only by phone. In the process of producing the work, it is the viewer not the artist who reveals what is left unsaid under appearances.¹⁹

The Answer without a Question

The videos of Croatian artist Renata Poljak weave a subtle commentary on the younger generation's relation to political and social tradition with theatrical and autobiographical tales. In her early piece *I the Housewife* (1996), Poljak is filmed underwater, outfitted in a wetsuit and oxygen tank, as she painstakingly carries out mundane daily household chores like washing and ironing clothes in frustrated Bruce Naumanesque style. Poljak grew up in Split, on the coast of Croatia, attended art school in Nantes, France, and lives currently in Nice. In her video *Souvenirs (Memories)* (1999), Poljak narrates, in French, her recollection of writing in Croatian as a child, composing the words Tito and Tata (meaning Father in Croatian) nearly identically. The video continues with her writing and speaking, "Tito, Tata, Tito, Tata" in a hypnotic repetitive rhythm. The last frames show Poljak dancing, carefree, around her studio to techno music. Poljak conflates the generic name for the personal father with the proper name of the national father, and simultaneously mixes two languages, pointing to the nostalgia that surrounds the memory of Tito, and the uncertainty of his legacy for a new, and partially dispersed, generation.

This undecidability turns into absurdist anxiety in *Jump* (2000) filmed in Nice, France. This piece was projected in September 2000 on the medieval city walls of Dubrovnik at the edge of the sea as part of Co.operation; it was also shown in the exhibition "A Small Country for a Big Vacation" in Ljubljana. In *Jump*, fast-cutting editing heightens Poljak's rhythmic mutterings and trepidation as she paces, trance-like, back and forth on a diving board in her bathing suit and cap. Against a backdrop of calm clear blue sky and the lulling sound of crashing waves, the nagging ghosts that tag along on vacation are

revealed, as in fear of her makeup smearing, she simply cannot take the plunge.

The borderline marks the place where the elusive slippage that is desire breaks, and the subject becomes hysterical because despite all the answers, he "does not know what he wants," finally opening up to the desire.²⁰ At this point, the hysterical borderline subject addresses the lack of meaning of the answer by asking the hysterical question that the healthy subject does not open him/herself to: "what do the answers without questions mean?"²¹

The Belgrade-based artist collective skart have been attempting to treat this symptom of contemporary society by distributing their *Additional Survival Coupons* on the streets of Belgrade, Stockholm, in the outskirts of Berlin, the countryside of Yugoslavia, and New York since 1997. Made of rough waste paper in different hues, the free coupons are redeemable for such things as: "miracles," "fear," "money," "orgasms," "word," "relaxation," "suck," "against," "taboo," "power," and "more." They are printed in several languages and are designated with recommended dosages, predicting that after prolonged use, the recipient may develop a craving for new coupons.

Reminiscent of the ration slips of socialist times or the junk mail of capitalism, these coupons bypass any possibility of carrying value assigned by either of these systems. Skart picks another route by giving free scraps of paper that may or may not spark the economy, cure social ills, or create new desires. The coupons point to the impossibility of holding any value beyond their rough texture and stamp-like design. Yet, simultaneously redeemable for things that rest at the core of life, they are gifts to the viewer imbued with rare humor and spirit. Confronted with open-ended indicators of meaning, the audience receiving the coupons decides how to define and use these objects. These gifts, these answers that stand in multiple relationships to basic human questions, spark reactions from the audience that relate to their larger social situations. For example, in the countryside of Serbia, where not much comes for free, the artists were mobbed violently. On the New York City subway, where people are overloaded with stimuli, the artists failed to get many people to accept their gift.

Globalized Chameleons

Contemporary society's emphasis on action over reflection leaves people unable to represent their experiences to themselves—to make the time and space for psychic life. Julia Kristeva observes of "contemporary man:"

Living in a piecemeal and accelerated space and time, he often has trouble acknowledging his own physiognomy; left without a sexual, subjective, or moral identity, this amphibian is a being of boundaries, a borderline, or a 'false self'—a body that acts, often even without the joys of such performative drunkenness.²²

Lacking the ability to make meaning, we cannot even enjoy the results of our obsession with action.

Sandra Sterle, who splits her time between the Netherlands and Croatia, attends to this dilemma by creating an abundance of fantastic and enigmatic characters in her practice of video, media installation, web projects, and performance. For Sterle, the identity of the medium can be multiple, as she explores how the lives of ephemeral, process-oriented works of art are affected by sophisticated modes of documentation. In her work, technology and tradition often inform each other to reflect on human emotions and fears as well as the tension and coexistence of traditional and contemporary ways of life.

Her video *Round Around* (1998) depicts the artist in traditional Croatian peasant dress frolicking around a huge tree. She runs around and around and around, constantly on the move, never escaping the frame or reaching any destination. Held in a timeless present, the heavy sound of her breath and the grass crunching underfoot hints at something more than playing in the country or playing at her character. There is a tense coexistence of tradition and the present day, rural and urban, rhythmic pagan rituals and frenzied contemporary routines.

Sterle's online project *Izlet/Ausflug/Gitta* (2000), included in the exhibition "A Small Country for a Big Vacation," provides the perfect holiday experience. Rejecting the web's promise to transport us to exotic faraway destinations while remaining at our computer, Sterle humorously takes us to the place where we already are. Consciously avoiding visual stimulation and interactivity, she presents a progression of black screens with simple white lettering with such phrases as, "you have been around many places," "so relax now," "and concentrate on yourself," "your body and soul."

At the time of Manifesta 3, Belgrade artist Milica Tomic was exhibiting her work in a solo exhibition travelling in Europe. In September 2000 she presented her video installation *I am Milica Tomic* (1998) at Co.operation. Tomic gazes out strongly at the viewer and repeatedly states, "I am Milica Tomic," each time in a different language and each time followed by the proclamation, "I am ____" filling in the nationality assigned to the language she is speaking. Between each designation of identity, a bloody wound appears on her face, shoulders, chest, or back. These wounds erupt into view, administered by an invisible hand. Spinning ever so slowly as the video progresses, she presents her agglomeration of wounds. At certain intervals these are erased by a jump in the video editing only to start the tortured process over again.

Tomic shifts through a multitude of fictions, never settling into any one of the random enunciations. Yet, by not claiming one particular identity the statements are paradoxically not fictions, but reveal an underlying truth that the attempt to name a singular identity inevitably leads to the eruption of a

haunting reminder of another secluded layer of ourselves. In Tomic's case, in the 1980s in Serbia, any attempt to identify oneself too individually and not as part of the collective Serb Orthodox Christian identity was considered a genetic defect, a wound on the healthy body of the Serb community. Tomic explains that she decided "to privately keep the identity of an Orthodox Serbian, while publicly speaking from the position of a wound"²³ through her public denial of her national and religious identity. Paradoxically, she allows these two things which seem contradictory to *co-exist* by erecting a strong *boundary* between her personal religious and ethnic identity, and the political attempts to co-opt and employ this for public, nationalistic ends. Theodor Adorno's comments about society's construction of femininity as "natural" bear an oblique relation to Tomic's imagined identities, thus highlighting another layer of social manipulation and self-deception specific to women:

Whatever is in the context of bourgeois delusion called nature, is merely the scar of social mutilation... The woman who feels herself a wound when she bleeds knows more about herself than the one who imagines herself a flower because that suits her husband. The lie consists not only in the claim that nature exists where it has been tolerated and adapted, but what passes for nature in civilization is by its very substance furthest from all nature, its own self-chosen object. The femininity which appeals to instinct, is always exactly what every woman has to force herself by violence—masculine violence—to be: a she-man.²⁴

Permissiveness and Defense

Similar to Julia Kristeva's amphibian is Slavoj Žižek's chameleon. Both suffering from contemporary maladies associated with the emptiness of narcissism, they are unable to recognize themselves. The amphibian does not have time for reflection, and the chameleon must not be recognized (as itself) in order to survive.

In the 19th century the invisible hand of the market was supreme; the early 20th century was the era of the invisible hand of institutions. Now it is time for the reign of the chameleon, an individual who can change along with the rules of the game rather than adhere to a deeper binding symbolic law.²⁵

Socioeconomic reality of late capitalism corresponds to the transition of 'organization man' to 'pathological Narcissus.'" This is manifested as a "transformation of bureaucratic capitalistic society of the 1940s and 50s into a society described as 'permissive.'²⁶

In the *Manifesta 3 Newsletter 1* (Spring 2000) Slovenian artist and theorist Marina Gržinić's article, "Don't ask what Europe can do for you; ask

what you can do for Europe!" takes up recent Slovenian cultural production and the problem of permissiveness in relation to an expanded definition of territory—seen in geographical, economic, and psychological terms. In his article in the same publication, "What Do We Do to Ourselves When We Want to Do Something For 'Europe'?" Slovenian theorist Tomaz Mastnak pursues these issues of permissiveness and the flow of global capital in relation to politics and the state.

Slaven Tolj highlights these issues with reserved force in his January 2001 performance at Exit Art's presentation of "Body and the East," curated by Zdenka Badinovac, Director of the Museum of Modern Art, Ljubljana. The video documentation of the performance was exhibited subsequently in Exit Art's "Danger" show in March 2001. The video, bisected by the room's corner, captures Croatian artist Slaven Tolj simply sitting at a table, drinking. Over the course of the ten-minute performance Tolj mixes together equal proportions of full bottles of Russian Stolichnaya vodka and the American favorite Jack Daniels whisky—and proceeds to drink. This piece was an adaptation of his performance *Untitled (In Expectation of Willi Brandt)* that he first performed in 1997 in Sarajevo in which he mixed together brandies from Croatia (Dalmatian herbal) and Bosnia (plum).

The "danger" of Tolj's actions appears deceptively easy for an American audience to unfold. The piece comments on the politics of the wars of the former Yugoslavia in the 90s, which brought destruction to his hometown of Dubrovnik and the city where he went to art school, Sarajevo. The mixing of the two traditional drinks produces chaos in his system, an extension of the war's siege on his body and his experience—which previously had not had difficulties digesting the mixing of various traditions in everyday life.

The replacement of the two types of alcohols for his performance in the US signals a shift in specific location and audience. However, the performance's relationship to the current moment in history versus that of the 1990s is not a singular shift but a duplicative fold: East-West or US-Russian relations, highlighted in Tolj's performance, were also implicit in the Yugoslav wars of the 1990s. The use of different alcohols most significantly points to his individual body's relationship to the layering of these factors when the global perspective is put into play. Mixing, duplication, bifurcation, all wreak havoc on Tolj's body and he collapses about an hour after the performance, and is taken to the hospital emergency room.

But what is the danger of exhibiting the video of this performance and its aftermath in New York? The danger to the artist's body is certainly manifold in terms of the symbolic and the real, but the documentation of Tolj's masochistic actions also present an imaginary danger to the US viewer. Even more than the danger of the perpetuation of the western practice of framing work created by Eastern artists in terms of predetermined narratives of lack of disci-

pline, excessive behavior, and the legacy of violence, there is the question of responsibility. People attending the performance were faced with the disquieting experience of having to work out what their responsibility was in relation to Tolj's incapacitation. However, when watching the video, the viewer is severed from the haptic relationship to the artist and freed of immediate implication. Thus, the simple act of including this video representation of the performance may be the first danger.

The problem must be pursued further. On one hand, the video allows the viewer distance so that the breakdown of Tolj's body—in physical, metaphorical, and political terms—is his problem, a Balkan problem that does not affect the West. However, it is in this mediatized space of separation that the question of responsibility, on a personal and political level, looms large. The absence of the need to deal with immediate physical duty is replaced by the much larger problem of the role of the viewer, and of Western structures, in the sickness—now not specifically of Tolj, but of the political and economic instability in Southeast Europe. This inordinate uncomfortableness is the other and real danger posed to the viewer.

In Zlatko Kopljar's installations and performances, this danger is palpable, even exhilarating. The interaction between the performers, often himself included, bleeds into the space of the audience in a mixture of Brecht and Artaud. On a summer evening, people strolling around the walled medieval coastal city of Dubrovnik became the unwitting performers in his understated installation *Shame* (1996). As part of the exhibition "Otok/Island" organized by the Art Workshop Lazareti and the Institute of Contemporary Art in Zagreb, Kopljar covered the entire grand expanse of a famous church staircase with vast sheets of delicate white cigarette paper. Wrapping the undulating stone ornamentation of the steps, the installation imposed a sheer modernist precision that provided its own luminous purity. However, as groups of people began their evening ritual of strolling on the steps, their traipsing up and down soiled and trampled the fragile, clean paper without their notice. Kopljar's subtle but powerful use of people's presence at this religious site in Dubrovnik—a popular tourist destination that suffered severe bombardment during the war and is still working to recover—poses a deeply valuable and unnerving insight into the unconscious implications of responsibility that entangle all participants in society. With this and other projects, the organizers and participants in "Otok/Island" were already exploring in 1996 the problems of isolation and connectivity that Manifesta 3 took up in 2000.

Andreja Kuluncic takes a different approach to critical commentary on individual and institutional attitudes to responsible use of public space in her action *Enjoy the Beach* (2000). This work was part of the exhibition "A Small Country for a Big Vacation," in which artists created thoughtful and enjoyable works reflecting on various implications of leisure activities in post-

war and post-socialist Croatia. Kuluncic's work took place at toll booths as drivers waited in traffic lines on their way to Croatia's famed coast for their summer holiday. A fixed point amidst the flux of travellers, she disbursed garbage bags to the drivers in an attempt to reduce pollution of the coast. Now that the tourists are coming back to the area, which was under siege during the early and mid-nineties, the action raises questions of people's feeling of ownership, belonging, and responsibility to locales with which they feel only fleeting connection and which are mere accessories to their holiday pleasure.

Questions of responsibility and public space as well as the areas of overlap between art, architecture, and design, infuse Joze Barsi's *Public Toilet*, which he built with his students. He created the private two-seated work in response to the need for public restroom facilities at an active artists' community in a former army barracks in Ljubljana. The artwork has been in use for a few years and in Spring 2000, Barsi created another work, *The Offer*, in which he proposed to exchange the artwork with a collector willing to maintain the toilet for two years. Through his practice, Barsi smartly and subtly mixes the languages of fine art and utilitarian design, monied art market collecting and service labor, responsibility of communal life and that of private ownership. The Museum of Modern Art in Ljubljana acquired the piece out of necessity because it opened a new gallery space in the barracks to hold its new permanent collection of work by contemporary Eastern European artists.

Conclusion

The presence of Manifesta in Ljubljana sparked intense discussion of recent issues surrounding contemporary art in Southeast Europe, only some of which have been touched on in this article. In the spirited publication *Manifesta in our Backyard* (December 2000), the Center for Contemporary Art in Ljubljana compiled local artists' writings, curatorial studies students' responses, critical reviews, in-depth considerations of the artworks in the exhibition, and insightful comments on the changing practice of curating. Vibrant contemporary arts centers throughout southeast Europe have been working intensively with good results over the past few years to provide resources for emerging artists and also arts managers. In addition, they have been creating platforms for discussion that are crucial for cultivating the substantial art scene that exists there. As artists and curators in Sarajevo see the situation: it is people from the outside who are rebuilding the infrastructure of the political system, but it is the role of the artists of the city to rebuild their *home*.

The question, "Where Do You Draw the Line?" lingers on the back cover of the Manifesta catalogue. That Europe is, paradoxically, an agglomeration of frontiers, complicates issues surrounding internal affairs, outside intervention, and cooperation, in this time of continuing political and economic transition. Slovenian artist Marjetica Potrc points out that, "people build walls

around themselves to bring order and borders closer to their bodies."²⁷ There is a strong human urge to forge one's own territory of home, even in the contemporary moment when mobility is so revered and especially when physical, cultural and psychological dislocation are a complicated reality for many people from Southeast Europe.

The subjects of Czech artist Roman Ondak's *Antinomads* (2000) travel while never leaving home. This series of postcards shown and distributed at Apex Art in New York in Fall 2000 depicts people who do not travel. However, Ondak gives them the humorous opportunity to circulate virtually without ever leaving their homes—through the old fashioned postal system.

Notes

- 1 Alex Tarnopolsky, "Borderline Disorders: A British Point of View," in *Handbook of Borderline Disorders* ed. Daniel Silver and Michael Rosenbluth (Madison, CT: International Universities Press, Inc., 1992), 186.
- 2 Ibid., 186.
- 3 Ibid., 185.
- 4 Ibid., 186.
- 5 Ibid., 186.
- 6 Ibid., 187.
- 7 Ibid., 190.
- 8 Ibid., 192.
- 9 N.A., *Under Construction* (Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina: Soros Center for Contemporary Arts, 1999), exhibition card for Maja Bajevic.
- 10 Slavoj Zizek, "'Pathological Narcissus' as a Socially Mandatory Form of Subjectivity," in *Manifesta 3: European Biennial of Contemporary Art: Borderline Syndrome, Energies of Defense* (Ljubljana, Slovenia: Cankarjev dom Cultural and Congress Centre, 2000), 235.
- 11 Ibid., 236.
- 12 Otto F. Kernberg, *Borderline Conditions and Pathological Narcissism* (Northvale, New Jersey: Jason Aronson, 1975), 29.
- 13 Zizek, 237.
- 14 Kernberg, 218-9.
- 15 Ibid., 220.
- 16 Julia Kristeva, "An Exile Who Asks, 'Where?'" in *The Portable Kristeva*, ed. Kelly Oliver (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), 235.
- 17 Julia Kristeva, "On Eccentric Seeming: Imagination as Process" in *The Portable Kristeva*, 177-8.
- 18 Zizek, 245.
- 19 Julia Kristeva, *Sense and Nonsense of Revolt: The Powers and Limits of Psychoanalysis* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), 18. This revealing freedom from appearance is like the process of revolt, or overturning, that Kristeva attributes to authors Aragon, Sartre, and Barthes. She sees imagination as revolt, and "freedom [as] an imaginary experience that is a violent

- experience." 167.
- 20 Zizek, 252-3.
- 21 Zizek, 252.
- 22 Julia Kristeva, *New Maladies of the Soul* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), 7.
- 23 Milica Tomič, *Milica Tomic* (Innsbruck, Austria: Galerie im Taxispalais, 2000), 43.
- 24 Theodor Adorno, *Minima Moralia: Reflections from Damaged Life* tenth ed. (New York: Verso 1997), 95-96.
- 25 Zizek, 248-250.
- 26 Ibid., 248-250.
- 27 Marjetica Potrc, "What's in the Cities," in *Manifesta 3 Newsletter 1* (Ljubljana, Slovenia: Cankarjev dom Cultural and Congress Centre, 2000), 7.

Contributors

Ciaran Bennett is the leading art critic in Dublin.

Katherine Carl is a Ph.D. student at State University of New York, Stony Brook.

Jean Fisher is Research Associate in Visual Culture at Middlesex University and a writer for *Artforum*.

Donald Kuspit is Professor of Art History and Philosophy at State University of New York, Stony Brook.

Howard Risatti is Professor of Art History at Virginia Commonwealth University.

John Walker was Reader in Art and Design History at Middlesex University until his retirement in 1999. His most recent book, written with Rita Hatton, is *Supercollector: A Critique of Charles Saatchi* (London: Ellipsis, 2000).

Morris Yarowsky is Professor of Painting and Printmaking at Virginia Commonwealth University.

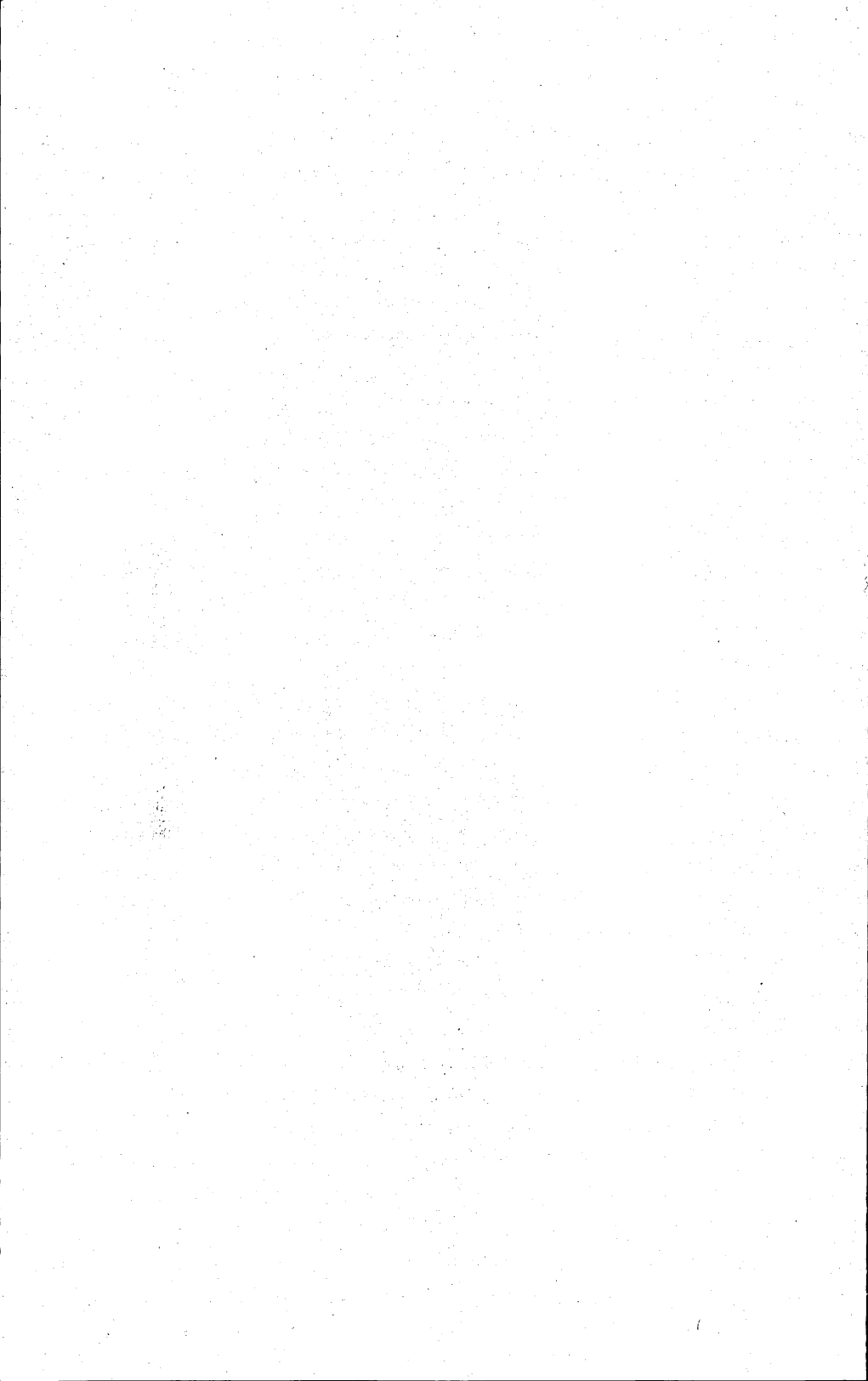
Art Criticism

Founding Co-Editors	Lawrence Alloway and Donald B. Kuspit
Editor	Donald B. Kuspit
Advisors	James Rubin Mel Pekarsky
Managing Editor	Katherine Carl
Business Editor	John Sanders

Art Criticism is published by:
Department of Art
State University of New York at Stony Brook
Stony Brook, NY 11794-5400

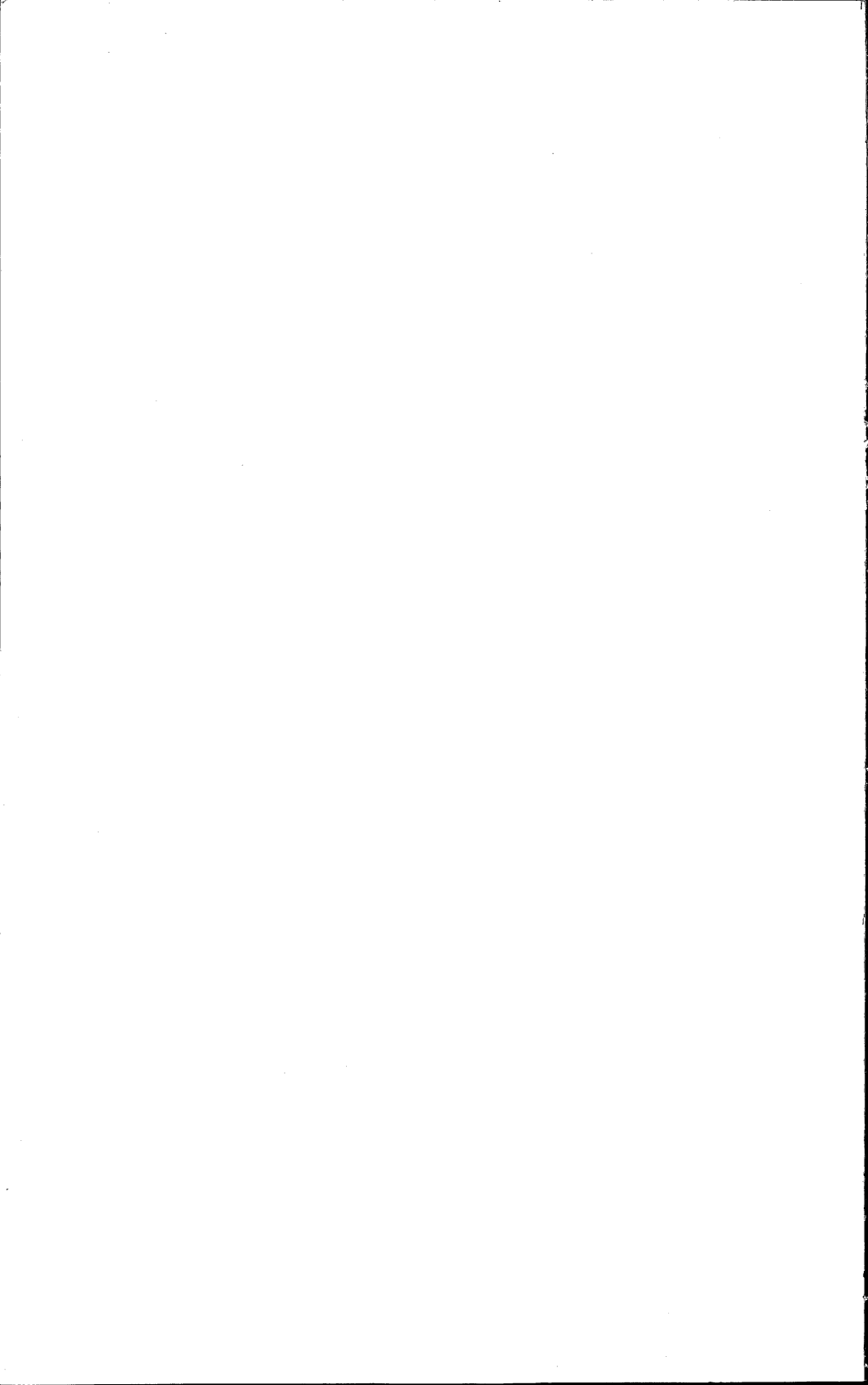
Prospective contributors are asked to send abstracts. However, if a manuscript is submitted, please include a self-addressed stamped envelope for its return. Manuscripts accepted for publication must be submitted on a PC computer disk. Please contact the managing editor for a style sheet.

Subscriptions are \$20 per volume (two issues) for institutions and \$15 per volume for individuals in the continental United States (\$20 outside the continental U.S.). Back issues are available at the rate of \$10 per issue.



Printed in the United States
1798





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

Non-Profit Org.
U. S. Postage
Paid
Permit #65
Stony Brook, NY
11790

