VOL. I, NO. 1 SPRING 1979

Art Criticism

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Published quarterly by:
Department of Art
State University of New York at Stony Brook
Long Island, NY 11794

No unsolicited manuscripts will be accepted without a return stamped envelope.
Subscriptions: $3.50/single issue, $10/year.

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The editors wish to thank the Stony Brook Foundation for its gracious support.

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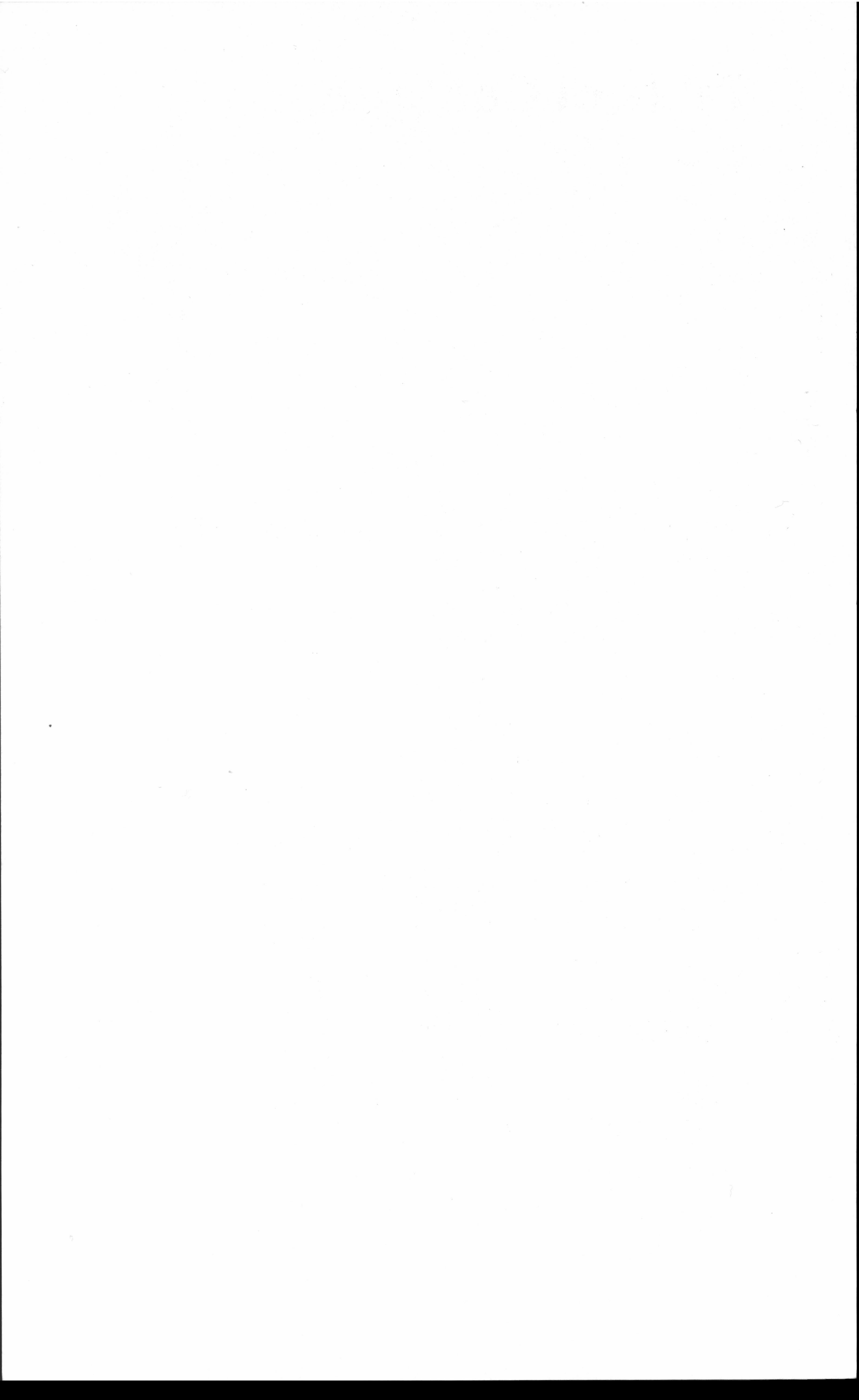

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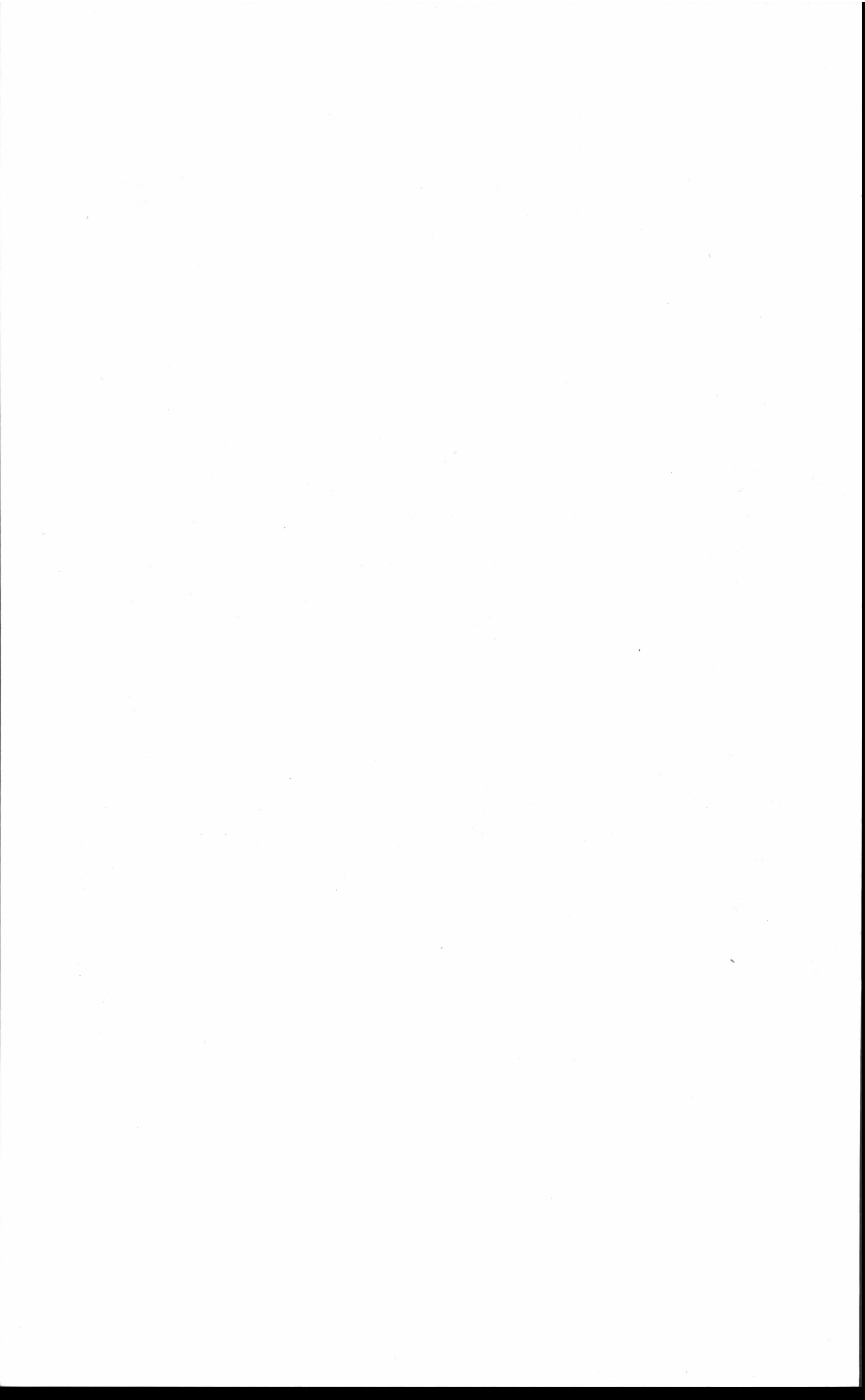


Editorial

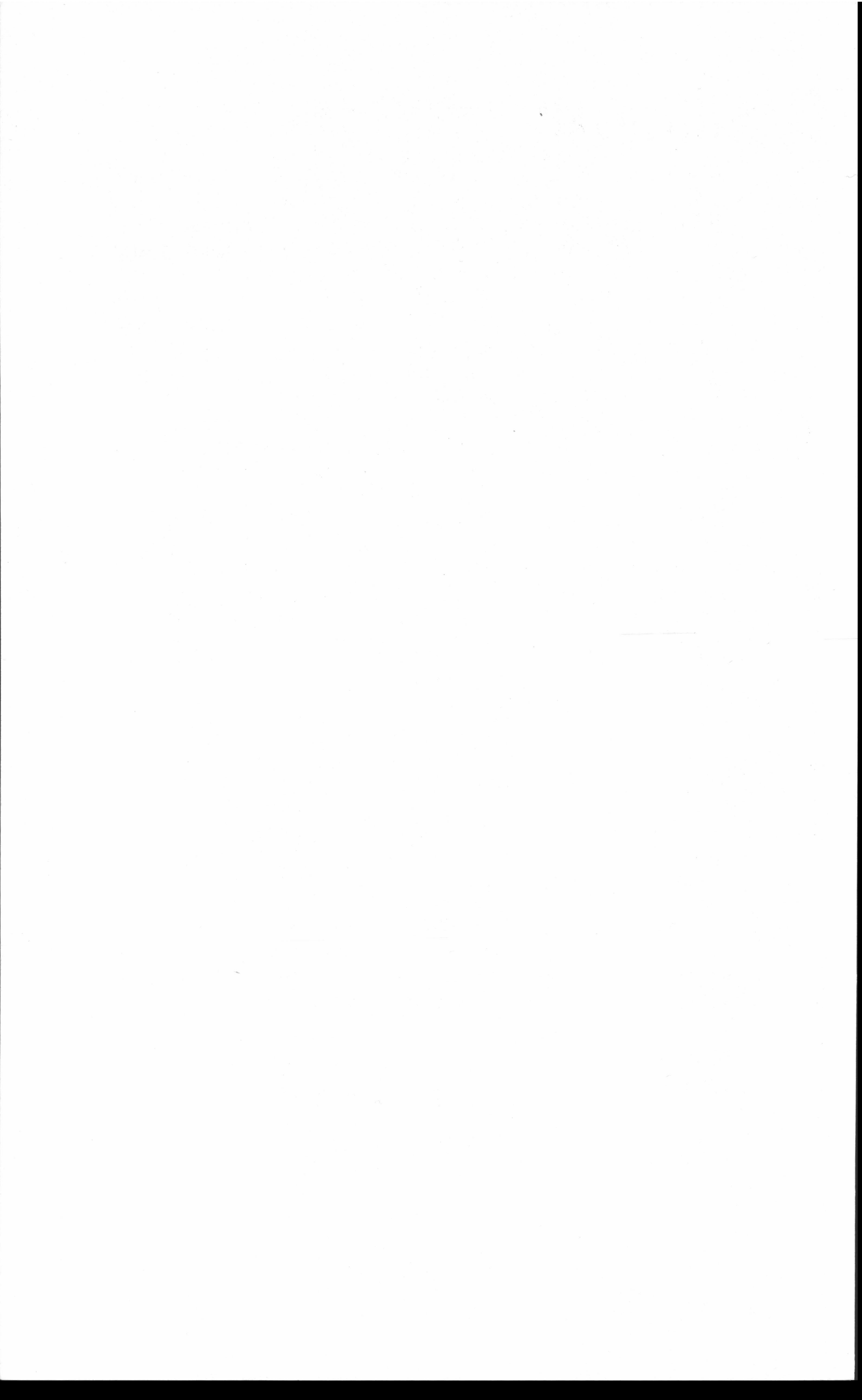
Art Criticism *is the outcome of the editors' dissatisfaction with published criticism. The title of the journal refers to an extension of the practice of art criticism, involving the publication of studies, such as Matthew Baigell's article on Philip Pearlstein, which view the artist in a context different from that in which he usually rests. However, the aspect of the title that has been most noticed is the implicit reference to art criticism* as a subject matter. *By this we mean the study of individual critics, of groups, and of ideas in the history of art criticism. Lawrence Alloway's piece argues that critics have responded negatively to their chief opportunity, the abundance of subjects. Irving Sandler, who discusses recent practice in terms of the interface of art history and art criticism, also raises the numerical problem. Donald Kuspit discusses the independence and responsibilities of the art critic, emphasizing the editorial policy of* Art Criticism. *We shall publish no reviews cued by the art gallery or museum exhibition schedules, considering this resource very well covered. Our contents will not reflect the present exhibition program, but act as an index of the ideas of writers working on subjects of their own choice.*

Art criticism is a richer and more various field than is usually realized. It includes, e.g., Félix Fénéon, the context of whose relation with Seurat is discussed here by Joan Halperin, and Thomas B. Hess, whose early criticism is considered by David Craven. Fénéon's attempts to match visual and verbal communication is relevant today, and a study is planned of Art News' *so-called poetic art criticism, which appeared under Hess' editorship, by such writers as John Ashberry, Frank O'Hara, Elaine de Kooning, and Jack Kroll. This, one of a series to be called "Review of Reviews," will appear in an early number of* Art Criticism. *John Dillenberger's re-review of William Rubin's first book,* Modern Sacred Art at Assy, *compares the theological patronage of post-war art with later requirements of art and religion. ("Re-Reviews," planned as a complement to "Review of Reviews," inspects sources of ideas and changes of opinion.)*

If Art Criticism *meets some of its editors' hopes for it, we shall be able to claim the appearance of some art criticism, with subjects arising from the writers' or editors' decisions, rather than the art market's. Articles on individual critics and on current groups and tendencies will lead towards the adequate history of art criticism so badly needed in relation to art and in relation to the literature of other disciplines.*

L.A.

D.B.K.



Pearlstein's People

BY MATTHEW BAIGELL

. . . our most perceptive minds have distinguished themselves from our popular spokesmen by concentrating upon the dark other half of the situation. . . .

Harry Levin, The Power of Blackness: Hawthorne, Poe, Melville

Philip Pearlstein is certainly among the most perceptive artists in our own time to have probed the dark other half of the situation. Within a surprisingly narrow range of thematic material—the draped and undraped human body posed in indoor settings—he has created some of the most disturbing and truthful images of modern life, a self-portrait of a generation. But his paintings of anonymous nudes and his portraits of married couples can also claim a distinguished heritage in the history of American art and might even have played a role in alerting us to that heritage. For Pearlstein's paintings form an important chapter in the still unwritten history of American paintings of the isolated, the depressed and the alienated.

Although their shared characteristics still need precise definition, such works can be traced back at least as far as the immediate pre-Revolutionary War period. Perhaps the earliest examples are

John Singleton Copley's somber portraits of New York women painted in the early 1770's in whose faces, unlike those of the sturdy and more familiar New Englanders, one may find presentiments of the disturbing events which were to occur later in the decade. In succeeding years, however, portraitists found in their sitters pleasant and more amiable moods. Occasionally a face might glare at the viewer, but the posture or bearing of a sitter rarely suggested that he or she was troubled by personal agonies.

It was not until the end of the nineteenth century that the recording of such moods grew common, during an era considered a watershed in the history of American culture when doubt and despair first scarred the American character.[1] Perhaps George Fuller's hallucinated youngsters of the 1880's who sit or stand in outdoor settings, are interpreted too personally to be considered part of a general tendency, but, during the next decade, several artists completed portraits characterized by qualities of sadness and even pain. The great majority of these paintings were of women. Artists such as Thomas Dewing and Edmund Tarbell as well as several other Tonalists and Impressionists painted middle-class women sitting in interiors disengaged from any activity. Often they stare blankly into space and, unlike their French sisters, seem alone and self-absorbed even when friends and family are present. Getting dressed up appears to be the purposeless principal activity. The succession of seemingly delightful sunny afternoons, a burden and a bore for most of them, was to be passed as mindlessly as possible. That the women were aware of their ornamental role in society and desolated by their inability to overcome it was best conveyed by Thomas Eakins' compelling studies of his female friends and acquaintances.

During the period between the two world wars, several artists explored a similar range of themes, their focus shifting from the caged middle-class ladies of the turn-of-the-century to less genteel and often self-supporting, but equally helpless, women and also men. In the hands of these artists, the Edenic sheen glossing American culture, which the Tonalists and Impressionists still honored, was dissolved entirely. Edward Hopper, the most sensitive observer among the painters of the interwar generation, recorded the psychological isolation of lower-middle-class urbanities throughout his career.[2] His melancholy observations of sexually aroused, but unfulfilled, women are among the most important forerunners of Pearlstein's figures even though the latter are more passive and appear to have lost their erotic charge. Artists such as the Soyer brothers and even Grant Wood portrayed people victimized by their environments, the former showing the personal devastation caused by the Depression and the latter the bitterness between people that Sherwood Anderson, a fellow Middle Westerner, found endemic in American Life.[3]

During the 1950's, Richard Diebenkorn also showed the loneliness and isolation of individuals in a group of paintings which avoided specific environmental and social factors. These are important works because Diebenkorn, in concentrating on an interior, existential sense of loneliness, suggested that isolation and withdrawal were now part of the modern human condition rather than the result of specific forces in society. Works such as these provide the immediate ancestry for Pearlstein's figures.

(The tradition to which Pearlstein belongs shades off into one closer to a sinister Dostoevskian vision of anxiety and torment, and would include the works of artists such as George Tooker and Gregory Gillespie. Their paintings describe the pathology of alienation, of an escape into another kind of spiritual world removed from the one inhabited by Pearlstein's still "normal" people. A third tradition lies at the opposite extreme and reflects more positive values than the other two. This tradition includes John Sloan and Alex Katz whose middle-class subjects are physically healthy and psychologically uncomplicated.)

Because of the freer sexual mores of the last 20 years as well as the willingness of married couples to reveal the nature of their relationship more readily, Pearlstein's paintings reflect the customs of their times as, say, Dewing's and Hopper's of theirs. As with the other artists, the extent to which Pearlstein has projected himself into his portrait of his period is, of course, unknown. One never knows how much is private obsession or terse commentary, autobiography or inspired observation. This ambiguity is not lessened by the minimally appointed interiors in which he places his sitters. We see the figures and little else. Unlike protagonists in a novel about whom we may often speak without worrying about the novelist (Don Quixote lives independently of Cervantes), Pearlstein's figures are, at the same time, extensions of the artist's personality, independent beings and creatures of the viewer's fantasies.

For example, I have always found Pearlstein's paintings of nudes to be wildly ambivalent. He forces the viewer to focus on genitals by placing them centrally on the canvas (even in paintings of dressed figures). This emphasis on genitalia makes the paintings as sexually charged as paintings can be, yet the images are never erotic. The negation of eroticism depends on the combination of at least three factors. First, usually nothing is happening. Individual figures seem remote. Figures in paintings containing two women or heterosexual couples, even when touching, do not relate to each other. There is an absence of feeling, not just between the figures, but between the viewer and models and the artist and models. Second, Pearlstein presents odd and not necessarily the most seductive views of his figures. Third, they are often unattractive and painted in unappealing ways. Flesh hangs and sags, more so in women than in men. Colors are harsh. As a result,

the sexual aspect is less that of either pleasant memory or expectant participation than of incipient hostility at worst or indifference at best. Or, what is probably the case, the viewer is reduced to a spectator's role since the figures maintain their physical and psychological distance from the viewer (and from each other). Perhaps the viewer cannot or does not want to enter into the world of the figures. This is voyeurism, then. Pearlstein's figures do not acknowledge anybody's presence nor are they posed for sensual delectation as figures by artists as varied as Titian and Ingres. The viewer is an intruder. He is allowed to look, but at the same time is repelled. It is as though the expected rapport between viewer and figures becomes too difficult to handle easily. Either Pearlstein is revealing something about himself or he is commenting on a society which desperately needs its sex manuals, or both.

On the other hand, one may argue that Pearlstein, in denying eroticism even though he focuses on erotic parts of the body, might be contributing to human liberation. Nudity need not always be associated with sexual activity. The artist, after all, is not obligated to paint sexual fantasies for the public. As he once said, "I'm concerned with the human figure as a found object."[4] In the paintings of heterosexual nude couples, where the possibility of pleasant sexual encounter, or encounter of any sort, appears remote, this might be interpreted as a very enlightened position. Heretofore, American men have been offered two primary models for physical contact: aggressive mock violence between men (locker-room, jock stuff) and raw sexual contact.[5] Pearlstein seems to suggest an alternative: emotional closeness brought about by physical proximity. But a casual glance at his couples suggests that their implied sexual impotence is derived from their emotional impotence. The implied fear of sexual encounter obviously indicates resistance to emotional communication, or vice versa, and without one there is little likelihood of the other. His figures not only lack the will to use their bodies, they cannot establish contact with each other on any level, sexual or otherwise. Nor, in the end, can we. We remain voyeurs of scenes in which nothing will happen and we do not always know if the sense of ungivingness is ours, theirs or Pearlstein's.

Should we have sympathy for the plight of the figures, or for ourselves? Are we given the means to establish sympathy? No, nor are we meant to. Pearlstein's penchant for cutting off parts of a figure's head lessens the figure's value as a human being. It is as though an individual's thought and feeling processes have been excised, along with an interest in their intrinsic worth. In several paintings, figures sit or recline with their eyes closed, further inhibiting communication. Their bodies do not telegraph, in today's language, positive interpersonal messages, since most are so relaxed as to be somnambulistic. In fact, Pearlstein's nudes, in

both single-figured and multi-figured works, seem to lack motivation of any sort. Trapped in their bodies, they live a life of enforced solitude. They do not lack feelings as much as Pearlstein resists letting them reveal any. Or, as he has indicated, when painting, he plays recorded music to "keep studio conditions constant and to drown out thought."[6]

In the portraits of married couples, there is a greater measure of interaction between artist and sitters and between the sitters themselves (since everybody probably knows each other too well for complete emotional stasis). These figures reveal more emotion, usually one of generalized anxiety which, because of their bodily positions and facial expressions, extends to barely controlled feelings of hostility. In a very few of these paintings, one of the partners seems to want to leave the room. The women, as often as not, wear brightly patterned garments which hide their bodies, implying further emotional and sexual estrangement from their mates. Pearlstein's couples seem unable to extricate themselves from their private hell, or, as if acting roles in Sartre's play *No Exit,* they chose to stay in it, or perhaps they have been deliberately placed in it.

Since Pearlstein's nude figures lack motivation and his married couples avoid confrontation, then it would seem that the artist is describing modern alienation. His figures, in avoiding the appearance of a dialogue with each other, evade responsibility for their own lives and signal their refusal to face an oppressive reality. Georg Lukacs, the Marxist literary historian, might say that they have accepted the modern human condition as *the* human condition to which there is no alternative.[7] Pearlstein has provided them with a reality which is self-referential. The modern condition of alienation is accepted as the given. According to this line of reasoning, Pearlstein, through his figures, has not adopted a critical posture toward society, but has succumbed to its intolerable pressures. He paints the isolates of society who keep the remnants of their personalities intact by refusing to interact with others. Pearlstein keeps his own distance from his figures and he also keeps the viewer at a distance as well. In this regard, he is somewhat akin to the Social Realists of the 1930's who were criticized by Communist critics for painting only those beaten down and vanquished by capitalist society instead of those who were supposed to be building the civilization of the future.

No doubt, it is easier for novelists and playwrights to show modern alienation as a single phase of contemporary life rather than as its primary aspect. For a painter to adopt a stance of critical realism, he might end up painting propaganda pieces. His medium of expression inhibits the creation of works critical rather than symptomatic of his time. As creatures reflecting alienated conditions, Pearlstein's figures would make remarkable subjects instead for an existential psychiatrist. This type of therapist, less

interested in changing society, focuses attention on ways society affects individuals and on the techniques such individuals might develop to cope with their immediate situation. One such psychiatrist, Viktor Frankl, has coined the phrase "existential vacuum" to describe symptoms similar to those Pearlstein's figures reveal.[8] Those so afflicted, according to Frankl, complain of a "loss of interest and lack of initiative." Meaning has evaporated from their lives. He calls this the loss of will to give meaning to life. Part of a patient's therapy is to develop a commitment to something or somebody beyond himself, to learn to transcend the moment and thus rekindle the will to provide meaning to life. Pearlstein's figures lack that special will. Emotionally paralyzed, they cannot make gestures signifying communication or commitment or self-definition. Their lives remain static. They live in a perpetual ahistorical fragment of time.

Pearlstein's style perfectly complements the content of his work. Although he turned to the figure around 1960, his mature work dates from 1963 when forms grew more precise and a more controlled technique replaced his earlier painterly brushwork. Figures which once seemed capable of movement were locked into rigid compositional schema. Bodies once softened by ragged shadows and streaked highlights became surfaces for displaying calculated lighting effects. Flesh grew less human, less suggestive of slight movements caused by breathing or subtle shifts of position, and more a field for technical displays of tonal variations. Like Edward Hopper's and Richard Diebenkorn's figures, Pearlstein's lost the potentiality for independent action as their body parts and the different tonal area playing across them increasingly became subsumed by organizational units that reached across bodies, chairs and couches as well as rugs and shadows on floors and walls. Even though figures dominated background elements, seemingly denying the modern tradition of figure-ground interaction, Pearlstein nevertheless assertively included non-figural areas in his system of organization. This habit of organizing forms in relation to the total area of the canvas also helped negate the possibility of movement. As in a painting by Franz Kline (Pearstein's figures corresponding to Kline's black slabs), figures bisect the canvas to create active patterns between themselves and the edges to a much greater extent than in paintings by other figure painters. And despite their apparent three-dimensional bulk, Pearlstein's figures seem immobilized, incapable of making the simplest gestures, creatures over whom the artist has exercised total control.

Their physical paralysis is exaggerated by their scale in relation to the size of the canvas. They crowd the picture plane and impose upon the physical space of the viewer. Yet, they are not part of the viewer's space because they cannot move into it. On the contrary, they are involved in, or doomed to, a private drama which we

observe, are witness to, but are excluded from. Their world is separate from ours even as they make their presence known in it. Easy access to their world, easy communication, sexual or psychological, with Pearlstein's figures, big as they are, is effectively curtailed, just as figures within his paintings are unable to acknowledge each other.

Pearlstein turned to the figure about the same time that artists such as Roy Lichtenstein and Andy Warhol began to use preexisting signs of popular culture to portray that culture. Their images, derived from the popular media, allowed them the luxury of hiding their true reactions behind pre-digested forms, just as Pearlstein filled his works with a similar psychological distancing. Both Pearlstein and the Pop artists effected a position of detachment from the implications of their content. But Pearlstein showed the effects of modern culture on the inhabitants of that culture. Where Pop artists emphasized the one-dimensionality of modern emotional responses without becoming involved with those responses (as in Lichtenstein's comic strip paintings), Pearlstein developed an art of greater authenticity and, despite his evident desire to remain uninvolved, greater engagement with the effects of modern life on the human mind. Where Pop artists accepted the effects of mass society and turned them into self-deprecating jokes, Pearlstein showed the results of those effects. And compared to the epigones of the Pop artists, the Photo-Realists, Pearlstein did not disengage the life of the mind from that of the eyes; his figures *are* invested with meaning beyond mere presence.

Pearlstein would disagree with all of this. Since 1962, when he first exhibited his paintings of realistic figures, he has always insisted that the meaning of his work is relatively simple. Calling himself a post-abstract realist, he has maintained that his figures are not meant to carry social content or comment. Rather, the meaning resides in the conjunction of forms and colors, of body positions and abstract shapes. In an early statement, he said that "the most meaningful experience in painting the figure" is in the relationship of the picture plane to the poses of the models,[9] an understandable attitude in an era when the picture plane was considered an article of art theology rather than a mere point in space. In 1977, he made a similar statement, presumably with equal fervor: "My aim is to be a mechanic of art. How a picture is put together is all that I'm interested in. Content is not interesting. What is interesting to me is how the page is divided."[10]

Despite Pearlstein's explanations, critics and observers have invested his works with a content ranging far beyond formal analysis. His constant denial of content may be a necessary factor in his creative process. Probably his stand against interpretation reflects his ideal of painting as well as a strategy to deflect unwelcome questions. In his most recent work, painted roughly

15 years after his first exhibited figural studies, Pearlstein seems finally to have made paintings which approximate and reflect his long-standing position. Simply put, his new works resist interpretation of the sort observers have been making for years. Even though his subject matter has not changed, there is less to say now about content than about form, a condition that shifts the grounds of discussion closer to Pearlstein's statements. Models are now obviously posed instead of sitting or reclining in more natural positions. Entire heads are cut off so that bodies are increasingly read as a sequence of shapes. Skin tones have grown silky and less sickly-looking. Shadows have become more obvious and compete with figures for attention. Pieces of furniture, always present, are now used less as props than as forms of intense interest in their own right. As a result, the viewer now knows that a scene is a staged tableau rather than an existential mirror, an exercise in composition, organization and finish rather than a guarded inquiry into the modern psyche.

Pearlstein's recent work, perhaps marking a new and major development in his career, might also be part of a general trend among realist artists whose content has been similar to his. Among all of his contemporaries, Pearlstein might best be associated with George Segal. Both artists developed realistic styles about the same time and, through the 1960's, both explored similar themes. For reasons still not clear, both moved the focus of their art away from these earlier concerns, Segal a few years earlier than Pearlstein. At the start of the 1970's, Segal added a new facet to his art when he began to make reliefs created within a more narrowly defined, studio-bound artistic context. Similar changes also characterize the work of Leon Golub, another artist who used his art until recently to probe aspects of the human condition. His flawed giants and assassins of the 1950's, 1960's and early 1970's described unfulfilled human potential for greatness as well as man's capacity for destruction. But within the last few years, he has substituted portraiture, albeit, portraits of political figures, for the high moral content of his earlier pieces. He, too, has cooled the premises of his art.

One may argue that these three, along with others, continued at least one major aspect of Abstract Expressionist painting in that they were intensely concerned with the horrors of the modern human condition as well as with facets of contemporary American life. They did in realistic terms what the previous generation accomplished in abstract forms. Pearlstein seems to have painted less from a sense of rage or from a need for personal assertion than as one who understood too well the effects of society on the individual, an observer as well as a victim. But one may further argue that Pearlstein's recent paintings have lost that earlier creative tension borne by his observation and victimization, that he is now more willing to escape into art rather than to use his art

to confront the present. If so, then we should be thankful that his paintings and his statements about art remained so far apart for so long.

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[1]Henry Steele Commager, *The American Mind* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1950) and Lloyd Morris, *Postscript to Yesterday: American Life and Thought 1896-1946* (New York: Harper and Row, 1947).

[2]See my "The Silent Witness of Edward Hopper," *Arts Magazine*, 49 (September, 1974), pp. 29-33.

[3]See my *The American Scene: American Painting of the 1930's* (New York: Praeger, 1974), p. 110.

[4]Hayden Herrera, "Pearlstein: Portraits at Face Value," *Art in America*, 63 (January-February, 1975), p. 47.

[5]Discussed in Bernie Zilbergeld with John Ullman, *Male Sexuality: A Guide to Sexual Fulfillment* (Boston: Little Brown, 1977), *passim.*

[6]Herrera, 47.

[7]Georg Lukacs, *Realism in Our Time*, trans. by John and Necke Mander (New York: Harper and Row, 1971), pp. 47-92.

[8]Viktor Frankl, *Psychotherapy and Existentialism: Selected Papers on Logotherapy* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1967), p. 19.

[9]Philip Pearlstein, "Figure Paintings Today Are Not Made in Heaven," *Art News*, 61 (Summer, 1962), p. 52.

[10]Cited in *St. Louis Post Dispatch*, February 27, 1977, in file at Alan Frumkin Gallery, New York City.

Art Criticism: A Series of Three Articles

The Necessary Dialectical Critic

The Complex Present

The History of Contemporary Art: A Contradiction in Terms?

The Necessary Dialectical Critic

BY DONALD B. KUSPIT

If thought willingly emerges from its critical element to become a mere means at the disposal of an existing order, then despite itself it tends to convert the positive it elected to defend into something negative and destructive.

Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, Dialectic of Enlightenment

To be worthy of the name today—even to be necessary to the art scene, as its salvation—there must be a consciously new way to be a critic, a way which seems self-contradictory, and yet is the only straight way: it is the way of dialectic, which leads the critic to question his own will to believe in art, and his own tendentious pursuit of the esthetic. There was once—not even so long ago—a different necessity to criticism, a less devious meaning. The critic was once more "positive": he documented the work as a fact, he judged it as a value that could be clearly fixed, and, true master of the work, he illuminated the esthetic in it for general contemplation, holding up to the masses like a priest at a ritual the sacred substance, the divine principle that made the work what it truly was. He was decisive enough to know the absolute in the work, and to exhibit it—in an unhesitating, resolute way—that even the work could not do, with its admixture of charm and personality,

the dross of signs that reveal the artist presence behind it. What the artist strove for was there for the critic's asking, as though the artist was simply getting the work in position for the critic to see its true import.

Those sanguine days are gone forever: neither artist nor critic are so lucky. For the kind of mastery of the work the critic could have in the past would defeat both the purpose of the critic today and the purpose of the work—to escape its own administration, with the critic the means of that escape as much as if not more than the artist, for he must finally leave well enough alone and display what he has determined, but for the critic display and determination are never over—at least for the responsible critic. Today a positive approach to art would only be to sell it down the river—to administer it for those who do not want it to have any more dignity than that of a slave on the auction block, sold to toil in the fields of commerce. To even offer to contemplate the work today—to inspect it for the esthetic as if to inspect a corpse for gold teeth—is to put it at the disposal of the existing order of commerce and culture. The collusion of dealer and historian today—historical criticism is no longer what Oscar Wilde knew it as, "part of that complex working towards freedom which may be described as the revolt against authority,...the resultant of forces essentially revolutionary"[1]—makes a travesty of contemplation, turns the exhibition of art into a near Ecce Homo situation (a responsibility and martyrdom the art itself may not be equal to). To even offer to "master" the work today is to defeat it by offering it as a sacrifice on the altar of Mammon or by imprisoning it in the tower of Babel which cultural consciousness of it has become.

This paper is about the necessity for a new type of criticism, already emerging in other areas than art—a new type of thought about art, which accepts both its own self-contradictoriness and that of art (systematic in the one case, less so in the other), as the only way of successfully locating the art without terminating it in its location. However eccentric the coordinates, they are not the deliberate dishabille of the bohemian poseur intellectual—as if that were the only way to escape academic respectability, with its pseudo-mastery—but the only possible poise and self-possession in a situation which wants not for information and its academic codification, but for alternative concepts, that offer a way out of the beaten track that leads art to the unhappy consciousness of being both cultural and a commodity: a cultural commodity. Only the dislocations of dialectic—even deliberately fabricated dislocations, which nonetheless carry with them their own curious intransigence, their own power of determination, and feel firm underfoot—can rescue art from the inevitability of its situation today, and rescue the critic from involuntary submission to both that situation and to art that voluntarily submits to it. Like all true criticism, dialectical criticism avoids victimizing both critic

and art in the name of the ideal and the absolute (the posturing of the system—total administration, which anticipates every future and every nuance of meaning), and thus becomes a devious sanity in a situation in which it seems impossible not to be both victim and victimizer, administered and administrator, totalized and totalizer. To avoid collusion, even the collusion of neutrality, one must be dialectical—even more deviously dialectical, more cunningly self-contradictory, than traditional dialectic, which has already become a system, and so another way of administration, of subjection to inescapable categories. To unwittingly be the victim of a system is the kind of loss of innocence—of invisible rape—never to be wished for.

To be dialectical today is the only way to restore the critical element in thought about art—to make criticism more than the sanctioning of the existing order of cultural thought about art, which locates it for the convenience of commerce, and administers its freedom for the ends of a sterile dominance. Dialectical criticism becomes the detotalizing of art history, the dismemberment of its conventions and pattern of possibility, for the sake of a new openness—which itself never becomes the totality or ideal—which is the only meaning of freedom that is not yet bankrupt, however much it has shrunk in value. It may be that in the end dialectical criticism is powerless in the face of administered history and culture, but nonetheless, as Horkheimer and Adorno assert, "today critical thought...demands support for the residues of freedom, and for tendencies toward true humanism, even if these seem powerless in regard to the main course of history."[2] Art was once thought of as a residue of freedom, and dialectical criticism of it is the only test that can determine whether it still is, even if that freedom means no more than a blindly willed, seemingly gratuitous and arbitrary gesture of resistance to administration, however unsystematic and of whatever kind—an administration which seems to be a non-administration, like dialectical criticism itself, which claims to administer the unadministrable and leave it intact as such, truly respect its innocence. The openness of dialectical criticism is the only test for the openness of art, even if that means both must appear closed in the test.

Let us, then, go unsystematically through the systems—all issuing in the same cultural totality, the same administered absolute, the same ritualization of art—the dialectical art critic must confront: first the system the positive approach to art imposes (the positivist fallacy), then the system the will to believe imposes (the partisan fallacy), and finally the system the transcendence of the esthetic imposes (the estheticist fallacy). These systems, with their moment of transcendence which becomes a refusal of experience, will be known through their critiques—through their alternatives.

(1)Why does dialectical method alone make sense? Because it alone acknowledges that nothing can be firmly posited about art without negating it as art—because today art itself does not wish to be firmly posited. To be positive about art, to take it as something positive—as something matter of factly there that must be made esthetically there, i.e., even more positively there, absolutely there—ignores the fact that it cannot be positively known as art. This is the meaning of the resistance to modern art—claims of its so-called obscurity or unintelligibility, and downright perverseness—that has been with it from the beginning. The public expected art to be positively identified as art—which was not simply a matter of living up to past expectations, but of positing an esthetic ambition. Yet this ambition, even in the neo-Mediterranean tradition of modern French art, was never unequivocally argued, never urged as the precipitate of all else, but seemed always to be a backdrop of something more insistent—of an intention oblique to the strictly esthetic intention, an intention having to do with the emerging recognition that art itself is a revolution in intention, and that the estheticist intention inhibits the profounder intention. The revolution in esthetics is simply a byproduct of the larger revolution in intention, which involves not simply new ways of codifying the world and new consciousness of it, but a refusal of any final code, consciousness, or esthetic—any ultimate style, and safe and durable (administrable) form.

In this situation, criticism cannot become an aid to the absolute esthetic, the final style, whether of art or consciousness. It cannot help make art or mind positive, as traditional description and judgment did. Instead, it must locate the work against its own grain—buoy it between the poles of what it does positively assert and what, within it, will disintegrate it, make it unadministrable, negative. Dialectical criticism views the work as not conforming to itself, and so not accommodating to the world by being graspable (even if unreadily). This puts it in a self-destruct position, as a self-and so world-opposition. It mediates itself to its own detriment, and even when it mediates itself so as to conform to itself and to accommodate to the world, seeking survival in history and commerce—seeking power as fame or as unique product—it negates itself, for it loses its self-contradictoriness, becoming self-same. Whichever way it moves—to retain itself as an illusion and symbol of freedom or to make itself self-same like every other administered being (to find its place in the system, or in the fragment of system assigned to it)—it self-negates, loses itself, perhaps pointlessly, perhaps for the sake of a future, perhaps as power and authority, but always with a loss of that self-identity which was itself non-self-identity. Dialectical criticism grasps this self-contradictoriness and manages it—preserves it, not as an artifact making an arabesque in history, an ornament of a histori-

cal moment, but as the core of that which alone is positive in the art, that which alone makes sense beyond its own coming and going, beyond its affinity with other art and its cultivation by culture and commerce. To show the preciousness of this self-contradictoriness becomes the whole point of dialectical criticism—to make of it something positive, and yet not to be possessive of it. Dialectical criticism here falls in with the best intentions in modern art itself—the intention to make art a revolution of intention, to introduce a note of self-contradiction in public intention (from which unexpected possibility can emerge), rather than confirm known intention and value. Indeed, the best traditional art looked like art because it transcended its contradictions, mediated unity and transcendental harmony, which, however out of empirical reach, was still accessible through clear consciousness—contemplation—of the art. The best modern art looks like art because it transcends its unity, its proposed transcendental harmony, toward a self-contradictoriness which itself never becomes transcendental because it is empirically accessible.

Dialectical criticism, insofar as it helps make this self-contradictoriness empirically accessible—without revelling in it as a rhapsody—becomes what Bertholt Brecht called "eingreifendes Denken," thought which intervenes: "the dialectic as that classification, ordering, and way of considering the world which, by showing up its revolutionary contradictions, makes intervention possible."[3] From this point of view, criticism itself is intervention in the exhibition of art—a necessary intervention, to show up the art's contradictions, which are the source of its revolutionary potential, i.e., its significance for freedom, for anti-authoritarianism. Without criticism's interference in the very presence of the art that presence has no revolutionary carrying power, is no opening toward the horizon of thought and action—that presence has only the carrying power that it is given by being culturally and commercially administered, a carrying power that by its very nature contradicts the idea that the work is self-contradictory or has any meaning for freedom, i.e., any revolutionary meaning. (All revolution creates new possibility.) Dialectical criticism, insofar as it works against administered criticism and the very notion of art as having any authority beyond what it can reveal of world historical contradiction, works against culture and commerce—passes between that Scylla and Charybdis with the art, rescuing it for further sailing on the seas of meaning and intention. Above all, dialectical criticism, as an instrument against cultural appropriation and commercial authority, links up with the grand tradition of critical thought: the pursuit of that enlightenment which denies any authority, for authority imposes a reconciliation where there is none—makes relations "positive"—and does not recognize the

self-contradiction on which it itself is based, the opposition on which its own absolute power, giving it the power of absolution, is premised. There is no absolution from contradiction and self-contradiction, except in ontological tyranny, in an over-reification of existence into cultural-historical heroic moments or other "authoritative" value absolutes. The lionization of art, by whatever means, forfeits it as a clue to contradiction—as contradiction written large enough to be, if not self-evident, then nonetheless obvious enough to be worked with. The only privilege art has is that it makes enough of a fetish about unity to reveal contradiction, or enough of a fetish about contradiction to propose unity. It is the one place where the irresoluteness of the dialectic becomes transparent—where no sociopolitical, experientially concrete solutions are at stake, or even thought about, whether as utopian proposals or as realistic reforms. Where, in other words, there is nothing forced about the relation between the opposites (and can never be between unity and contradiction, reconciliation and opposition)—so that the relation can be recognized in its generality, as an alternative to the narcissistic system's insistence that, whether a system of contradictions or of harmony, the administered system is the best of all possible worlds, i.e., that there is no alternative world or fragment of a world—no freedom, mythical or otherwise.

Dialectical criticism rejects this positivist "myth of things as they actually are,"[4] in art and elsewhere. It does not respect what Coomaraswamy calls the "esthetic surface" of art things, which stabilized them as they actually are—which keeps them what they actually are, like the skin the taxidermist uses to preserve "history." What Gideon call the "eternal present" of art and Robert Morris calls its "presentness" ignore—deny—its self-contradictoriness (only self-contradictoriness is unadministered self-identity) and its contradiction of the administered world historical, including its own administered art historical world. They are easy formulas for self-sameness, making art self-administering—they are the utmost esthetic positivism, the most simplistic reconciliation with art imaginable, doing it the disservice of giving it a readily serviceable identity. Under the guise of neo-transcendentalism, these formulas further art's historicist tendencies, which lead it to want to usurp the present, be the positive in the present, and so relegate the negative to the future, making it a utopian negative.

Dialectical criticism, then, is not a positivistic search for information about art nor is it an historical or transcendental apotheosis of it, i.e., the reduction of it to the permanently positive, whether arrived at by contemplation or consensus. It is the reluctance to accept any identity for art which denies it a possible loss of identity as art and role in the world—role within the self-contradictions of the world. Art is not simply a question of

estheticizing what Sartre called the practico-inert but of deesthe-ticizing the "beautifully" administered practico-inert. Art is not simply a question of transcendentalizing the historically memorable but of de-transcendentalizing the already transcendental history of dominance, that goes in the guise of the necessarily memorable. Art is not simply a question of separating the necessary from the contingent and disposing of the latter as the shell around the kernel, as the accident or occasion accompanying the essence or principle, but a recognition that the necessary would not be what it is unless it stood in opposition to the contingent, that there would be no essence or principle unless there was an accident or occasion, and that art is a matter of denying the authority and administrability of both—the authority of one over the other, the administration of the one by the other. Art, which at its best is itself dialectical criticism, finally involves one simple fact-concept: that we are in a situation of dichotomous determination, with quite specific dichotomies operational, and if this contradictoriness is repressed in a false consciousness then living death results—such living death as positive culture and commerce cultivate, wittingly or unwittingly. They eventually break down into their opposites—culture and commerce collapse or suffer setbacks (and carry much art with them)—or become negative, devaluing what they originally valued, negating what they originally posited, because they ignored the negative in the first place, the death that their life gave.

(2) Traditional positivist criticism assumes that criticism is necessarily partisan—and it is assumed that this is sometimes enough to make it sufficient. Partisan taste—and what else can taste be?—necessarily involves, in William James's words, "passional decisions" leading to a "voluntarily adopted faith."[5] Art becomes an article of faith, something to which one is converted—in the privacy of one's intuition or on the open road to another art—and something which always exists under the duress of becoming as radically profane as it was once regarded as radically sacred. Questions of criticism become questions of faith, for both involve being moved to the depths of our "passional nature" by a mystery that is always on the verge of becoming intimate and transparent—and that our passional nature can help "resolve" into clear and distinct being, by making it a part of that nature's own becoming. Indeed, passional nature exists to "establish" our becoming, to direct it toward positive being—to ground it positively, even if that means seemingly irrationally.

> Our passional nature not only lawfully may, but must decide an option between propositions, whenever it is a genuine option that cannot by its nature be decided on intellectual grounds; for to say, under such circumstances, 'Do not decide, but leave the question open,' is itself a passional decision—just like deciding yes or

not—and is attendant with the same risk of losing the truth.[6]

When, in the course of criticism, it becomes impossible to decide on the value of an art on objective grounds—after intellectual analysis, with its references to history and publicity (of which commerce is the logical extension)—then our passional nature is necessarily called into play, and however hardpressed is forced to a decision. Indeed, it is just the amount of duress, the extent of the situation of being hardpressed, the agony of decision, that guarantees the truth of the decision—the decision's power to penetrate art and determine its value, its artistic "truth," its esthetic significance. Only through the passional decision can the esthetic experience of the art be had, and thereby its value realized. Without the passional decision one is always in bad faith with the art, however well one has historically located it—which amounts, without faith in it, to an intellectual compromise of it. The "openness"—agnosticism—which resists passional "judgment" risks the very nature of art, suspends belief in the very existence of value.

This conception of the partisan position, which "rationalizes" partisanship into the leap of faith and art into the object of faith—and it is the only significant justification of the partisan position—has as its ulterior motive an effort to generate a momentum of meaning about art which it might not otherwise have, a strong sensation of its necessity which might otherwise be lacking. There is seemingly no existential reason why we should have a passion about art, whether for better or worse—for ourselves and for the art. The partisan argument insists that the passion for art does not displace or sublimate other more primordial passions, as Freud thought, but is itself a primordial passion—so that art must be taken seriously, at least as seriously as Plato took it when he banned it from the Republic. The partisan argument becomes all the more acute in modern times, when the necessity of art is not self-evident—when it does not seem to be integral to life, whether as a convention or as a sublime goal. To regard it as unnecessary is one devious way of administering it—of making it ask forgiveness for its intractability, its seeming wildness of purpose, and humbly petition for admission to the system, humbly ask not to be mistaken as an "outsider," the sin of sins for the administering system, as Horkheimer and Adorno note.[7] Also, the partisan position shows the system in extremis of administration, reaching out with all its being to surmount what seemed unsurmountable, to subsume what seemed unsubsumable, to grasp what seemed ungraspable. In this kind of final agony of administration the system does indeed administer, ruthlessly, repressively, absolutely—at its most ideal. Its faith in art means that at last art will have faith in it: its passionate commitment to art expects

reciprocity. Art acquires necessity, i.e., a secure place in the system, by being believed in: belief becomes the ultimate instrument of administration, belief in art once and for all appropriating or locating it —absolutizing its nature for the convenience of administration. Belief becomes the final fixing of being for the convenience of the administering consciousness.

Dialectical criticism dispenses with belief in art—with the will to believe in general. It wants to leave the question of value open, not in expectation of some answer to it, but because the look of the art under the pressure of this irresolution becomes a clue to its self-contradiction, to its defeat of its own self-identity, to its proposal of possibility, to the extent of its willingness to risk negativity. Dialectical criticism sees the passional nature as itself dialectical—concerned to overcome the possibility of its own negativity by being firm or positive about the work of art, whatever the specific character of its decision. Dialectical criticism is itself more clearly passional than partisan criticism, for it does not want to direct passion toward the goal of truth—to push it to use its power of decision—but rather wants passion to explore the situation of non-truth, of indifference to the positive truth (about art or anything else), which surrounds the truth, and permits a discovery of it as only one among many optional modes of relationship to art or any other reality. The issue is not one of faith or lack of faith, belief or disbelief, but of the necessity that compels toward one or the other, and that necessity is the compulsion to administer reality, to overpower it in the system of consciousness, and then in the *Realpolitik* of the world (for art, the politics of commerce). To resist the will to believe is to resist the will to administer, and to resist the will to administer is to keep possibility open—to allow art to remain a residue of freedom. Admittedly, a "residue" as much as a "freedom," and so perhaps dispensable to administered history—finally lost to history—but nonetheless viable as a way out of the positiveness of the present, even if this means positing a negative future. Only by suspending the will to believe—disengaging from all belief systems, personal or social—can the intention of the art be examined, can it be tested for its revolutionary potential. Belief in the art precludes such a test, for it sees the art in terms of esthetic value, which masks its value for intention. Esthetic value is a positive value, while intention, in a situation of positiveness—of false consciousness, of meaningless reconciliation—is inevitably negative, if it is to be of any revolutionary value. Esthetic value is simply the dumb shadow of art's negative intention. The authenticity of the work of art resides in its negative intention not in its esthetic positiveness, which is all that the will to believe can discover.

In substitution for the will to believe one approaches the work of art with the will to negate it, which has nothing to do with disbelieving in it, but rather with refusing to administer it—to give

it the intellectual-cultural and commercial succor it eagerly wants, the fixed art historical and social meaning that would give it destiny and security. No, it must remain undestined and insecure, it must not be known through any of the usual categories—these may be a starting point but not a positive ending—but through deviously self-contradictory, unstable categories, categories that capture yet do not capture, that let the fish slip away, or rather that slip it from net to net—without finally putting a hook in it—to test its survival power, its ability to negate its own administration. One gives the art a chance to negate its own administration by not catching it on its own desire to be believed in. James's psychological update of the Pascalian wager, which is the ultimate situation of partisanship, is replaced by a profounder wager, which asks the work to show itself as a sign of freedom—and realizes it can only do so if it is not administered by belief, not made positive by being made an object of faith. This perhaps is the ultimate question about art: does one want it for its negativity, as a sign of freedom, or does one want it for its positiveness, as a sign of the divine, i.e., the ultimate administrator, the authority on systematic administration.

(3)Talk about the esthetic quality of a work of art administers it with an iron fist; it is the velvet glove on the firmly administering hand of the authoritarian critic. Talk about the esthetic has a way of closing down the horizons of discourse about art like nothing else. Hemmed in by esthetic demands, both critic and art succumb to authoritarian narcissism—the dreamless sleep of the well-administered reality, the reality that does not even know it is administered, and so thinks it is "naturally" self-same. The esthetic is the most facile belief system about the work of art—belief in the esthetic value of art is the climax of partisan commitment to it, partisan engagement in the search for its truth, for what makes it positive, what makes it art—positively art. Estheticism, with all its alluring deviances—for it too claims to be an existential matter of faith—must be resisted, if one is even to begin to fathom the negativity of art, its refusal of positiveness (any kind of "imitation,"of following) in the midst of positiveness (in the very act of imitating, of acknowledging and positing). Estheticism cannot make—precludes making—such a distinction, for to it all art aims to be positive, art's "imitation" of the given, of whatever kind, being a technique for drawing out the best in the given, for affirming its "ideal" or "beautiful" nature, its harmony with itself and everything else. Estheticism ultimately issues in an epiphany of harmony—the most exquisite false consciousness which all beauty is—which, in its wake, reduces all negativity to a dross, a metaphysical illusion. But it is the recovery of the negativity that permitted positive beauty that is the task of dialectical criticism. And it begins this recovery by seeing the unity of beauty, the esthetic itself—the very in itselfness of art it posits—as a lie

designed to recruit art as an authority capable of administering art, or more simply, recruit art as a standard of administration.

The esthetic, with its insistence on positive exhibition, must be resisted, so that what the work negates in its exhibition can be acknowledged. The esthetic, which is itself the absolute administrator of art, must be shown to be anti-esthetic, i.e., to be self-negating. For the collapse of the negative—in effect the life-world—which is the aftermath of esthetic epiphany is momentary and itself illusory. The negated resurrects with all the force with which it was negated, with the secret repressive force of the esthetic itself, and overwhelms the work of art, sucks it into the world, absorbs it both in the most trivial way—as a commodity—into the system of the world's values, and in the most sophisticated way, as an item of culture, a symbol of cultural value. Both strip the esthetic work of its power of affirming beauty—they make its false consciousness of harmony simply one more ornament on the world's sordid reality, i.e., reduce all its efforts to raise consciousness to a higher perception, to a transcendental level to nothing (the transcendental simply becomes the protective camouflage of the real). Worse yet, commerce and culture subtly rob—expropriate—the repressive power of the esthetic, its ability to push the world aside, to repress awareness of the negative, of conflict. This power is turned on the esthetic itself, revealing it to be the naively negative or rather the naively positive, in its negativity: for the truly positive are culture and commerce, truly positive in that, open- eyed, they give us the world as it is, but as still of value—of cultural and commercial value. Their realism contrasts sharply with esthetic idealism, which claims to be a realism about the work of art—and the realism of culture and commerce shows itself as the only realism about the work of art. But this still leaves esthetic idealism with its own negativity—its power of negating the world. This, while it is no longer effective in cultural and commercial terms—in the world of commodities they jointly create—is still of use to dialectical criticism, which uses it to spotlight the world negated, to disclose the world in a new, negative light. To do so is the very raw beginning of authentic critical enlightenment.

The esthetic, which aimed to extend the charisma of art into a universal possibility of transcendence, ends involuntarily de-transcendentalizing art into a new kind of realism, a recovery of the negative aura of reality. Charisma, which is simply the absolutization of the presentness of the work of art under the auspices of the clear and distinct category—the work becomes exemplary and shines with the lustre of the total system, and so is thoroughly and willingly administered—becomes thwarted with the recognition that it too is mediated. Charismatic art's repression of its mediation is entirely a function of its exemplariness in the universal system. The esthetic, which meant to bespeak the charismatic,

almost as the aura of the aura, becomes its undoing, its negation, for appropriated by commerce and culture the esthetic is recognized simply as the most conventional of all means of mediating the work of art. Without the esthetic effect to give it transcendental meaning the charismatic is reduced to a means at the disposal of the existing order: it is the charismatic that commerce and culture take advantage of, make a commodity of, package into the positive. This leaves esthetic beauty where it was in the first place: an overly abstract presentation of the negative. The esthetic can finally be pressed into the service of dialectical criticism, as the pure negative in search of reification. To convert transcendental esthetic into the revolutionarily possible is the task of dialectical criticism.

Perhaps the most momentous factor determining the role of art in the world today is awareness of it—voluntary and involuntary awareness—as a form of capital, or at least a mechanism for the creation of capital. The individual work has the possibility of becoming the most durable material capital created, and style has come to be thought of as perhaps the most durable psychic capital created—the very principle of consciousness, which gives it its form and capacity. An artistic object is understood to stand to an ordinary object as consciousness of a style stands to consciousness of a fact: there is a surplus value in artistic objects and a style that ordinary objects and ordinary consciousness can never hope to mediate. It is this sharing of surplus value that is responsible for the reciprocity of art and capitalism: today it is assumed that they, and they alone, are sources of surplus value. Both mean to benefit from this power—in effect the power to produce transcendence. Both mean to show that they are as transcendent as the transcendence they produce—as valuable as the value they confer. This is demonstrated when the reciprocity between art and capitalism is fully operational: when capitalism expropriates the aura of style from art to "explicate" the meaning of surplus value; and when art expropriates the meaning of surplus value from capitalism to "explicate" the meaning of style. Surplus value is then revealed to be the happiness of the legendary "promise of happiness" art offers, style's refinement of reality bespeaking that promise. Surplus value keeps the promise that style made: materializes the happiness that utopian style proposes. And in so doing brings style down to earth, as the first intuition of the positive that the actual can be. In high capitalism the aura of style continues to be valued for its positive content, so that the possession of style becomes the final confirmation of happiness under capitalism. Style is not only the surplus value of the best commodities, but itself the best commodity, and, like art in general today, "renounces its own autonomy and proudly takes its place among consumption goods," as Horkeimer and Adorno say. What this means is that style renounces its utopianism: it is no

longer the promise but the fulfillment of the promise, no longer the possibility of happiness but its actuality—its most intimate content. Capitalism comes to advocate style, as the truly positive in existence. And to consume style becomes a sign that one harbors no unhappy feelings—no negative intention—about the actuality created by capitalism. Art and capitalism bolster each other's self-regard by bolstering each other's good intentions toward—positive view of—what is really the case. Each becomes the catalyst of the other's self-approval, and as such the grand obsession of the other: each wishes to be secretly possessed by the other; and is, openly, in the markets where valuable meanings are determined.

Positivist cultural history, which guarantees a positive approach to art—an approach which reduces it to a cast of stereotypes which seem to fulfill every individuality, which makes of it a happy progression of styles, each with its own nuance of happiness—is possible only in a world in which art and capitalism have married, in a world which finds their divorce and antagonism inconceivable. Art is capitalist booty, and positivist cultural history conquers world art, separating it from its utopian dream of its society, and presenting it simply as the fulfilled promise of beauty, there for the asking. But more insidiously cultural positivism is a mechanism for the capitalist transformation of the world into a positive commodity, a transformation whose first step occurs when, as Adorno and Horkheimer write, "the whole world is made to pass through the filter of the culture industry."[8] This determines the world as a stereotype, and to know something as a stereotype is to be prepared to consume it as a commodity. It is to be in possession of it as something already assumed to be collectivized and standardized. The cultural positivist, whether historian or critic, who thinks he can demonstrate an art that will not pass through the filter—that is so unique as not to be susceptible to standardization, and so consumption—is absurd, since the very activity of "positing" such an art extends the administration of the filter, bringing the unheard of under control. Despite his protests to the contrary, the cultural positivist does not preserve the integrity of the art entrusted to him, but creates a universal system of administration which absorbs it into the rigorous logic of the stereotype. It is the stereotype which creates the aura of the eternal present—of the settled status and meaning of art. It is the stereotype which affords relief from all further pressures of experience and meaning. It is the stereotype that is the ideal—the transcendent style—the individual always seems an inadequate instance of.

> The art historians and guardians of culture who complain of the extinction in the West of a basic style-determining power are wrong. The stereotyped appropriation of everything, even the inchoate, for

> the purposes of mechanical reproduction surpasses the rigor and general currency of any 'real style,' in the sense in which cultural *cognoscenti* celebrate the organic pre-capitalist past. No Palestrina could be more of a purist in eliminating every unprepared and unresolved discord than the jazz arranger in suppressing any development which does not conform to the jargon.[9]

The critical problem today is how to avoid conforming to the jargon—how to undermine the purity of the inescapable jargon. Horkheimer and Adorno write that "with the progress of enlightenment, only authentic works of art were able to avoid the mere imitation of that which already is."[10] It can be assumed that there are no longer any authentic works of art today—works of art which, in whatever way, avoid the mere imitation of that which already is. That is, generate critical resistance to it, the resistance which criticism is to the positive way in which things are given under the assumption that such positiveness obscures the way they are given for consciousness or "intended." Abstraction, which was once the most significant way of avoiding or resisting what was positively the case, has become a jargon—a source of stylistic stereotypes. Simply by being committed to its own history it has become critically obsolete. And so-called realism, whether it be a return to landscape, portrait, and still life, or an ironic reminiscence of the pseudo-detachment of the photograph, is a meek commitment to what is already the case. Behind the self-effacement of current realism is a refusal to see the treachery of the real, which generates its own resistance—exactly what we find in the realism of Goya and Courbet, who deny the pedestrianism of reality (which we find even in Impressionism) by disclosing it as "critical." Critical realism, under whatever stylistic auspices, hardly exists today, for the contradiction in reality itself is not available in the eternal present—hardly dares disclose itself in the face of the transcendence of art and capital. Today art plays the sycophant to the supposed nature of things in a way that would honor the most ingratiating courtier. The problem of authenticity is no longer a problem for art. Works of art today no longer even have the option of being authentic. That option, and the burden of that option, exists only for criticism.

Accepting the view that in today's overdetermined, well-administered cultural world an authentic work of art can never emerge, the question remains as to whether the terms or categories of such administration can be made authentic, i.e., can be made to avoid the mere imitation of that which already is decreed to be cultural. Can they be made to resist that which they themselves have posited? Can they be made to underdetermine what they have overdetermined, so as to restore to it the possibility of authenticity? Can the culture they have made

inauthentic be made authentic again, with the understanding that all authenticity is the responsibility of—in the care of—critical mediation? Can cultural credibility be replaced by critical credibility? Is that any advantage, if critical credibility only means to confirm what is the case in a new way, as part of a "counter-culture" which is nonetheless an administered culture? Is it possible to forego the establishment of the normative, a renunciation crucial to critical authenticity? One is asking criticism not simply to become the systematically unsystematic, the affirmatively negative, but to become as evasively transcendental as authentic art under capitalism once supposed itself to be. One is asking criticism to imply but not offer a significance beyond immediate significance, an experience beyond immediate experience—to suggest the staying power of such transcendental significance and experience without fully defining it. One is willing to let criticism be arbitrarily contradictory, but not let its contradictoriness simply become the case. However hard it is to be authentic today—even to fathom the meaning of authenticity—only criticism has the opportunity of being authentic, of even positing the possibility of being authentic. Only criticism can change the terms of the discourse; art simply "interprets" them, necessarily conforms to them, in however "original" a way. Criticism thus offers a limited, residual freedom, which it indirectly offers the work of art—and which the work of art often rejects, to retain cultural approval. In general, one finds the residue of freedom in criticism, not art, which seems to be a residue of freedom only by reason of the way it is freed from culture by criticism. Horkheimer and Adorno write:

> The work of art still has something in common with enchantment: it posits its own, self-enclosed area, which is withdrawn from the context of profane existence, and in which special laws apply. Just as in the ceremony the magician first of all marked out the limits of the area where the sacred powers were to come into play, so every work of art describes its own circumference which closes it off from actuality. This very renunciation of influence, which distinguishes art from magical sympathy, retains the magic heritage all the more surely. It places the pure image in contrast to animate existence, the elements of which it absorbs. It is in the nature of the work of art, or aesthetic semblance, to be what the new, terrifying occurrence became in the primitive's magic: the appearance of the whole in the particular. In the work of art that duplication still occurs by which the thing appeared as spiritual, as the expression of *mana*. This constitutes its aura. As an expression of totality art lays claim to the dignity of the absolute.[11]

But what is art when the totality is in the administering cultural system? Simply the reflex action of the system. All enchantment is now in the system; it is the system which is magical. The work of art is simply the particular charged with the magic of the system, the thing spiritualized by the totalizing categories—stereotypes—of the system. All dignity is in the cultural system, not in the work of art, which becomes dispensable once it no longer seems to reflect the magic of the system. And the particular work of art does become dispensable quickly, for the system will never commit itself completely to any one of its particulars, since it retains much of its magic by implying that none can adequately exemplify it, and reveal the totality of its influence—have the same power to enchant that it has. No work of art can become exemplary in a well-managed cultural system, since the system itself is exemplary, i.e., retains all rights to influential power, to magical or charismatic domination. Thus, it is the system itself that is self-contradictory—uses its power to negate as well as affirm—and so appears authentic, adding to its charisma.

The dialectical critic does not naively confront this charisma with its own methods of mediation, but extends the system's power of negation to *reductio ad absurdum* by turning it against the system's claim to absolute power of determination. He makes the cultural system look undignified or unsystematic by creating alternative critical terms which de-totalize rather than totalize, disenchant rather than enchant—terms which withdraw totality from the work before the system decides the work does not conform to the mythical totality of culture. These alternative terms measure art by its conformity or non-conformity to actuality, and view style as a mediation of this conformity or non-conformity rather than as a transcendental epiphenomenon bespeaking the self-identity of the work. Thus, the dialectical critic does not put the work in its place in the totality, but presents it as always in some shaky, even preposterous and absurd, relationship to the totality. This makes it even historically indeterminate: it is historical determinacy that the cultural system gives to whatever filters through it—that neutral, minimal historicity which amounts to no more than putting in an appearance and being "positively" identified. The dialectical critic opens the work to actuality, giving it a kind of negative magic: the work is shown to be a ceremony of containment of actuality, enclosing it in intention. It is the actual that acquires a circumference or limit through the power of intention of art, making it sacred—sealing it into significance. Art becomes the open horizon of the actual, and the actual becomes a sacred realm of significance posited by art, a realm brought out of chaos into clarity and ready for fresh, unprejudiced exploration—exploration not predisposed by stereotypes and so able to discover the contradictory which can never be mastered by presuppositions and expectations. Dialecti-

cal criticism functions like dialectical phenomenology: it suspends any preconception of objective (cultural-historical) structure to concentrate on the critic's intention toward a complex of art, working through that intention toward concepts which can articulate the intention of the art, without then administering that intention for the cultural-historical system, i.e., stereotyping the intention as a fixed category of consciousness.[12] It can never be guaranteed that the intention will never be stereotyped, although its source in the free self-questioning of the critic—his questioning of his own intention to the art—suggests this.

It is taken for granted that no critic can avoid categories of the cultural-historical system. But it must also be assumed that the dialectical critic will question such categories—put himself in a negative or contradictory relationship to them—as soon as they emerge in his consciousness. The point is to establish the possibility of an alternative to the illusion of the "daily life" of art the system establishes—to break down the illusion of cultural and historical business as usual. Nonetheless, the dialectical critic must, in working out critical alternatives, not succumb to what art itself has submitted to in its desire to be easily administered, to be "handled" by the system. Namely, "the constant pressure to produce new effects (which must conform to the old pattern)" and "serves merely as another rule to increase the power of the conventions."[13] The dialectical critic does not want to be a victim of what might be called the "Orson Welles effect":

> Whenever Orson Welles offends against the tricks of the trade, he is forgiven because his departures from the norm are regarded as calculated mutations which serve all the more strongly to confirm the validity of the system.[14]

The dialectical critic must avoid the fate of the artist, who became "completely fettered" by "the pressure (and the accompanying drastic threats), always to fit into business life as an aesthetic expert."[15] While critics once "signed their letters 'Your most humble and obedient servant,' and undermined the foundations of throne and altar," today the critic is more likely to be "accused of incompetence" if he does not conform, or else, like Orson Welles, be tolerated as the official outsider. But just this accusation and toleration make the dialectical critic a risk to the system, for to the extent he finds concepts that contradict its positive categories it becomes negligible if not directly disputable, i.e., it reduces to a set of passive conventions rather than active categories. It is taken for granted—a fate worse than death for the system, which wants active loyalty, enthusiastic devotion. The system wants a hold on those it administers, for without that hold they are potentially free—in a state of what might be called lazy or unreal-

ized freedom, a freedom on a par with and intimidated only by the ordinariness of the system, i.e., the ordinariness it possesses when it is taken for granted. Thus the cultural-historical system has more to gain from the acceptance, however reluctant, of the dialectical critic. For while such acceptance does not bring him under control—truly administer him—it puts the system itself in a situation of potential greatness, in the same way the work of art once did, *viz.*, by "exposing itself to this failure in which the style of the great work of art has always achieved self-negation."[16] The dialectical critic is the system's exposure to possible failure, its achievement of self-negation and self-transcendence, the sign of its greatness. The dialectical critic acts out the system's own fear of failure: his mistrust of its style is its own submission "to the logic of the matter" it subsumes—its complete reversal of order, in expectation of unexpected possibilities, a fresh hold on the "matter" of art. This makes the dialectical critic either the ironic apotheosis of the system or the obscure fly buzzing around its dead face, no longer able to be a gadfly.

Finally, we might note that for the dialectical critic to intervene in the cultural historical system with his persistently perverse concepts and intentions—apparently misapplied to positive art—is for him to resist the system's reduction of art to amusement, and so, paradoxically, to save the system from itself, making it once again responsible to esthetic transcendence. "Amusement, if released from every restraint, would not only be the antithesis of art but its extreme role."[17] "The fusion of culture and entertainment that is taking place today leads not only to the depravation of culture, but inevitably to an intellectualization of amusement."[18] "The culture industy can pride itself on having energetically executed the previously clumsy transposition of art into the sphere of consumption, on making this a principle, on divesting amusement of its obtrusive naivetes and improving the type of commodities."[19] The culture industry reconciles "the irreconcilable elements of culture, art and distraction." How does the dialectical critic intervene in a situation in which amusement has become as enchanting as art, and art has become as much of a distraction from actuality as amusement? How does one disenchant what seems to be inherently enchanting, distract from what seems to be inherently distracting? By, in fact, being amused by amusing art—amused to the point of laughing at it, laughing at one's own distraction by it and at its power of distracting. Dialectical conversion again frees one from dialectical inversion. The dialectic presents itself as the laughter that apocalyptically arises from the amusing: dialectic becomes a kind of dada. "Resounding laughter has served to denounce civilization in every age. 'The most destructive lava which the crater of the human mouth spews out is hilarity,' says Victor Hugo"[20]—exactly the hilarity that Duchamp spoke of and that is an eternal possibility of art, and a

necessity in modern art.[21] Amusing, distracting art self-destructs by generating laughter, restoring dialectic to what seemed an unqualifiedly positive situation of art, in which it did nothing but make the actual amusing and so all the more imitable, i.e., something all the more desirable. Dialectic inevitably develops comically—seems comic—in the face of amusing culture, in response to art's intention to entertain. Dialectical criticism expropriates the comic from the distracting and amusing, using it for its own clowning purposes. Dialectical criticism becomes a kind of clowning about art: criticism for criticism's sake, dancing around art for the sheer joy of dancing around art—a fool about art fooling about art. And so, hopefully, restoring it to utopian significance, when it offers negative rather than positive satisfaction, the laughter at—resistance to—the world which is the expression of the unhappy consciousness hidden in art for art's sake.

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[1]Oscar Wilde, "The Rise of Historical Criticism," *Works* (London, 1948), p. 1044.

[2]Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (New York, 1977), pp. ix-x.

[3]Quoted by Jeremy J. Shapiro, "One-Dimensionality: The Universal Semiotic of Technological Experience," *Critical Interruptions* (New York, 1972), p. 186.

[4]Horkheimer and Adorno, p. x.

[5]William James, "The Will To Believe," *Pragmatism and Other Essays* (New York, 1963), p. 193.

[6]Ibid., p.200.

[7]Horkheimer and Adorno, pp. 133, 150.

[8]Ibid., p. 126.

[9]Ibid., p. 127.

[10]Ibid., p. 18.

[11]Ibid., p. 19.

[12]Shierry M. Weber, "Individuation as Praxis," *Critical Interruptions* (New York, 1972), p. 44.

[13]Horkheimer and Adorno, p. 128.

[14]Ibid., p. 129.

[15]Ibid., p. 133.

[16]Ibid., p. 131.

[17]Ibid., p. 142.

[18]Ibid., p. 143.

[19]Ibid., p. 135.

[20]Ibid., pp. 112-13.

[21]See Donald B. Kuspit, "Comic Modern," *Decade*, 1 (Oct. 1978), pp. 8-12.

The Complex Present

BY LAWRENCE ALLOWAY

The present is complex because of all the unsettled issues. In a few years we shall know if ecological art made a difference to public art, leading to organic systems rather than more hardware, trees instead of corten steel. In a few years we shall know if feminist iconography could compete with other ideologically-based image-systems or if art will return to a unisex configuration. In a few years it will be clear if the realist revival of the separate genres, of portraiture, landscape, and still life has fundamentally diversified art beyond the subsuming "oneness" of Abstract painting. For the moment these issues, and a host of others, are unresolved.

The complexity of the present depends not only on topics in suspense, but on the growth of the number of artists. Since the 17th century artists have become more numerous and more specialized in their practice. Therefore it is not the complexity of

inheritance, a mix of traditions and memories, that is the issue, but stark plurality. The present is an intricate array, like the radar screen of an airport or a harbor. The data, in a great holding pattern, have their historical origins, but the fact of immediate consultability is overwhelming. No matter how often we revise the past, the revisions originate in our own time and are hence a part of the simultaneity that is the structure of the present. Art critics not concerned with the mapping of their own time tend towards a form of short-order diachronicity, claiming the perspective of the art historian but without the foundations for a stable view.

The stylistic diversity of 20th century art is often regarded as a modern condition, but this view overlooks the historical perspective. It tends to be regarded as a recent problem, the product of universal education and mass communications, but it actually follows from the 18th century separation of art from the patronage of church, state, and aristocracy. To quote Meyer Schapiro's paraphrase of Denis Diderot: "The tyranny of patronage, however disguised by gracious manners and rewards, enslaves art."[1] The freedom of artists is freedom to specialize in their own interests, from initiating their own subject matter to treating it personally. The proliferation of styles in our own time and the expansion in the number and size of audiences is continuous with the artistic freedom of the Enlightenment. However there is little recognition of this freedom as it manifests itself as stylistic variety. Art critics usually respond prescriptively to the crowded scene. Each individual elects a favorite from the spectrum of possibilities and nominates it for high art status at the expense of every other artists' freedom. The criticism of Morris Louis is a prime example of this form of exclusivity, in which historical succession is used not just to argue for him as a good painter, but as the *right* one.

Assuming that art is a social institution, it is clear that it is impoverished by notions of hierarchic order. We need to acknowledge multiple points of origin in art, because stylistic variety is the expression of multiple points of view. Our sense of the complexity of the art world, as offered by the contiguity of current events, is actually the form of liberty, not the collapse of standards.

To quote Schapiro again, this time concerning Diderot's view of artists' autonomy: "They wish to be free creators, unconfined by any goal external to art; but they wish to participate in the advanced consciousness of their society and to influence it by their work."[2] This states a fundamental view of art to which most artists would assent and most critics, but critics continually restrict its application by the search for masterpieces, something rare, or for summarizing artists, of whom by definition there can only be a few. Much art criticism therefore rests on opposition to the origins of the art community, including the invention of art

criticism in its modern form by Diderot. Critics resist the prolifera-tion of artists as if the increase in stylistic possibilities meant an adulteration of "quality." The desire to keep the body of art small acts to support the market, for as writers succeed in conferring depth of meaning or centrality of role on living artists, they are conferring status. Most art criticism reads like single-issue election programs, but to use John Cage's succinct words, "It is a situation involving multiplicity."[3] Art needs a change of scale, away from the scarcity of "true" art to the facts of abundance.

As a rule critics begin their careers by confronting the population of artists as a crowd. This was as true of Clement Greenberg doing his leg-work round the galleries during the emergence of Abstract Expressionism, as it is of new reviewers following their assigned routes for *Arts Magazine* today. Generally one gets promoted from point-to-point coverage to the writing of theme — and monographic articles. The former leads to the discovery or invention of trends, the latter to elaborations on the work of known artists; unknown artists are of limited interest to editors. Only an occasional "mute inglorious Milton" is editorially acceptable. Thus the career profile of the average critic is likely to isolate him or her progressively from any sense of panorama and attach him or her to a diminishing number of artists and groups. The sense of the art world as a continuum of varied events — tends to recede as writers become more successful.

What alternative is there to small-scale exclusory thought-patterns? A part of the difficulty is that the data have expanded beyond simple causal explanations, such as the often-cited succession of Jackson Pollock, Helen Frankenthaler, and Morris Louis. The desire for a unitary esthetic calls for spectacular acts of exclusion, of which this typical example is Ad Reinhardt's: "The main painting traditions of the 20th century are the abstract and surrealist ones."[4] He wrote this in 1943 and the passage of time shows up his casual dismissal of expressionists and realists as either brutal or ignorant. The solution of the problem is to give up the idea that any single influence will affect art as a whole. "It is more 'simple' to expect that any one variable will be accounted for by less than the full complexity of all the factors acting together. This implies that there should be dense groups, like astronomical galaxies, constituted by variables unaffected by any one factor."[5] If we accept this point of method by Raymond B. Cattoll we have a basis for extending the radius of critical attention beyond a few artists and pet esthetic problems. Words (and insights) that apply to say Mark Rothko's paintings will not apply to the paintings of a realist born a quarter of a century later, or vice versa.

The information available about the state of art in our time is immense. The past, though continually revisable, as is well understood, is more compact in terms of information quantity. Writers on contemporary art tend to treat the present prematurely as a

finite unit, akin to the comparatively condensed pictures that we have of the past. However, the present, taking the term to mean the unsorted experience of several years, is endlessly generative of signs. It is in their failure to allow for the productivity of the communication system that art critics' performances have deteriorated. Their main tactic when faced with great amounts of data has been to opt for the deceptive neatness of causal models. The numbers of the present are reduced as rapidly as possible to a mainline (formalism, expression theory, or whatever), but these small scale proposals merely create scattered islands of privilege.

Esthetics, by which I mean the judgmental standards of art critics, and the recognition of stylistic variety seem irreconcilable: on one hand, enduring standards; on the other, the daily profusion. The function of esthetics often seems to be the achievement of order by strenuous filtering. Though the definition of esthetics has for a long time exceeded the traditional "search for beauty," the exclusivity of much modern practice covertly retains the early sense of the word. Our problem is to find an esthetic appropriate to "a situation involving multiplicity." Given the existence of a lot of art, surely more can be done than to disqualify most of it? Current criticism either excludes on principle or tacitly ignores diversity. Is there an esthetic not antagonistic to the diversity of present art?

Most of our ways of writing about modern art are diachronic, conceived in terms of the "relations that bind together successive terms,"[6] to quote Ferdinand de Saussure. The study of chronological change, of evolutionary advancement, is implicit in the way artists' developments and the succession of movements are discussed. The assumption of many art critics is that current art is best judged in terms of its inferred momentum, in which the present advances themes from the past and bequeaths developable topics to the future. An analysis of the present however, in terms of synchrony might be a way to avoid dividing the field of the present by seeing it as a mass of histories. It would make possible the recognition of diversity by tolerance of unrelated and incompatible events. Critical acts of exclusion, mass dismissals, and the contraction of possibilities are not the way to cope with present experience.

Synchronicity is used here in de Saussure's sense to indicate "a language state" at a given moment of time. The word also has a Jungian meaning as a form of order additional to the laws of cause and effect and is said to effect a link between depth psychology and theoretical physics on the basis of acausality.[7] Synchronous analysis is a way of coping with the collection of heterogeneous fact homogeneous in time. Synchrony provides cross-sections, arrays of simultaneous information in terms of co-existence rather than succession. This form of analysis is sometimes represented as static compared with the dynamic character of diach-

ronic events traced in time. We are presented with a choice between events "in process" or events "at rest" and, given the rhetoric of the 20th century, one's reflex is to prefer process. In art criticism, as we see, very small genealogies often command great prestige, but we need synchronicity as an alternative to the proliferation of single-issue histories of, say, Fluxus, Post-Minimalism, and Feminism.

The sample of a moment in time does not exclude the known past or presumed future. A comparative study across time is not a case of inert horizontality: on the contrary, it reveals the intersection of paths of development. Their unique continuity is not uppermost, but the synchronous array does not preclude historical succession. On the contrary, the historical dimension can be callibrated by such terms as the following: latent, emerging, continuing, dominant, and declining events.[8] Clearly such terms refer to phases of development, so that the cross-section is not a sample of events at rest but of events at different stages of development.

The practice of horizontal description is not simply an index of good will, but a critical position in itself. Not every coincidence in time is connectable of course. For example in the early 50's Monet's late paintings of waterlilies were rediscovered, numerous Abstract painters expanded their work horizontally, and CinemaScope, a form of widescreen projection, was introduced to movie theaters. The Monet revival and the expansion of Abstract painting are certainly connectable, but CinemaScope, an existing technique activated at that time by competition from TV, though of lateral spread, is something else. They do not all belong together as manifestations of environmental space effects. False convergence is the risk of a synchronic reading of events, as elitist diachronics produces queues of excluded artists. The ideas and attitudes of critics, a small group, faced with a larger group, artists, have precipitated a classic case of the queuing problem.

What do we expect of the art world viewed cross-sectionally? It is spectacle of entrance, exits, and changing coalitions. There is a multiplicity of styles, irreconcilable according to traditional criteria. It is a domain of multiple causation and divergent developments. Without the enforced simplicity of diachronic usage, there is no doubt that the present seems disordered to many contemporaries. It is experienced as a pile of miscellaneous things, but the heap of the present is a critical opportunity for personal discovery, speculative taxonomies, and confrontation with fresh stuff. There is the possibility of intimacy, such as Félix Fénéon enjoyed with the Post Impressionists or Thomas B. Hess showed in his first book on *Willem de Kooning* (1959), infatuated but authentic. Early articles, written in advance of the others, include Lucy Lippard's "Sol LeWitt: Nonvisual Structures" in

Artforum 1967 and Carter Ratcliff's "Rafael Ferrer in the Tropical Sublime," a catalogue text of 1973.[9] Both pieces have the sting and enthusiasm of early contact that derives in part from arbitrary but confident commitment.

Art is not the same as the art world of course, but there is an art world and it has a real significance. It is the equivalent of the network of universities, publishers, reviewers in literature, but it is less private and more complicated. Art has developed in public in a way that literature has not. Art world is a loose term but it refers usefully to the support system composed of artists, galleries, collections, museums, and magazines that contribute to the distribution of art. The art world is the professional milieu in which art is produced, giving artists the chance to work in ways that are "complex, innovative, unstructured, and unpredictable."[10] The literature of contemporary art, as it is written without reference to the art world, tends to nostalgia and absolutism. The art world, as it can be consulted informally, is a necessary supplement to the taste of critics and journalists.

It must be admitted that critics face an increasingly distrustful and sceptical audience. This is not merely a matter of disgruntled artists whose shows have been overlooked or reviewed badly. Diachronic criticism, as it is evolutionary, is attachable to social cues of leadership. As say Brice Marden or Vito Acconci become normative their value changes: they are no longer examples of what can be done by young, resolute artists, but models for emulation. Art criticism tends to follow artists as they develop successfully with correspondingly flattering commentaries, a fact noted by other artists. What is needed is a grasp of temporally contingent events, responsive to the pace and mixture of real time events. Harold Sackman defines real time processing as the "continual sampling of line inputs from the external system environment"[11] at a rate that makes it possible to intervene in the ongoing events.

One recent case of the cross-section is an exhibition "1961." It was based on Allan Frumkin's thesis "that 1961 was a crucial year for American painting. It was the last year that Abstract Expressionism held the center of the stage. It was the year of the first Pop Art paintings" and "the year of a strong surge in representational painting."[12] Andy Warhol's and Roy Lichtenstein's paintings based on quotations from comic strips as well as Jim Dine's paintings of large neckties date from this year, as do Alex Katz's cut-outs and Philip Pearlstein's first nude paintings. Katz's mature style was formed earlier and 1962 was a better year for early Pop art, but Frumkin's point is essentially true. In 1961 there was an increased visibility of various kinds of representational art.

In 1961 H.H. Arnason arranged an exhibition of "American Abstract Expressionists and Imagists."[13] In one way this large show may have seemed like a victory for Abstract painting, but in fact it

emphasized the contribution of Field painting (called Imagist here), as opposed to gestural painting. In addition, Hard Edge paintings, linkable to Field painting but with specific geometric characteristics of their own, which had emerged in the preceding three years, were conspicuous. The early 60's therefore constitute a zone in which the differentiation of Abstract painting and a renewal of the resources of iconic representation both occurred. We can add to Frumkin's point about emergent realism and Pop art that the gestural aspect of Abstract Expressionism was declining in importance as the color of the Field painters moved from latency to dominance. (De Kooning's Women, incidentally, though much discussed in the 50's, had no effect on the course of subsequent iconographies.) Such comparative views suggest ways in which we can move outside the narrowly-focussed concerns of diachronic analysis.

1961 is the year of Tom Wesselman's "Great American Nude, 1," the first of a series which combines painting and collage techniques, high art and mass media references. The treatment of the nude is derived from the Matisse of the Barnes Foundation murals, 1932-33, its poster-potential emphasized by the topical sensual mouth and by contrast to a color photograph of a landscape. In the same year, Pearlstein developed his figure style: in color, a pervasive terracotta, but in mass and pose, reminiscent of Michelangelo's reclining marble figures in the New Sacristy of San Lorenzo, Florence, the Medici Funerary Chapel. It seems that Pearlstein borrowed from sculpture to build up an advancing form and a recessive perspective, whereas Wesselman preserves flatness, both by following a flat source and by the use of collage, which carries three-dimensional imagery but as a physically thin addition to the canvas. Also Wesselman's title shows that he is alluding to the pin-up, so that his painting has a pre-coded aspect inimical to Pearlstein's realism. Both artists depersonalize their figures, but by absolutely different routes.

One of the values of a synchronic approach to art is that its activity is in part corrective, rehabilitating artists and tendencies that had been suppressed or under-interpreted. Frumkin points out that one of the consequences of the activity of 1961 was an exhibition in the following year at the Kornblee Gallery called "Figures."[14] It included: (1) a group of artists who painted flat, relying on contour and surface hue, such as Milton Avery, Ben Johnson, Alex Katz, and Marcia Marcus, and (2) another group who combined gestural abstraction with evoked figures, such as Charles Cajori, Lester Johnson, Nick Marsicano, George Segal —then a painter, and, probably belonging here, Sherman Drezler. Their figures were not observed and transcribed, but evoked through the act of painting. Perceptual realists, those to whom painting is a serious act of transcription, were John Button, Elaine de Kooning, Paul Georges, Pearlstein, and Fairfield Porter.

There were: Nell Blaine's dappled Impressionism and Robert de Niro's blocky Post Impressionism; one of Robert Beauchamp's Walpurgis Nachts; Larry Rivers and Fay Lanswer painted figures abstracted to the point of losing their identity, and Alice Neel's painting was in her early caricatural style. The point is that the exhibition revealed that the span of choices facing artists in even "neglected" styles is remarkably wide.

The cumulative effect of the revival of realism has led to later shifts in the art world at large, as a few examples taken from the 1978-79 season in New York will show. One of the few paintings by Mark Rothko with a title is "Homage to Matisse," 1954, included in the Guggenheim retrospective of his work; it is a reminder of Rothko's and other Abstract Expressionists' interest in Matisse's color. An exhibition of "Matisse in the Collection of the Museum of Modern Art" showed that the collection was rich in early and late work, that is when the artist's work was at its brightest, largest, and flattest. However one missed the Nice period of the 1920's, when Matisse was at his most naturalistic and I am not alone in finding the late-cuts over-familiar, perhaps a bit thin. Thus the revival of interest in art's referential capacity, emergent in the 60's, is a continuing factor now, with the power to effect our evaluation of other aspects of art.

In some respects art history has had a good effect on American art criticism. French art criticism, as it derives from 19th century French literature, for example, can be pretty vague: the sense of an artist's greatness is likely to be conveyed, but possibly not the reasons for it. The chronological view that art history assumes is iconic in the sense that it matches the succession of the original events. However, co-existent relations, as they cohere and interpenetrate, cannot be described in this way. Synchrony, as was argued above, possesses its historical dimension, but diachrony is without a compensating sense of the fullness of the moment. The study of simultaneity does not preclude the fact of systematic age,[15] George Kubler's term for the location of an object in its relevant sequence (beginning, middle, end or early and late), but the diachronic approach sacrifices multiplicity.

Two uses of the cross-section as an art historical method of enquiry will be compared.[16] Nikolaus Pevsner's "The Crisis of 1650 in Italian Painting" aims "to establish 'late Baroque' as a stylistic concept" with "formal principles distinct not only from those of the High Baroque but also from those of the 18th century." He does this by a discussion of artists from Naples, the Veneto and Liguria, and Rome. Theodor Hetzer in "Francisco Goya and the Crisis in Art Around 1800" nominates one artist as representative of a general failure of the cohesive order established in the Renaissance. The 18th century artist "was so certain of it (order) that he no longer needed to proclaim it as such or to represent it" with the result that the artist of Goya's generation could no longer

evoke its authority. The difference between these articles should be noticed: Pevsner is noting a preciously undefined style-change, whereas Hetzer is writing an "end of the Renaissance" piece. Art critics frequently use the apocalyptic periodicity of the latter as a way of sweeping the board clear of too many artists.

Art critics attached to a diachronic tendency often equate it with evolutionary cultural change as Hetzer does. This leads to an exclusory stance in which the *right* art for the present shrinks to the contribution of a few artists, as in Donald Judd's and Philip Leider's criticism of the 60's. Such elite groups of artists soon become, or may already be, a part of the market. It is notable that none of the critics who claim rigor do so on behalf of unknown artists. It may be said that it is inevitable that quality will be recognized, but the fact remains that there is substantial agreement among strict critics and active dealers about the developable names. The points at which a critic is strict or "passionate" are usually taken as the test of his or her caliber, but perhaps they are really the weak points, the place where the first persona singular claims a false diachronic authority.

The existence of copious information in the art world does not mean that it will be used, of course. Harold D. Lasswell has pointed in a global context to a situation that has a bearing on our problem. "The modern communications revolution has been unable to universalize the outlook of mankind." "The chief gainer from reduced localism has been not a common world perspective, but intermediate attitudes of a more parochial character. The great continental units — like the USA, Russia, and mainland China — absorb the focus of attention of the overwhelming percentage of their population. National self-references rise more sharply than do more inclusive references. The flow of information is controlled to perpetuate the patterns of segregated access that correspond to the value-institution structure of a divided world arena."[17] This seems analogous to the art world on a small scale. If communication systems have a built-in tendency to "segregated access" in preference to "more inclusive references" the difficulty of changing art criticism is great. However an art criticism that matches the productivity and diffusion of artists is our greatest challenge.

[1]Meyer Schapiro, "Diderot on the Artist and Society," in *Society and the Freedom of the Creative Man,* ed. Joseph L. Waldover, Diderot Studies, V (Geneva, 1964), p. 5.

[2]Ibid., p. 11

[3]John Cage, "On Robert Rauschenberg, Artist, and His Work," *Silence* (Middletown, 1961), p. 101.

[4]*Art-as-Art: the Selected Writings of Ad Reinhardt,* ed. Barbara Rose, (New York, 1975), p. 48.

[5]Raymond B. Cattoll, "The Nature and Measurement of Anxiety," *Scientific American,* 208 (March, 1963), p. 96.

[6]Ferdinand de Saussure, *Course In General Linguistics,* ed. Charles Bally and Albert Sechehaye in collaboration with Albert Riedlinger. New York: McGraw-Hill. 1966. p. 140.

[7]Ira Progof, *Jung, Synchronicity, and Human Destiny* (New York, 1973).

[8]Lawrence Alloway, "The Artist Count: In Praise of Plenty," *Art In America,* 65 (September-October 1977), p. 108.

[9]Lippard's piece is reprinted in *Changing* (New York, 1971), pp. 154-166. Ratcliff's piece is in "Deseo," the catalogue of an exhibition at the Contemporary Art Center, Cincinnati, Ohio, 1973.

[10]I borrow these words, used to describe work in research laboratories, from Charles Perrow, *Complex Organizations* (Glenview, Ill.), p. 55.

[11]Harold Sackman, *Computers, Systems Science, and Evolving Society* (New York, 1967), p. 232.

[12]"1961". New York: Allan Frumkin Gallery, 1974.

[13]"American Abstract Expressionists and Imagists". New York: Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, 1961. By H. Harvard Arnason.

[14]"Figures: a Show of Current Figure Painting in New York." Assembled by Rael Gleitshaw. Introduction by Jack Kroll. New York: Kornblee Gallery, 1962.

[15]George Kubler, *The Shape of Time: Remarks on the History of Things* (New Haven, 1974), p. 55. (Orig. pub. 1952.)

[16]Nikolaus Pevsner, "The Crisis of 1650 in Italian Painting," *Studies in Art, Architecture, and Design* (London, 1968), V. I, pp. 56-76. (Orig. pub. *Wiener Jahrbuch fur Kunstgeschichte,* VIII, 1932.) Theodor Hetzer, "Francisco Goya and the Crisis in Art Around 1800," in *Goya in Perspective,* ed. Fred Licht (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey, 1973), pp. 92-113. (Orig. Pub. *Wiener Jahrbuch fur Kunstgeschichte,* XIV, 1950.)

[17]Harold D. Lasswell, "Policy Problems of a Data-Rich Civilization." International Federation for Documentation, 31st Meeting and congress, 1965. Excerpted in *Information Technology in a Democracy,* ed. Alan F. Westin (Cambridge, Mass. 1971), pp. 187-188.

The History of Contemporary Art: A Contradiction in Terms?

BY IRVING SANDLER

Art history and art criticism are often distinguished on the grounds that one treats the art of the past, distanced in time from its subject, and the other deals with recent art or with older art from the vantage point of contemporary experience. Because it is thought to be more distanced, art history is supposed to be more dispassionate, more "objective" than art criticism, and in fact, leading professionals in the field, notably great European emigres in the thirties and more recent writers such as Quentin Bell, have called for the exclusive cultivation of a "scientific" approach, confining art history to biographical documentation, the dating of works, iconography, verifiable influences and stylistic developments, and the like. Art criticism is supposed to be more "subjective" then art history, concerned more with the experience of art, the aesthetic interaction between the observer and the observed, and with such elusive matters as quality in art or the lack of it. In fact, discerning quality is believed by many contem-

porary critics, Clement Greenberg, for example, to be the primary task of art criticism.

However, as I see it, the attempt to elucidate quality is but one of a variety of subjective approaches, and because there are no demonstrable criteria for judgment, quality is not the most illuminating issue for a critic to focus on. It simply becomes a matter of personal taste. More fruitful is the articulation of the critic's aesthetic encounters, opening up for the viewer potentially fresh ways of seeing and experiencing art. In my opinion, art history is also most useful when it fulfills this function, e.g., Meyer Schapiro's *Cezanne*. However, individual aesthetic encounters have a collective dimension. Although they are individual, a significant number of individual art "professionals" at any moment experience art in more or less the same way, arriving at a "consensus" about its meaning and value. The nature of this consensus will be examined at length in this article.

Conventional art historians have denigrated art criticism because of its emphasis on the evaluation of art — but not without challenge from within the profession. For example, James Ackerman has written: "No critic can operate without historical knowledge and historians make critical judgments every time they choose one work rather than another to illustrate a point."[1] Ackerman also remarked: "The isolation of art history from art criticism in recent times is due largely to a conviction that a clear distinction can be made between facts and feelings about works of art, that we made sound 'objective' observations at one moment and unreliable 'subjective' evaluations at another-....[But] we cannot distinguish clearly 'objective' from 'subjective' factors in visual perceptions, and...nearly every conclusion we make about works of art bears the stamp of our personality, experience, and system of values, though in varying degrees."[2] If this is so, and I believe it is, then there can be a valid history of contemporary art. Scholars can bridge consciously the disciplines of criticism and history, with difficulty to be sure, particularly if the historian has participated in the events under consideration and must undertake a kind of aesthetic psychoanalysis.

More than Ackerman did, I question whether the passage of time engenders "objectivity" or enables art historians to put art into the "proper" perspective many think it does. Such a perspective is not supposed to be available to critics close in time to the art they are writing about, because aesthetic controversies are too immediate, or too hot, to allow for that. I submit that aesthetic controversies only seem to cool in time. Actually, they are assimilated into the controversies of the historian's time. Bias remains but it is hidden rather than open. One need only consider the ups and downs of any modern master's reputation and most old masters' to see how differing aesthetics shape art history at different times.

I also question whether art history or criticism can ever be "objective," even if that were desirable. As I see it, the long view is different from the short view because prejudices, appetities, tastes, aesthetic and cultural issues, and "life," so to speak, have changed. There is no judgment-free history. Marcel Franciscono (to whom I am indebted for many insights) has written: "The way the art historian conceives historical relationships...betrays his values," and there is no avoiding this.[3] In fact, critics of the same generation as an artist as well as later writers have often interpreted the artist's work in ways that never occurred to the artist. Furthermore, writers have even found the artist's intentions entirely beside the point or even embarrassing, as formalists did the aspirations of Barnett Newman, much as they admired his painting. Indeed, the "greatness" of a work of art depends on its ability to trigger multiple meanings, changing as the culture changes in time. Again, the fluctuating reputations of artists attest to this.

Theoretically, there is an "objective" record in art history, but no scholar would want to recapitulate it, since it would involve documenting every artist's career in a period under study. All would have to be treated equally. This is neither meaningful nor feasible, particularly in our own time when there is such a profusion of information available that it has probably become unmanageable. We cannot avoid singling out certain artists and disregarding many others. But once evaluations are made, the true record is distorted. The record comes to depend on the artists esteemed by a historian. Thus the facts of an event are those that involve artists regarded as masters. Facts that pertain only to artists deemed inferior simply do not count. As I remarked in my history of Abstract Expressionism, *The Triumph of American Painting,* what artists who called for setting the record straight "really desired was not so much a record of events as the assertion that certain events were more significant than others"—and therefore that the participants were more significant historically.[4]

Ultimately, the art historian is responsible for the record he or she creates, and any such record is a subjective one. However, there are a number of correctives to individual subjectivity, namely the opinions, aesthetic experiences, and tastes of artists, critics, curators, historians, dealers and collectors, that is, art "professionals" and "experts," who formulate a loose consensus at any moment about which aesthetic issues and tendencies are the most important or, at least, stimulating, and which artists are most interesting, influential or best. The art historian need not allow the consensus to change his or her mind, but it ought to be studied and presented in his or her history. The attitudes of others are subjective, of course, but it seems to me that in concert, as a collective subjectivity, so to speak, they take on a kind of objectivity in that they are likely to be more understandable, perhaps

more meaningful, than just one viewpoint that might be only idiosyncratic. It should be stated that the responses of certain art "professionals" are more valuable than others, and that the choice of who they are is also subjective. But there tends to be a loose consensus in this matter too. For example, the public for advanced art in the fifties would have agreed that the judgment of a Thomas Hess or Dorothy Miller should count for a great deal more than that of, say, an Emily Genauer.

In my new book, *The New York School: The Painters and Sculptors of the Fifties,* I tried to describe the nature of artistic consensus, *at least as it existed in the fifties:* "Although there are no demonstrable criteria to determine quality, the awareness of quality exists, and this awareness causes certain works and bodies of work to grow in stature in time. But it is not only quality that guarantees longevity. The possibilities that a work possesses for future development can cause it to remain interesting, whether it has aesthetic quality or not, as the continuing fame of Duchamp indicates. In most cases quality and the potential of future development come together in an artist's work, but not necessarily.

"I also assumed that each generation is intent on weighing aesthetic possibilities in order to discover the main sources of energy at the moment, what appears alive and dead or boring in current art. At every moment ambitious young artists — ambitious in that they do not merely want to imitate past styles — each face a 'crisis.' The pressure on them is simultaneously to ascertain what in existing art has become too familiar and over-used to continue to challenge perception; what seems open for fresh extension; what constitutes the particular sensibility of their generation, its particular manner of experiencing as distinct from any other; and what each artist desires or feels compelled to say. Thus, the task of an artist is to achieve a style which embodies his or her private insights while forming the sensibility of the time. If the artist succeeds, his or her individual statement relates to that of his or her most relevant contemporaries. [In this way period styles (or what Thomas Hess called manners in contrast to individual styles) come into being.]

"These individual styles in aggregate constitute a manner which possesses the energy to command an audience for advanced art, an audience that, to the surprise of the artists, seemed to have been waiting for the new art to clarify its latent self- and generational-awareness, initially in the face of ridicule and hostility. The most influential members of such an audience are the artists themselves, who naturally evaluate present and past art from the vantage point of their own appetites and aesthetics. It is not so simple, of course. Other taste-makers exert influence on the public, but generally they are close to the artists who provide them with cues. Of particular importance are older tastemakers ...who, like the venturesome artists, have become tired of the old

styles they had been influential in 'establishing.' Indeed, fatigue is a primary cause of the decline of a prevailing vanguard which has exhausted the potential of its aesthetic premises and whose premises have become well-known and successful enough to attract large numbers of followers. Most of these latecomers at best try to extend the style whose potential for fresh development has diminished, or at worst, craft the 'look' of the style, producing a glut of stale, unchallenging, or academic work, generating ever more fatigue.

"The audience for new art recognizes a style by focusing attention on it and in so choosing disregards competing styles, generally exempting a few leading artists in each. The few exceptions, in most cases the initiators of the established styles, come to be viewed as individual artists rather than as members of a 'school.' In time, the achievement of such individuals counts for more and more and continues to engage the public for advanced art long after the style of which it is a part ceases to be of interest.

"One would suppose that it would be difficult to determine with any certainty which tendency at any time best exemplifies that time. However, it appears that the audience for advanced art is somehow agreed on what is of value, notwithstanding inevitable differences of individual opinion."[5]

As I remarked, this model of consensus applies to the fifties but not necessarily to the greatly expanded art worlds of the sixties and seventies. As yet, I have not studied the latter decades as intensively as I have the earlier one. However, it seems that during the sixties, the pressures of commerce, fashion, and the media were exerted on avant-garde taste as never before. I wrote in *The New York School* that a new audience emerged that seemed excited more by novelty in art than by any other quality, by the artist as celebrity more than his or her art, and by art as commodity, a potential big money-maker, or as a means of social climbing. As art became increasingly fashionable, the fashion world entered the art world bringing its own aims, a few of which seemed similar to those of the avant-garde artists, such as the pursuit of the new and refusal to redo what had been done. To be sure, the values of most artists were substantially different from those of the fashionable (with the exception, of course, of the few seriously interested in art); the one intent on the expansion of perception, on achieving new visions; the other on novelties that titillate, replaced with such regularity that they appear to have had planned obsolescence built into them. Still, the fashion world exerted on the art world a growing demand for novelty and for a more rapid rate of style change—exacerbating the development of avant-garde art.[6]

Certainly, the role of fashion, commerce, the media, and other information networks, all of which are important cogs in the art support system, has grown in influence. Still, the question

remains, which art does the system support? In determining this, factors other than commerce and fashion enter decisively. In fact, artists, critics, curators, historians, dealers, and collectors are bound together much less by market values than by a common artistic education, culture, and experience, a shared experience in contemporary art and culture which values above all art for its own sake and which also enables most artists, critics, curators, etc., to determine independently which artists they think best, most significant, influential, and freshest. As I see it, support system opinion stems from aesthetic consensus, rarely the other way around. Nonetheless, critics and historians must be suspicious of the system because of its effect on the consensus, even though any influences it may have are probably short-lived. What makes questions of this kind so difficult to deal with is that if our support system is not the best imaginable one, we do not know of any better. Moreover, its mechanisms are old and deeply rooted in our civilization. As Joseph Alsop has shown, the very origins of art collecting and dealing, museums, and art history are inextricably intertwined.[7] For the time being, I would like to hold further consideration of the art support system in abeyance, hoping to make it the subject of future essays, using as one point of departure Lawrence Alloway's article, "Network: The Art World Described As System."[8]

My conception of consensus in the fifties does not apply to the seventies in a number of significant respects. The audience for "difficult" art in the fifties was disposed toward what it considered avant-garde art, even though in retrospect that art does not seem very advanced. In the seventies, the notion of the avant-garde as the modernist mainstream of art no longer seems believable, because art has reached so many limits, that is, boundaries between art and non-art. Indeed, jumping to extremes has become *established* as a *tradition*. Furthermore, there now exists a substantial public for "difficult" art, willing to follow enthusiastically wherever artists lead. Because avant-gardism now seems retardataire, we have entered a period of pluralism, or as it is sometimes called, post-modernism. To sum up, attitudes have changed, yet the analysis of the consensus in the fifties is a useful place to begin the study of developments in the sixties and seventies. I also find it illuminating to investigate the consensuses of the periods preceding and following the one I am studying, particularly the following one. I will deal with this simultaneous looking to the past and its future later in this article.

The idea of consensus has another value. It provides a way of dealing more fairly than usual with quality, since more informed people than a single individual are brought into consideration. As Franciscono remarked, "the informed taste of those for whom the works were primarily intended surely counts objectively for much."[9] Documenting the judgment of others need not limit the

author's own critical evaluation. However, it does force the author to test or, at least, juxtapose his or her opinions and their premises against those of other "professionals." This approach has an additional worth. It helps to account for the success of certain artists, that is, their critical acclaim which leads to or augments other kinds of success. It also helps reveal the mechanisms whereby an artist succeeds or fails in the eyes of the art world, mechanisms that have been too little studied and thus appear more obscure than they might be. (Incidentally, it also reduces the role of the historian as tastemaker, promoter, and the like.)

Although it seems to be a good practice to take into account the opinions and tastes of others, there appears to be a bias against it, at least on the evidence of two reviews of my recent book. Indeed, I have been accused of self-abnegation, of hiding behind the assertions and critical judgments of others, as if it was not I who organized and evaluated all the material, establishing it as a foil or a complement in a historical context I myself created. However, I must admit to an occasional self-denial. In a few cases, I included artists, reluctantly to be sure, for whom I had little appreciation because of the taste of the consensus or historically important members of it.

In presenting the ideas of others, the historian also risks being misunderstood. Two reviewers of my book took me to task for being in Greenberg's "camp," to my surprise, since I clearly stated my disagreement with his aesthetic views, although I did try to present them fairly. There was and is no question in my mind that Greenberg was an important critic, and any consensus would agree that he was either the most important critic of our time or one of the two or three for whom such a claim might be made, whether one might like his criticism or art world role or not. Yet my reviewers implied that if I did not like him, I should have ignored or perhaps savaged him. And if I did not disregard him or tried to treat him fairly, then I was a disciple or ally.

It should be stressed finally that although consensus opinion and taste is useful, it is limited. During the fifties, the consensus was agreed generally on only a dozen artists or so. There were sub-consensuses, to be sure, but beyond the dozen or so artists, opinion was so mixed that an author could only rely on his or her subjective judgment about the quality and historical merit of individual artists.

In the following section, I will deal with the special problems or pitfalls in the methodology of the history of contemporary art, There is first of all the use of taped interviews with artists as a primary source of materials, a method of research that has been most important in my own work. Certainly, interviews are useful, particularly in determining an artist's intention and the facts of his

or her career. There has been, of course, a continuing controversy over the historical worth of the artist's intention, because the intentional fallacy cannot be denied. What an artist aims to embody in his or her works is not necessarily what they communicate. Often some entirely different content, feeling or mood is conveyed. Moreover, as William James noted, an artist's creative process or leap cannot be imagined and recapitulated. Therefore, an artist's conscious intention is of limited help. Nevertheless, in my opinion, an artist can provide relevant insights about his or her aims and work, insights which can be checked against the evidence on the picture surface, verified visually, as it were, or at least made comprehensible. However, as I wrote elsewhere: "The ultimate test ... is the work itself. It must convince one that it embodies the meanings that the artist (or anyone else) attributes to it, else any discourse concerning content is irrelevant."[10] What counts, therefore, is the writer's experience, but it is natural for a writer in contact with an artist to be influenced by the artist's self-appraisal. Alloway cautioned that the artist's opinion can inhibit the writer's independent interpretation as well as the study of broader comparative and historical contexts.[11]

An artist's statement of aesthetic intention presents far fewer difficulties for the historian than the artist's conception of his or her role in the general development of the art of the time, that is, the relation of the artist's work to that of his or her contemporaries. If the artist is persuasive and has outlived many or most of his or her colleagues, the artist, if so disposed, can try to rewrite art history, and some do (sometimes successfully), being less interested in being historians than in having themselves written into history, not to mention deriving more immediate rewards. Yearnings for success must not be underestimated. It is not easy for a scholar, particularly if young, to question the veracity of first-hand verbal information — even about events two or three decades old — especially from a living master who was so kind to see one in the first place. What better rule of evidence — primary source material! If the interviewed artist's story does not conform to other interpretations, even if closer in time to the events, particularly if published and therefore secondary source material, so much the better. The record has been set straight by new and original research. Justice has been done (and the requirements of dissertation committees fulfilled). Why bother speaking for a dead artist when it is so easy and fascinating to talk to a living one.

Valuable material can be garnered from interviews, but it must be checked with other contemporaries, if any are alive and accessible, and with articles, documents, chronicles, diaries, and earlier interviews. Furthermore, the interview without evaluation should not be considered creative scholarship, as it commonly seems to be. One advantage in talking to artists is that it enables

the historian to achieve an apposite sense of the limits of their thinking, as indicated by works of art seen and books read and discussed, ideas ruminated and shared, and equally important, ideas not entertained. The artist's thinking need not limit the writer's interpretation, but it can help curb interpretive orgies, and that is salutary. Once again, I would like to emphasize that eccentric interpretations can be further avoided by studying the critical literature of the time under discussion. It is generally later writers who advance idiosyncratic notions, sometimes only in order to come up with something different.

It is useful to keep in mind that an interview with an artist about a past period tends to reveal as much or more about the artist's thinking at the moment when the interview occurred. I myself discovered that my interviews in the fifties about what was supposed to have happened in the forties told me a great deal about the fifties, something that I did not discover until I began to study the later period.

The historian can also use the interview to get to know the artist as a person, and perhaps to treat the art from the vantage point of the artist's personality, or what the historian can learn of it. Personally, I have strong reservations about the psycho-historical approach, because I do not believe that the historian can learn enough about an artist's life to justify relating it to his or her art. Unless historians undertake a process as intense as psychoanalysis, how can they really decide which of an artist's past experiences are the significant ones? Actually, for those interested in the artist's psychic make-up, his or her art would be more revealing than the amount of talk an artist would be willing to take time for away from work. At least, the work discloses what an artist believes it is important to abstract from the totality and multiplicity of his or her experience. I am also uncomfortable with the presentation of the artist's personal interactions with others, life style, his or her environment, and the like, because of the impossibility (for me, at least) of relating these convincingly to the art.

Although its greatest use is gathering factual information, the interview technique can aggravate the problem of determining certain facts, notably the dating of works. Many artists tend to backdate when given the opportunity, that is, when no public record exists. (One Abstract Expressionist even altered a published picture by scrawling on it a date earlier than the one previously printed in the caption. It's the artist's word against the editor's "mistake." Another painter dated his pictures in the year each was allegedly conceived, although the works themselves were sometimes executed decades later.) Much backdating is innocent, simply a matter of lapsed memory. (One Abstract Expressionist could recall whom he was living with when he painted certain pictures but not when. Dealing with past loves was a major problem for his biographer.)

Backdating is most often motivated by an artist's attempt to better his or her potential status in art history. In all fairness to the artist, historians are frequently the cause of the urge to tamper with dating, because they often assume that a single "genius" is the source of a style and therefore relegate related artists to the role of followers or imitators or mannerists. I believe that an artist can occasionally be the leading innovator of a style, perhaps even the sole one, and that an innovator's work is generally better and more powerful than that of others who develop later in a similar direction, and thus take the limelight. Frank Stella is a case in point, and it was his ambition to be the central artist of his time. As he said: "The idea in being a painter is to declare an identity. Not just my identity, an identity for me, but an identity big enough for everyone to share in. Isn't that what it's all about?"[12]

However, the multiple discovery is far more common than the single one. This makes the problem of figuring out who painted what first exceedingly difficult. As I once wrote: "It is generally assumed that if artist A worked prior to artist B in a certain style, then artist A influenced artist B, and that A is a leader and B a follower. This is frequently true, but it also may happen that artists A and B were friends who exchanged ideas, or that artist B was tending in a direction similar to artist A before seeing his pictures, or that artist B, responding to the same stimuli in art and in the world at large, developed independently of artist A. The latter theory is known as 'multiple discovery'." Robert Merton has accounted for this by pointing out that particular discoveries in science (and I believe in art) "become highly probable when, first, prerequisite kinds of knowledge have accumulated in man's storehouse of culture and, second, when the attention... becomes focused on particular problems; focused either by changing social needs, by developments internal to science, or by both." Merton did not minimize the role of the individual innovator, but stressed that his activities do not occur "apart from the environing structure of values, of social relations and of socially induced foci of attention."[13]

As I remarked, the reason artists backdate their work is because they recognize the importance in art history of what George Kubler called good entrances. He maintained that "the great differences between artists are not so much those of talent as of entrance and position in sequence. Talent is a predisposition ...[but] it is meaningless to debate whether Leonardo was more talented than Raphael. Both were talented . . . But the followers had bad luck. They came late . . . The mechanisms of fame are such that their predecesors' talent is magnified, and their own is diminished . . . . Times and opportunities differ more than the degree of talent."[14] Kubler may be right, but whether he is or not, the issues that he raises warrant far greater study than they have received.

Given the historian's reasonable suspicion of any date not documented close to the time the picture or sculpture was shown, how is the entrance or work to be validated. Every method has its shortcomings. I prefer to accept the entrance of work only when it is publicly shown, aware of course that this allows entrance to be largely decided by dealers, or occasionally curators or critics who publish articles with illustrations before work is exhibited (a rare occurrence).Perhaps it is questionable to give so much history-making power to dealers, curators, and critics, but they have generally listened closely to artists. All are naturally interested in any artist who introduces fresh ideas and whose ideas and work possess the energy to command attention. I find it difficult to imagine that such an artist would not receive a show close to the time when his or her work got to be known, even today, when with mushrooming numbers, artists are more easily lost in the shuffle. (There are exceptions, such as artists who do not want to exhibit, for example, de Kooning, who refused to show until 1948.)

Apart from the pitfalls in methodology, there are pitfalls in attitude, generated by the historian's preconceived, often hidden assumptions. One major assumption is that certain works possess quality and that others do not. Another common assumption is that art should add something new to existing art, and that if it does, it possesses quality, or is likely to. Fresh looking art can be considered as an individually original contribution and/or as innovation that changes the course of art by establishing a new style, an avant-gardist assumption. In the forties, fifties, and sixties, critics in the ambiance of the New York School tended to be avant-gardist, predisposed to favor each new style as it appeared. In the seventies, they tended to favor personal uniqueness.

Generally, historians who believe that stylistic novelty is the prime measure of art historical virtue also presuppose progress in art as a value, art advancing into the ever new. The new is then used to rewrite history, making it seem to have moved inexorably in a predetermined direction. I am opposed to this conception, indeed to any deterministic approach. However, I do find it useful to compare the art of a period with the art that preceded and followed. For example, the gestural styles of the New York School in the forties and fifties can be more clearly defined by contrasting them with the non-gestural styles of the thirties and sixties.

This suggests one way of dealing with style change, one of the most difficult and challenging problems of art history. The comparative approach has its dangers, namely our reading of what we know of *our* present into work created earlier by an artist who knew only his past and present. As Ackerman wrote: "He accepts and rejects aspects of what he finds in things about him and adds something of his own. By his choice and by his contribution he

moves a step — sometimes a leap — away from the past. Are we, then, justified in saying that he has moved toward the future?"[15] Perhaps not, but we know part of that future, unpredictable though it may have been to the artist, and we cannot but take it into account.

By evaluating an earlier period from the vantage point of a later one, I do not mean that the more recent art is better. The aesthetic judgment of one generation is neither better nor worse than that of another. But I am affected by the *living* quality of certain art, its survival in time. For the historian to limit his or her appraisal of a period just to the way it saw itself closes it off, embalming its art in the past. To bring into consideration a later time implies a continuous process of art, much as it risks calling into question the self-conception of the earlier period. I prefer to deal with both viewpoints. There is in this the danger of avant-gardism, exemplified by the assertion that what remains alive conforms to, anticipates, or abets, particularly abets, the ongoing movement of art history. It was difficult in the sixties to avoid equating innovation with aesthetic worth, so pervasive was the belief in the virtues of the avant-garde. In the pluralistic seventies, it will be easier.

In conclusion, I would like to venture the hypothesis that the history of contemporary art can provide a new relevance for the study of past art. For some time now, I have been speculating about approaches to art history that might be more useful and pertinent today than the common chronological one, which implies, as I have written elsewhere, "the conception of the past as a more or less orderly evolution of artistic traditions . . . .each generation adding its gloss while considering those traditions valuable and pertinent to its time."[16] However, in our modern era, changes in art and life have been revolutionary rather than evolutionary, and history can no longer be treated as a more or less even flow.

Therefore, I have proposed that we approach art history from the standpoint of contemporary art and the conflicting issues deemed important now. "These issues can become the points of departure for reviewing the past, that is, allow the living present to give us our access to the vast realm of the past. In this way, we can determine what is of significance — alive or dormant at any moment — in the past, significant because it exposes how we arrived at the present and by contrast clarifies our awareness of both past and present. In turn, the past assumes a new importance, for it is imbued with meaning that it otherwise no longer seems to possess. To summarize, let the present regenerate those aspects of the past which illuminate and enrich the present."[17]

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[1]James S. Ackerman and Rhys Carpenter, *Art and Archaeology* (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey, 1963), p. 140.

[2]Ibid., pp. 144-45.

[3]Marcel Franciscono, "History, Textbooks, and Art: Reflections on a Half Century of Helen Gardner's *Art Through the Ages*," *Critical Inquiry*, (Winter 1977), p. 288.

[4]Irving Sandler, *The Triumph of American Painting: A History of Abstract Expressionism* (New York, 1970), p. 2.

[5]Irving Sandler, *The New York School: The Painters and Sculptors of the Fifties* (New York, 1978), pp. 290-91.

[6]Ibid., p. 315.

[7]Joseph Alsop, "How Did Art Collecting Begin," *The New York Review of Books*, December 21, 1978.

[8]Lawrence Alloway, "Network: The Art World Described as a System," *Artforum, V. 9*, September 1972

[9]Franciscono, "History, Textbooks, and Art," p. 288.

[10]Sandler, *The Triumph of American Painting*, p. 2.

[11]Alloway, "Network: The Art World Described as a System," p. 30.

[12]Philip Leider, "Literalism and Abstraction: Frank Stella's Retrospective at the Modern," *Artforum*, April 1970, p. 44.

[13]Sandler, *The Triumph of American Painting*, p. 3. See also Robert K. Merton, "The Role of Genius in Science," *Temple University Alumni Review*, April 1962.

[14]George Kubler, *The Shape of Time: Remarks on the History of Things* (New Haven, 1962), pp. 7-8.

[15]Ackerman and Carpenter, *Art and Archaeology*, p. 173.

[16]Irving Sandler, Statement, "The Teaching of Contemporary Art," *Conference on Art Criticism and Art Education* (New York, 1970), p. 41.

[17]Ibid., p. 44.

Scientific Criticism and *le beau moderne* of the Age of Science

BY JOAN UNGERSMA HALPERIN

Fénéon met Seurat in the spring of 1886 at the eighth and last group show of the impressionists, who had not exhibited together since 1882. For several years their diverging interests had made it difficult for them to unite as they had in the 1870's, when they needed to band together for mutual support. This year various disagreements between what Pissarro referred to as the "romantic" and the "scientific" impressionists brought about a break within the group. Degas insisted that the word "impressionist" be dropped from the title of the exhibition. Monet, Renoir, Sisley and Caillebotte withdrew. Cézanne, as usual, was not present; he had not exhibited with the group since 1877. Fénéon was most impressed with the work of the newcomers invited by Camille

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From a forthcoming biography, *Félix Fénéon, The Critical Years: 1861-1894.*

Pissarro: Seurat, Signac, and Lucien Pissarro, son of Camille, who had joined young Seurat in his quest for a new, more controlled art.

Fénéon had been deeply affected by Seurat's painting, *Une Baignade, Asnières* (Bathing at Asnières), which he had seen two years earlier at the first Salon of Independent Artists. Now, at the "Eighth Exhibition of painting," in a large gallery above a restaurant at 1 rue Laffitte, he finally met Seurat, Signac, and Pissarro. Fénéon was struck with what Seurat had accomplished in his large canvas listed in the catalogue as "A Sunday Afternoon on the Island of *la Grande Jatte*." This island in the Seine just outside Paris, called "The Big Basin" because of a bowl-like depression in the middle of it, was a popular recreation spot in the 1880's. Seurat had spent many hours there accumulating studies in oil and drawings for his final composition, which he painted in the studio, as he had *Une Baignade*. *La Grande Jatte*, flanked by five smaller canvases by Seurat, covered the entire back wall of one room, which Seurat shared with Signac.

The exhibition revealed what Pissarro had meant by the difference between the "romantic" and the "scientific" impressionists. It indicated to Fénéon the distance between the old and the new art, and his sympathies were definitely with the innovators, who were naturally under fire from the original impressionists as well as from the press catering to what Fénéon called the bovine public. He wrote an article for *La Vogue* on the Eighth Exhibition with separate sections for each group within the impressionist movement. He stated, for the first time, that the revolutionary stage of impressionism was already a part of the past. His opening paragraphs give a succinct history of the movement:

> During the heroic period of "Impressionism," the crowd could always see Edouard Manet in the forefront, arousing anger, trying to get the annual Salon to accept his entry; enthusiastic, resilient, theatrical Manet. But in fact the last mutation that changed Manet the bituminist of the *Bon Bock* into the luminist of *Linge* and *Père Lathuille* happened under the influence of Camille Pissarro, Degas, Renoir and especially Claude Monet: These men were the chiefs of the revolution of which he was the herald.
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> MM. Renoir and Monet are not at rue Laffitte, and neither are MM. Raffaëlli, Cézanne, Sisley and Caillebotte. In spite of these lacunae, the new exhibition is explicit. M. Degas is there with characteristic entries; Mme Morisot and MM. Gauguin and Guillaumin represent impressionism as it had appeared in previous exhibitions; MM. Pissarro, Seurat and Signac are breaking new ground.[1]

Fénéon first described the works exhibited by Degas and his group. His word-picture of the Degas nudes is a classic example of his style:

> *Des femmes emplissent de leur accroupissement cucurbitant la coque des tubs...* (Women crouching fill the hull of bathtubs with their gourd-like shapes...).

The neologism, *cucurbitant* (from Cucurbitaceae), is not only picturesque, evoking form (gourds, melons), but humorous and slyly misogynous, as one hears *cu(l), cu(l)* and sees the piling up of *c's* in a typographical mime of the female behind.

The next section treats those painters identified in 1886 as impressionist, much depleted by the defection of Monet, Renoir, Sisley and Caillebotte. The paintings of Gauguin, Guillaumin, and Berthe Morisot are vividly evoked. Fénéon chose to add a paragraph on an obscure Swiss painter who was not represented at the exhibition, David Estoppey, who worked mostly in pastels. He had just done a portrait of Feneon (he also did one of Jean Moréas) and the critic was interested in what appeared to be a young talent ready to move in new directions.

The final section was devoted to Seurat, Signac, Camille Pissarro, his son Lucien, and Dubois-Pillet. Degas had vetoed the last painter's participation in the Eighth Exhibition, but Fénéon pointed out that Dubois-Pillet really belonged with the group of Seurat. Before defining the newcomers' work, Fénéon reviewed the qualities of the impressionists: they limited themselves to direct observation of modern life and painted landscapes at the spot; they saw objects sharing a common light, interdependent, the color of each one conditioned by other objects nearby; all this, he noted, as opposed to the traditional autonomy of objects ideally isolated and lit with weak, artificial light. To capture fugitive sensations of sunlight and shade, the impressionists had abandoned "tenebrous sauces concocted on the palette" and applied separate strokes of pigment; but their application was arbitrary. Seurat and his friends, wrote Fénéon, "divide color values in a conscious and scientific manner. This evolution dates from 1884, 1885, 1886."

> If you consider, for example, 100 square centimeters [about 16 square inches] of uniform tone in M. Seurat's *Grande Jatte,* you will find on each centimeter of this surface, in a whirling host of tiny spots, all the elements that make up the tone. This grass plot in the shade: most of the strokes render the local value of the grass; others, of a light yellowish orange and thinly scattered, express the scarcely felt action of the sun; bits of purple introduce the complementary of green;[2] a cyan-blue, brought out by the proximity of a plot of grass in the

sunlight, accumulates its siftings towards the line of demarcation, and progressively grows thinner away from this line. Only two elements come together to produce the lawn in the sun: green and solar orange, all other reactions being obliterated under the full impact of the sun's rays. Black being a non-light, the black dog is colored by reactions of the grass; its dominant color is therefore deep purple; but it is also attacked by the dark blue arising from neighboring spaces of light. The monkey on a leash is speckled with yellow, its personal quality, and flecked with purple and ultramarine. The whole thing: all too obviously in this writing—a crude description; but within the frame, complexly and delicately measured out.

These colors, isolated on the canvas, recombine on the retina: we have, therefore, not a mixture of material colors (pigments), but a mixture of differently colored rays of light. Need one be reminded that even when the colors are the same, mixed pigments and mixed rays of light do not necessarily produce the same results? It is also generally understood that the luminosity of optical mixture is always much greater than that of pigmentary mixture, as is shown by the numerous equations worked out by the American physicist Ogden N. Rood.[3]

For carmine violet and Prussian blue, which produce a blue-grey:

50C + 50B = 47C + 49B + 4 black;
mixture of pigments — *mixture of light*

for carmine and green:

50C + 50G = 50C + 24G + 26 black.

We can understand why the impressionists, in striving to express a maximum of luminosity — as occasionally Delacroix before them — would want to substitute optical mixture for mixing pigments on the palette.

Georges Seurat is the first to have presented a complete and systematic paradigm of this new technique. His immense painting, *La Grande Jatte,* whatever part of it you examine, spreads out, a patient, monotonous, try: here, in fact, fancy brushwork is futile, tricks of the trade impossible; there is no room for bravura — let the hand be sluggish, but the eye quick, shrewd, and knowledgeable. For an ostrich plume, a bundle of straw, a wave, or a rock, the handling of the brush remains the same. And if it is possible to give "virtuoso

painting" points for slashing and scumbling, say, rough weeds, waving branches, fluffy fur, at least "la peinture au point"[4] is exactly right for rendering smooth surfaces, and more particularly the nude, to which it has not yet been applied.[5]

This analysis shows how closely attuned Fénéon was to Seurat's conception. Indeed, his preoccupation with technical detail and scientific intention suggest that he had directly exchanged information with Seurat. His remark about the yet unexplored area of the nude is provocative; Seurat began work on *The Models* a few months later, in the fall of 1886.

The cryptic formulae in the middle of Fénéon's text on *La Grande Jatte* were taken directly from one of Seurat's source books, *Modern Chromatics* by Rood. Fénéon assumed that his reader was acquainted with Rood's work (which had been translated into French in 1881); but there is a certain snobbery in his remarks, "Need one be reminded that. . . .It is also generally understood that. . . ." In fact, the theory of optical mixture was *not* generally known, and, as Fénéon noted, *La Grande Jatte* was the first methodical application of it in painting. His use of Rood's equations here creates a certain mystery under the guise of clarity. He did not explain the experiments behind them, where Rood, to demonstrate the superiority of optical mixture of color over the mingling of pigments on the palette, painted a cardboard circle with a mixture of two pigments in equal parts, for example, fifty parts of carmine and fifty parts of green, giving dark red. He then painted each half of another circle with the same pigments, separate, and rotated the disk at high speed. The result was a much lighter color, pale reddish or flesh-tint. In order to match the color obtained by mixture on the palette, Rood had to add a sector of black to the disk painted with separate colors. That is the "black" in the equations quoted by Fénéon, who telescoped the terms of the experiment by saying, "mixture of light," rather than "mixture by rotation," as did Rood. Fénéon's love of concision made him reduce the scientific evidence to brief formulae, which added a touch of magic to his text. In the 1880's, science had become the touchstone to all knowledge, even art.

This kind of writing, like the art it represents, struck an entirely new note. Neither Huysmans nor Théodore Duret, to whom Fénéon referred his readers for more information on the impressionists, nor any other critic, had ever taken such pains to translate and explain the work of a particular artist. One cannot say that such criticism is inspired, in the manner of Baudelaire, nor enthusiastic, as Diderot — two critics much admired by Fénéon. But it was surely faithful to the intentions of the artist. It was largely due to Fénéon that *La Grande Jatte* became what Signac called the "manifesto-painting" of the movement.

The seriousness of Fénéon's criticism is all the more evident

when set against the contemporary reaction of most people to Seurat's *Grande Jatte*. When Pissarro told Degas that this painting was very interesting, Degas replied with a bit of his customary sarcasm: "Oh, I would have noted that myself, Pissarro, except that the painting is so large!"[6] George Moore told how a friend described the opening of the exhibition:

> There is a canvas there twenty feet square and in three tints: pale yellow for the sunlight, brown for the shadow, and all the rest is sky-blue. There is, I am told, a lady walking in the foreground with a ring-tailed monkey, and the tail is said to be three yards long.[7]

This monkey seems to have been the central attraction for the public, as Fénéon explained forty years later:

> There must have been something aggressively odd in the canvas, for it reduced the visitor to paroxysms of rage as soon as he entered the room reserved for Seurat and Signac and saw it occupying almost all of the back wall. Soon the intruder's anger, at first scattered over the forty figures on the scene, became localized (by an ill-explicable phenomenon) on the monkey held on a leash by the lady in the foreground and particularly on its spiraled tail. It seemed as if that little beast, an atavistic glimpse, and that tail were there to insult personally anyone who crossed the threshold.[8]

At the time of the exhibition in June 1886, Fénéon simply ignored the hilarity of the crowd. After his discussion of Seurat's technique, he gave a simple description of the subject of the painting, seen not as an anecdote but as a formal structure.

> The subject: beneath a sultry sky, at four o'clock, the island, boats slipping past its flank, stirring with a casual Sunday crowd enjoying the fresh air among the trees; and these forty-odd figures are endowed with a succinct, hieratic line, rigorously drawn, back or full-face or in profile, some seated at right angles, others stretched out horizontally, others standing rigidly; as though by a modernizing Puvis.
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> The atmosphere is transparent and uncommonly vibrant; the surface seems to flicker or glimmer. Perhaps this sensation, which is experienced in front of certain other paintings in the same room, can be explained by the theory of Dove:[9] the retina, expecting distinct rays of light to act on it, perceives in very rapid alternation both the disassociated colored elements and their resultant.[10]

Thus, without elaborating further on the figures — for the subject is "the island...stirring" — Fénéon returns to the visual nature of the picture whose vibrant, transparent quality is due to the division of colored elements, transmitted by the retina in rapid succession of alternate impulses: the "vibration" that Blanc and Rood had described in their scientific studies and that Seurat and his followers sought to achieve in their painting. Earlier in his description of *La Grande Jatte,* Fénéon had given the official theory of the painters, that the "colors, isolated on the canvas, recombine on the retina." This idea of "optical mixing" as opposed to mixing pigments on the palette, had been extensively discussed by Blanc and Rood and had been adopted by Seurat and Fénéon as a rational explanation in support of the new technique. In practice, however, optical mixing rarely occurs: the viewer continues to see the separate colors.[11] Fénéon's repeated assertion that the colors would blend at a certain distance has led to some intriguing scholarly work. "Take two steps away, and all these versi-colored spots melt into undulating, luminous masses; the brushwork vanishes, so to speak," said Fénéon.[12] And his readers tended to believe him. But the eye is a persevering and sensitive organ and refuses to obey this particular theory. (I have found, however, that upon removal of my spectacles, a gentle combination of astigmatism and myopia creates the effect Fénéon spoke of.)

As the presumably healthy eye of the viewer strives toward a resolution of the different hues in optical painting, it experiences the vibration of separate colored particles as they interact. Rood had described this particular effect, and in Fénéon's final paragraph on *La Grande Jatte* Rood's very words appear: "the surface seems to flicker or glimmer" *(la surface semble vaciller* in both Fénéon and the French version of Rood) — "an effect," Rood concludes, "that no doubt arises from a fainter perception from time to time of its constituents. This communicates a soft and peculiar brilliancy to the surface, and gives it a certain appearance of transparency; we seem to see into it and below it."[13]

Fénéon described the rigorous structure of Seurat's painting by calling it "succinct, hieratic." These words evoke the calm compositions of ancient Egypt and Greece, without making an obvious comparison. Symbolists favorable to Seurat were pleased to call his style "primitive" or "Egyptian." Because they identified their own ideals with those of the ancients, the symbolists were quick to make similar parallels for the most gifted of the young painters. Jean Moréas saw "Panathenaean processions" and Paul Adam "Pharaonic parades" represented by the rigidity of the promenading figures in *La Grande Jatte.* Egyptian art, highly praised in Blanc's *Grammaire des arts du dessin,* had a profound, if subtle, influence on Seurat.[14] And Seurat once said to Gustave Kahn, "The Panathenaean Frieze of Phidias was a procession. I

want to make the moderns file past like the figures on the frieze, in their true essence."[15] At the same time he was not impressed with the literary effects the symbolists extrapolated from his work. "They see poetry in what I am doing. No, I apply my method and that is all there is to it."[16] This remark was something of a brag, a statement of faith in what the painter considered *his* method. To underline how little the subject meant to him, he said, "I could just as well have painted, in another harmony, the Combat of the Horatii and the Curiatii"[17]—a deliberate reference to David's *Oath of the Horatii* painted in a neoclassical style a century earlier, and again a kind of exaggerated rebuttal, because Seurat very consciously sought to express the most modern scenes of contemporary life.

Of all the critics, Paul Signac remarked, "Only the infallible F. Fénéon gave a pertinent analysis of the painter's technical achievement."[18] It is tempting to think that Fénéon's perception of Seurat's method was the product of a uniquely close relationship. In fact, there is no evidence that the critic and the painter had any especially personal friendship. The only known portrait of Fénéon by Seurat is a drawing in conté crayon showing the critic *profil perdu* in three-quarters view, his back turned, gazing, perhaps, at a painting. Fénéon never posed for Seurat, as he did for Signac, and Seurat probably did this sketch without Fénéon's knowledge.[19] In some ways Seurat's character was similar to Fénéon's. He was, wrote Jules Christophe, "silent, obstinate, and pure,"[20] a formula which brings to mind Paul Valéry's description of Fénéon as "just, pitiless, and gentle."[21]

Critics who write about painting not as a means of earning a livelihood but from some intense personal need often seem to experience their first encounter with a particular painter as a joyous shock to the nervous system. Delacroix was such a man for Baudelaire. And Huysmans told how he felt the first time he saw Degas's work:

> I do not recall ever having felt a commotion equal to what I experienced in 1876, the first time I found myself face to face with the works of this master...It was like being truly possessed. The modern art that I had been looking for in vain at contemporary exhibitions, and which only broke through in bits and pieces now and then, suddenly appeared before me, complete.[22]

It was the same for Fénéon and Seurat. The first impact was like a revelation. "Although there remains no trace of my reaction," he later wrote of *Une Baignade*, "I was totally aware of the importance of this painting: the masterpieces which were its logical consequence followed one after the other; but, much as I delighted in them, the initial spice of surprise was never repeated."[23]

Perhaps this one-to-one relationship of critic to artist is due to a

kinship in vision, which the difference in craft only brings closer, allowing for an exchange, or dialogue in esthetics. Zola defended Manet because he saw in him a realist, a sort of Zola on canvas. Duranty, another exponent of realism, also upheld the modern naturalism of the impressionists. Among the symbolist writers, Fénéon remarked (and he could have included himself) "certain ones, Gustave Kahn, Paul Adam, engaged in transposing everyday life into a logical reverie, intrigued by more complex rhythms, seeking precise and effective means of expression, saw in the work of the neo-impressionists certain analogies with their own efforts."[24]

Meetings between Fénéon and the painters were frequent. He was invited, along with Pissarro, Seurat and Signac, to Sunday dinner at the home of Dubois-Pillet, who had been one of the chief organizers of the Society of Independent Artists. Sometimes Fénéon met the painters at Asnières, on the outskirts of Paris, or joined their evening discussions at the cafe de la Nouvelle-Athènes near Pigalle, meeting place of the impressionists since 1877. The critic introduced Seurat and Signac to the literary gatherings of Mallarmé's Tuesdays, and invited them to the offices of *La Vogue*. Tradition has it that at the eighth impressionist exhibition, in front of *La Grande Jatte,* Fénéon introduced Seurat and Signac to Charles Henry, whose scientific theories on art closely paralleled their own and who would shortly work with them in new directions. The painters joined the poets at their usual meeting places: the Taverne anglaise on rue D'Amsterdam, Brasserie Gambrinus in the Latin Quarter, and the café d'Orient at Place Clichy.

If Seurat rarely spoke during the volatile discussions, Signac enjoyed bantering with the "young Symbolards." New friendships were born of these encounters, and many of the poets began to write art criticism that challenged the public scorn and official condemnation of the young painters. As Zola, Duranty and Huysmans had defended the impressionists, so Paul Adam, Gustave Kahn, Jean Moréas and Emile Verhaeren joined Fénéon in paving the way for future comprehension of the new painters. But it was Fénéon's writings that became, in Kahn's words, "the conscientious, intuitive, and complete manifesto of neo-impressionism."[25]

Fénéon did not use the word, *néo-impressionisme,* in his first article on Seurat and his followers. To distinguish them from the impressionist clan and from Degas and his group, he called them *novateurs,* or *dissidents* from impressionism. He repeatedly used the word, "reform," to indicate that the new art was building consciously on the discoveries made intuitively by the impressionists.

In June 1886, Monet, Renoir and Raffaëlli, who had not participated in the last impressionist exhibition of the previous month,

gave a show in common at the elegant gallery of Georges Petit, the fashionable rival of Durand-Ruel. Fénéon wrote a brilliant review of their paintings for *La Vogue* of 28 June. These two articles, along with another on the Independents, furnished the basis of his *Impressionnistes en 1886,* printed later that year.

The Society of Independent Artists held their second exhibition from 20 August-27 September 1886; some four hundred works were displayed, in the same Tuileries barracks used in 1884. This time the group of Seurat, Signac, Angrand, Lucien Pissarro and Dubois-Pillet managed to reserve a whole room to themselves in order to present a united front to the public. The public's reaction is seen by this report in the *Figaro:*

> Not very interesting, really, this exhibition, from the point of view of art, but very useful if you are bored by life; we advise those of our friends who like a good laugh to see this show. The room reserved for the "intransigents" of painting is especially priceless.[26]

Fénéon seized the occasion to write again of the innovating painters and sent a long article to *l'Art moderne* of Brussels, which had just engaged him to replace Huysmans as its Paris correspondent.

Entitled "L'Impressionnisme aux Tuileries," Fénéon's review appeared on 19 September 1886; the following day in Paris *La Vogue* printed extracts from it. It was here that the term "neo-impressionist" appeared for the first time. Fénéon, who doubtless chose the word, spoke of "the neo-impressionist method" — not yet an ism, but a method of painting separate and distinct from that of Monet, Renoir, Morisot and Sisley. Signac later reported that the young painters themselves were considering the term, "chromo-luminarists."[27] But *color* and *light* had been the essential quest of the impressionists, and the word neo-impressionist both underlined the debt of the new art to the old, and indicated a difference in technique.

As he had done before, Fénéon began by describing the virtues of the "traditional" impressionists, but then he dwelt more on what he considered their failings: impasting so that their canvases looked like relief maps, improvising on the spur of the moment and accepting any result that looked good — although, Fénéon conceded, these results were enough to captivate the most reluctant observers. He then defined the reform brought about by Seurat and his followers. Writing in *l'Art moderne* for a distant public, Fénéon did not concentrate on *La Grande Jatte* but briefly evoked several works by each painter, revealing in a few words the personal style of each one. He pointed out the significance of form in Seurat: groups of sailboats "stated as scalene triangles"; figures in a landscape "taking on geometric contours." In Signac's paintings, "colors provoke each other to wild chromatic esca-

lades, exult, and shout."[28] At the same time Fénéon gave a more complete explanation of the technique involved in terms less scientific than in the article for *La Vogue*. For his review of the eighth impressionist exhibition, Fénéon had interrogated Seurat and Signac and had obtained scientific particulars "to the extent that Seurat's laconism allowed."[29] But Seurat became more and more wary of divulging the secrets of his technique, and so Fénéon turned to Camille Pissarro in the fall of 1886 to correct and confirm the data he was giving to *l'Art moderne*. Great-hearted and conscientious, the old impressionist found himself in a quandary: he wanted to help Fénéon who had done so much in proclaiming the cause of the "néos," but he did not want to betray Seurat. He returned Fénéon's manuscript with the comment:

> I am sorry I cannot reply in more detail. Please excuse me if it's not very clear....I would have to have been in front of the paintings to ascertain the colors produced either by reflected light or by simultaneous contrast, and even local color.[30]

The principal thing, said Pissarro, was to name Seurat as the leader of the group. Pissarro, who was in Paris, could very well have observed the paintings in the light of Fénéon's remarks, but declared that he would have needed more time and that he still had to clarify certain things for himself before he could assert definite opinions.

Fénéon's article named Pissarro several times, even though he was not exhibiting at the Tuileries (the elder Pissarro had decided not to join the Indépendants, which he considered "mainly a venture of the young to whom other doors were closed."[31]). By including him in the review, Fénéon displayed a preference that Pissarro might have found embarrassing vis-à-vis Seurat. He was given a place of honor in Fénéon's concluding sentence: "As for new recruits to impressionism, they will turn not to Claude Monet but towards the analyst Camille Pissarro." Feneon even made a comparison unfavorable to Seurat in discussing a point that was "not yet clarified" in the neo-impressionist method: judging from Pissarro's paintings, he noted, a colored surface throws not only its complementary on neighboring surfaces, but reflects some of its own color on them. "The opinion of M. Seurat and M. Signac," wrote Fénéon, "seems less positive. And for example, the woman in the foreground of *A Sunday at la Grande Jatte* is standing in the grass and yet not one spot of green contributes to the formation of the tone of her dress."[32]

Robert L. Herbert has pointed out something that Fénéon did not realize at the time, that Pissarro "remained an impressionist at heart even when using much of the neo-impressionist technique, because he sought the harmony of similar tones, not opposites. This is why he usually showered one area with the local color of the adjacent area, not its complementary. As a result, he tended to

blend two areas together, instead of separating them as did Seurat and Signac."[33] What Fénéon had perceived as an unexplicated area was indeed a problem for Pissarro, who was to work out his basic incompatibility with neo- impressionism after two or three years. By observing apparently slight but significant differences, Fénéon revealed that even when the painters could or would not explain what they were doing, he was intent on understanding every detail and phase of their work.

Fénéon touched on various technical problems, such as cracking: the small, separate strokes of the neo- impressionists dried evenly and thus did not crack. He explained why the painters put glass over their canvases (like the varnish of traditional painting, it prevented colors from dulling, without adding the brownish yellow left by even the purest varnish), and gave the rationale behind the use of a white frame (gold destroys the quality of orange tones on the canvas). Technical counsel given him by Camille Pissarro is evident particularly in a discussion of the chemical problem of pigments that change and deteriorate with time—the old quest of Leonardo, still unsolved.[34] These and other points were so well elucidated that Camille Pissarro wrote to his son Lucien:

> I am afraid that these questions are only too well explained and that the painters will take advantage of us. I would have liked [Fénéon] to discuss this with Seurat, but this is impossible.[35]

Pissarro was referring again to Seurat's pride as an innovator and his increasing fear that his territory was being invaded; a few months later, Pissarro wrote Lucien that he was afraid Seurat would object to having the neo- impressionists exhibit in Brussels with the Belgian group of painters, *Les XX*, who were interested in Seurat's new method.

> ...his prudence is so extreme. But we — I, rather, — see no objection, since I recognize no *secret* in painting other than one's own artistic feeling, which is not easily swiped![36]

Fénéon, too, had made it clear that all the science in the world would not make a work of art if the temperament of the painter were not that of a real artist. Nor could a common scientific technique deprive authentic artists of their individuality:

> That is mistaking calligraphy for style...."A recent Pissarro, a Seurat, Signac, all look alike," proclaim the critics. Critics have always made, with pride, the most embarrassing confessions. — Finally, these painters are accused of subordinating art to science. But they are simply using scientific data to direct and perfect the

education of their eye and to control the accuracy of their vision....Mr. X can read treatises on optics for all eternity, but he will never paint *La Grande Jatte*....This kind of painting is only for *painters.*[37]

Urged by his friends, Fénéon decided to make a separate edition of his two *Vogue* articles on the impressionists and their successors, to which he added small extracts from his report on the Indépendants. The result was Fénéon's only book — booklet, rather: *Les Impressionnistes en 1886.* He arranged it with care and rigorously revised his writing, although his articles had already been subject to several drafts.

Fénéon realized that his brief chronology of previous impressionist exhibitions was inadequate (he had even omitted, out of ignorance, the year of the first exhibition). He wrote in haste to Camille Pissarro, asking for particulars. Pissarro immediately sent back an eight-page letter from his home in Eragny, and promised to meet Fénéon two days later when he would be in Paris, to bring him old catalogues and discuss further questions.[38] Fénéon encapsulated this information in a one-page note at the end of his section on the last impressionist exhibition (F, 38).

The 43 pages of *Les Impressionnistes en 1886* were elegantly ordered, with a title page for each of the three exhibitions. The names of the artists were set in large type over each section, in the manner of Diderot's *Salons,* an arrangement Baudelaire also copied in his first *Salon* (1845). Diderot and Baudelaire were, for Fénéon, the two great art critics of the past.

This booklet meant a great deal to Fénéon; it was his first purely personal creation. Every detail had to meet his image of that creation, even the paper on which it was printed. In August, the printer had sent him a perplexed note:

> We see on the instructions for printing the *Impressionnistes:*
>
> 199 on Saint-Omer
>
> 1, unnumbered, on pumicif
>
> What kind of paper is Saint-Omer? And what is this "pumicif"?[39]

Fénéon must have explained. *La Vogue* soon announced that *Les Impressionnistes en 1886* were on sale, one copy *sur pumicif* (for 100 francs), 6 copies *sur Japan* (10 francs), 21 *sur Hollande* (4 fr.), and 199 *sur Saint-Omer* (1^{25} fr., or about 30 cents). Before it came out, Fénéon wrote to Gustave Kahn, Director of *La Vogue* which was publishing the brochure:

> Dubois-Pillet's exhibition [Salon des Independants] is being prolonged for eight days. If I received the final proofs of the *Impressionnistes* the order could be placed right away and the brochure put on sale one or

two days before the closing and while the paintings are being taken down.[40]

However, *Les Impressionnistes en 1886* did not come off the printer's press until the following month, at the end of October. The 227 copies described in the initial announcement were the only ones made; it was sold out after eighteen months, and Fénéon never allowed a second edition. In December 1886 Fénéon bethought himself to send courtesy copies to all of the artists and many of their literary friends.

Although the title defers to the impressionists, it was, so to speak, the manifesto of the neo-impressionists. It was sold at *Les XX* and the *Indépendants* in 1887, and also at a shop in Montmartre run by a man called Soiret, "a shrewd and bold bookseller," Fénéon once said, in another context (F, 685). Today a collector's item, it was not considered very important at the Bibliothèque Nationale, where it was thrown in with a bunch of other pamphlets published in 1886: "Catalogue of the Collection of Tobacco Pipes," "Classification of 160 Vegetable Oils, Followed by a Classification of 95 Animal Oils," "The Petticoat," and so on.[41]

Les Impressionnistes en 1886 revealed that Fénéon had reached his maturity as a writer. No longer would he be inclined to write, as in some of his earlier art criticism: *c'est d'une gracilité exquise....d'un large dessin* (it is exquisitely thin....amply drawn, F, 15). Not only were generalities and hackneyed phrases banished from his criticism, so was, apparently, his own personality. The "I" or "we" which had found its way from time to time into Fénéon's writing was definitively eliminated. The absence of *je* became one of the hallmarks of his style, as of his character. "He banished *je* and *argent* (*I* and *money*) from his conversation," reported one of his friends.[42]

A comparison of his articles as they appeared in *La Vogue* with their final version in *Les Impressionnistes en 1886* shows the stylist in action. Fénéon worked for more concision and for more accuracy. He reduced the number of already infrequent relative clauses and took out parenthetical remarks, especially those that tended to advise or judge a painter. He cancelled any explanation that duplicated what the paintings said for themselves. In the following passage, for example, he eliminated the first sentence:

> [*M. Signac est, en outre, un mariniste du grande allure.*] *Des mers bouillonment sous des ciels flamboyants.*
> ([M. Signac, moreover, paints alluring seascapes.] Seas froth up under flaming skies. F, 37 & 49.)

He simplified language so that it did not add anything to the painting; thus, of a Pissarro:

Un espace illimité, et, très haut, des nuages légers qui se pommellent [*sure des ciels bleus*] *sur le bleu.*
(A timeless space and, very high, [blue skies are] the blue is dappled with light clouds. F, 37 & 49.)

The final version *(sur le bleu)* is indicative of a painted work as against "realistic" skies.

In addition to the stylistic amendments, Fénéon also refined certain judgments. A painters' quarrel had resulted from his first article in *La Vogue:* Guillaumin objected to seeing the name of Dubois-Pillet placed with Seurat and Signac "in the avant-garde of impressionism," particularly since Dubois-Pillet did not participate in the Eighth Exhibition of the impressionists.[43] Fénéon took out the sentence and devoted a section to Dubois-Pillet further on in his study of the Salon des Indépendants.

The booklet, *Les Impressionnistes en 1886,* was admired by its elite audience as much for the poetic precision of its language as for the prophetic accuracy of its statements. Remy de Gourmont said of Fénéon that he had "all the qualities of an art critic: the eye, the analytical mind, the style which makes visible what the eye has seen and intelligible what the mind has understood."[44]

Written before the turn of the century, and thus before "modern art," Fénéon's criticism has a remarkably modern focus. Perhaps this is more because of his intellectual honesty than his style—his determination to present rather than judge, to evoke rather than describe, to avoid editing or editorializing—or perhaps it is because of his rare combination of that honesty with a consummate linguistic skill.

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[1]Félix Fénéon, *Ouvres plus que complètes,* Joan U. Halperin, ed. (Geneva: Droz, 1970), p. 29. This edition will be referred to hereafter simply as F. From "VIII Exposition Impressionniste," *La Vogue,* 13 June 1886. Reprinted with some minor changes in the booklet, *Les Impressionnistes en 1886,* quoted here.

[2]When Seurat was painting *La Grande Jatte,* he was using optical color opposites, namely purple and green. After about 1887, Seurat used the more traditional oppositions, such as red and green, because he had found that pigments did not in fact act like spectral colors: in painting, it is not primary but reflected light that reaches the eye.

[3]Ogden N. Rood, a Columbia University professor, whose *Modern Chromatics* (New York, 1879; *Théorie scientifique des couleurs,* Paris, 1881) described all

recent color theories and greatly influenced Seurat and his group. The numerous equations Fénéon referred to are found on pp. 148-49.

[4]Here Fénéon makes a pun, as he had earlier in the sentence, with *sabrée et torchonnée,* which both mean "botched" as well as "scumbled." *La peinture au point,* besides indicating the use of the dot, calls to mind such expressions as *technique au point,* "perfected technique," or the colloquial *c'est au point,* "it's just exactly right." Puns not being translatable, I have put an admittedly inferior one in the English version, where none existed in French: "give 'virtuoso painting' points" (*soutenir les avantages de la "belle facture"*).

[5]F, 35-37. "VIII Exposition Impressionniste."

[6]Degas quoted by Camille Pissarro, [March 1886], *Letters to His Son Lucien,* 2nd ed., John Rewald, ed. (Mamaroneck, N.Y., 1972), p. 74.

[7]George Moore, *Confessions of a Young Man* (New York, 1917), p. 32. First published in French by Gustave Kahn and Félix Fénéon in the *Revue Indépendante,* March, 1888, pp. 408-09.

[8]F, 487-88. "Sur Georges Seurat," *Bulletin de la vie artistique,* 15 November 1926.

[9]Heinrich Wilhelm Dove (1803-1879), German physicist whose writings on optical mixture had not been translated into French in 1886. Seurat and Fénéon knew of Dove's explanation of the luster created by the use of small lines or dots of color through Ogden Rood, who described Dove's experiments in *Modern Chromatics.*

[10]F, 37. *"VIII Exposition Impressionniste."*

[11]See Robert L. Herbert's lucid analysis, "Techniques and Science," in *Neo-Impressionism* (New York: Guggenheim Museum, 1968), pp. 19-21. A brief extract: "A moment's reflection shows not only that real optical fusion was not the artists' goal, but also that it is impossible to achieve."

[12]F, 74. "Le Néo-impressionnisme," *Art moderne de Bruxelles,* 1 May 1887.

[13]*Modern Chromatics,* pp. 279-80.

[14]See Robert L. Herbert, "Seurat's Theories," *The Neo-Impressionists,* Jean Sutter, ed. (Greenwich, Conn., 1970), p. 41.

[15]Gustave Kahn, "Exposition Puvis de Chavannes," *Revue Indépendante,* January 1888, 142-43, where Kahn does not refer to Seurat by name, but as "one of the young impressionist innovators [who] thus defined for me his vision of art."

[16]Letter of Charles Angrand quoting Seurat, in Gustave Coquiot, *Georges Seurat* (Paris, 1924), p. 41.

[17]Quoted by Signac in *Encyclopédie francaise,* vol. 16, A. de Monzie, ed., Paris, 1935, p. 84.

[18]Ibid.

[19]The figure is on the back of another drawing, *Blé et arbres,* 23.5 X 30 cm., now at the Galerie Krugier in Geneva. Neither is in the catalogue by de Hauke and Brame, *Seurat et son oeuvre* (Paris, 1961).

[20]"Georges Seurat," *la Plume,* September 1891, p. 292.

[21]Paul Valéry quoted by Solange Lemaître in an interview with the author, 17 December 1962.

[22]J.-K. Huysmans, *L'Art moderne* (Paris, 1883), p. 111.

[23]Fénéon to John Rewald, Marseille, 8 May 1940, printed in *Seurat* by Henri Dorra and John Rewald (Paris, 1959), p. x.

Re-Review

Artists and Church Commissions: Rubin's *The Church at Assy* Revisited

BY JOHN DILLENBERGER

The last four decades have witnessed the emergence of several church buildings for which distinguished artists have done works, ranging from the church of Notre - Dame - de - Toute -Grâce, in Assy, France, for which artists were beginning to be commissioned in 1939, to St. Peter's Lutheran Church, New York City, for which Louise Nevelson's sculptural works create the entire environment of the Erol Beker Chapel, completed just over a year ago. Between these stand such European churches as the Chapel of the Rosary at Vence, France; the church Corbusier designed at Ronchamp, France, and the rebuilt cathedral at Coventry, England. In the United States, we would single out for special attention the Breuer designed University Church of St. John the Baptist, Collegeville, Minnesota; the Roofless Church at New Harmony, Indiana; the ceramic sculpture for the Newman Chapel at the University of California, Berkeley, by Stephen de Staebler; Lippold's Baldac-

chino for St. Mary's Catholic Cathedral, San Francisco; and the Rothko Chapel, Houston, Texas. If stained glass were included, we could stretch the number by adding the Presbyterian Church in Stamford Connecticut, and the Community Church in Pocantico Hills, New York.

Viewed as a whole, the group is not significant in size. The period of the nineteenth century as a whole, together with the early twentieth century, did not witness a significant number of attempts to utilize distinguished artists. In the United States, we can think of the decorative works of the late Neo-Gothic revival and the works of artists such as John LaFarge at Trinity Church, Boston, and the Church of the Ascension, and St. Thomas in New York City. Compared to the Medieval period, in which architecture, artifact and art coalesced in common cultural aspirations, the number of significant commissions is few, and the setting, of course, is entirely different.

Not surprisingly, most of the important departures in the last decades occurred in Roman Catholic Churches, or with the influence of particular Roman Catholics, clerics or laypersons, and to a lesser extent, of individuals within the Episcopal and Lutheran traditions. The Roofless Church, at the site of the 19th century Utopian community started by Robert Dale Owen, is in fact the result of the vision of Jane Owen, and the Rothko Chapel in Houston, Texas, of Dominique de Menil. In fact, from Assy to St. Peter's, one can only conclude that the projects happened because particular individuals were persistent in their determination to commission distinguished artists and architects.

Nothing happens, of course, without the initiating decision of individuals; but it is a matter of decisive difference as to whether or not their decisions reflect or have the support of, the community or culture at large; or whether they reflect only the vision of these individuals and the works of art and architecture come into being in indifferent or potentially hostile environments. Certainly the projects here mentioned fall into the second category. A pattern of individual initiatives may indeed start new directions. The question we will not be able to escape is whether that is in fact true of these instances as a whole.

In the case of the Church at Assy and several other churches noted (excepting Ronchamp and Coventry, Breuer's Chapel, and to some extent, New Harmony), the buildings are more significant for the works of art than for the architecture. During the same period, Protestantism and Judaism did indeed commission a few distinguished architects, such as Pietro Belluschi, Frank Lloyd Wright, and Louis Kahn. Protestantism, with its accent on auditory rather than liturgical or sacramental space, is conscious of forms, but uninterested, uneducated, or suspicious of the sensuous nature of the visual arts of painting and sculpture. Protestantism has lived so long without the visual that the loss of that human and

spiritual resource is not even recognized as an issue.

Both the lack of numbers of significant church commissions and the special nature of those we have mentioned raise the critical issue of the relation of religion, the artists, society, and the church in our time. Paradoxically, there is more widespread interest in the visual arts than has been true in generations. This is reflected both in a genuine widespread interest in seeing and owning works of art, and in the attendance records for museum extravaganza exhibitions. That fact, too, testifies to the divorce of the church from the arena of patronage, though it once was one of the great patrons of the arts.

The evidence does not indicate a return to such patronage by the church directly. Though the Catholic Church has belatedly started a collection of twentieth century religious art, the Vatican has been the recipient of gifts of works of art rather than the commissioner and patron who actively shapes a notable collection. Thus, the whole wing devoted to contemporary religious art is for the most part filled with banal, or safe works which are not at all representative of the leading artists of our time. When one considers the Vatican's historic treasures, the contrast is all the more startling.

The United Church of Christ, noted for its interest in promoting the arts generally, has not been as imaginative in the visual arts as in the other arts. Yet, this church body is the recipient of a major collection of art by black artists. In short, churches seem to have joined the general wave of interest in the visual arts, without returning to, or advancing toward, their significant inclusion in church structure and liturgical life. The result is that the arts are among the activities in which individuals participate, and which may diversify and enrich what they already know. But in that context, the arts do not transform human existence, except peripherally or accidentally, and they are not essential to the human spirit.

Protestant history has left the churches, either with no art at all, or with art as the illustration or confirmation of what was considered safely known and knowable on other grounds. It seems that the misuse or abuse of the power of art led, not to the correction of those abuses, but to limitations of the nature and use of art for the church. The inherent processes of art were diminished at the point of the central, critical power of art, when issues of faith were involved. Thus, the visual arts, when expressing the integrity of their own process, were superior when these works were produced outside the life of the church, even when the same artist was the creator. In many instances, the pressure of the church and synagogue led to an internalization in the psyche of the artist to the extent that artistic freedom and creative competence diminished when faith issues were involved. The works of the Roman Catholic Rouault, for instance, are more interesting and pro-

found when clowns and prostitutes were depicted, than when he dealt with religious figures, and the Christ. It follows that the mere commissioning of artists by the church is not enough. Indeed, the issues of the competence, vitality, freedom, and spiritual perception of the artist are essential ingredients, which, in the twentieth century, are only tenuously related to the faith conviction and shape of the liturgical, believing life of the church.

Not only has the churchly cultural ambience of the middle ages disappeared; the psychic posture which depresses the sensuous vitalities remains an ingredient of our culture. That is why some of the great art produced for the church in our time has come from non-believers, or those residually related to the life of the church. That fact, as the history of the Church at Assy indicates, can become a new source of problems. In the seventeenth century, the issue arose, can the non-regenerate do good theological work. The answer was, if there are enough regenerate around.

That problem and its answer reflected a recognition that the leading and dominant orientations of the culture were at that time still basically Christian, but that other perceptions were beginning to be powerful enough to demand attention. In our time, the problem is more complicated, for single leading orientations no longer exist. Perceptions have become multiple or pluralistic, while the church has lived for some time without an awareness of the sensual as a powerful force in the visual arts. Today, many of the perceptions needed and absent in the church are being formed afresh by the artists themselves. That intensifies the issue as one moves from the virtual divorce of the two to new potential alliances and possibilities. From Assy and Vence to the Rothko and Nevelson chapels, that issue is both threat and possibility. Indeed, there is considerable discussion these days as to whether paintings reflect, or essentially may purvey spiritual or religious conceptions. Hilton Kramer of the *New York Times* and Thomas Messer, Director of the Guggenheim Museum, can write and talk in such terms, particularly in regard to the paintings of Mark Rothko. That development does not solve the problem for the church, particularly when its own perception of the content of a work of art is dependent upon particular iconographic recognitions. That problem was particularly acute at Assy, as was its opposite, that the accepted iconographic content presented problems as executed, partly because of the modernism of the style and partly because in the eyes of the Vatican, there seemed to be a connection between the modern mode and the lack of Christian faith, or faith in any form, among many of the artists.

William S. Rubin in his definitive book, *Modern Sacred Art and the Church of Assy* (Columbia University Press, New York and London, 1961 — based on a doctoral dissertation completed in 1958), provides us with a full account of the commissions, the response of the Vatican, and his own, I think, misdirected, and

therefore overly pessimistic, conclusions about art and the church. For the reader unfamiliar with the church at Assy, a list of the works done by the various artists is essential and is here provided.

Fernand Léger	*The Virgin of the Litany* - 1946 Mosaic on the Facade
Georges Rouault	*Christ aux Outrages* - 1939 Stained Glass.
	Le Grand Vase - 1946-1949 Stained Glass.
	Christ of The Passion - 1946-1949 Stained Glass.
	Le Petit Bouquet -1946-1949 Stained Glass.
	Saint Veronica - 1946-1949 Stained Glass.
Jacques Lipchitz	*Notre-Dame-de-Liesse* - 1948-1955 Bronze
Marc Chagall	*Crossing of the Red Sea* - 1952-1957 Ceramic Mural.
	Psalm 42 Plaster Bas-relief.
	Angel with Candelabra Stained Glass.
	Angel with Holy Water Stained Glass.
Henri Matisse	*Saint Dominic* - 1948-1949 Ceramic Mural.

Georges Braque	*Tabernacle Door* - 1948 Metal Bas-relief.
Pierre Bonnard	*St. Francis of Sales* - 1943-1946 Oil on Canvas.
Jean Lurçat	*The Apocalypse* - 1945 Tapestry.
Germaine Richier	*Crucifix* - 1948-1949 Bronze

A cursory glance at the subjects will confirm that there is no iconographic scheme related to the liturgy and the theological scope of the church's affirmations. Indeed baptism alone is represented among the sacraments. Narrative scenes, so prominent in earlier churches, are absent. The subjects were determined by the individual artists in conversation with Canon Jean Devémy, to whom had been entrusted the plan of the building, and Father Marie-Alain Couturier, who in the light of association with Devemy, took over the general schematic development at the end of the Second World War.

For Couturier, the Church at Assy represented the possibility of bringing the talents of the great artists in relation to the church once again. Hence, starting with the artist, an individualistic rather than liturgical scheme was followed, though many of the saints depicted are associated with healing, thus emphasizing this theme.

The Church at Assy was created precisely to meet the needs of the many sanatoriums being built in the area. It seems strained, however, when Rubin remarks that the "iconographic and stylistic discontinuity is not out of harmony with the more individualistic, less group-oriented religious experience of the convalescents at Assy" (p.39). More central, from our perspective today, is whether the individual works, without a consistent iconographic scheme, provide a religious ambience, susceptible to and encouraging of, the life of faith; or, has the church become merely a museum?

Rubin's conclusion about Assy was that it was the product of a temporary alliance between liberal priests, artists, and the French Left; that it has a lack of liturgical integrity; that most of the artists had anti-religious orientations; that there is a lack of new artistic discoveries at Assy; and that the Vatican officially opposed it. His pessimistic conclusion follows if one expected an entirely new relation between the artists and the church as a result. An anomaly, as Rubin calls the Church at Assy, may be instructive, and

indeed, of considerable significance, when times and history change. One could make the point that the anomalies of the past are as instructive to the future, and occasionally much more so, than the continuities of history.

Father Couturier knew precisely what he was doing, using the confluences, indeed the anomalies of his time, to full advantage. Couturier knew that acceptable Catholic theory manifested itself in poor works of art, that pious artists produced banal works. On this point, he had to stand against even those who had helped to revitalize both theology and the arts, such as Jacques Maritain, who believed that Christian art could only be done by Christian artists. Modern art, so despised in the 50's by the Vatican, reflected the church's rejection of unfamiliar artistic styles, inevitably, in the Vatican's view, associated with the modern, unbelieving age. Hence, the dogmatic connection made by the hierarchy between the artist's style and his unbelief meant that the art at Assy would automatically be rejected. Couturier, on the other hand, believed that the reemergence of significant art in relation to the church, indeed, sacred art, would emerge only when significant artists were employed. That direction was focused by Couturier in his taking over the review, *L'Art sacré*, and in his vision of the Church at Assy as his laboratory. Of course, his personal involvement in the arts, the temporary alliance between the left and the church among artists and intellectuals, the role of liberal priests and worker-priest movement, made possible Couturier's achievement. That this coalition did not last may be less significant than that it gave a moment in which Coututier could produce what would no longer be possible, once the strange coalition collapsed and Vatican pressure intensified.

Among the first of the artists to be asked to create art for Assy was Rouault, a devout Catholic, who at the age of seventy had not yet had a single Catholic commission. Eventually five of his paintings were translated into stained glass, two figures of Christ, two floral designs symbolizing the prophetic imagery of Isaiah, and Saint Veronica as another Christ type. Hence, all five are Christological in intention, exhibiting greater unity than Rubin noted. The Virgin, according to Rubin, is more important in Assy than is Christ, being central in a large mosaic on the facade by Léger, in a sculpture by Lipchitz, in a window, and in Lurçat's tapestry. But it is also conceivable that Rubin draws the conclusion he does more from what he knows of the role of the Virgin in Catholic history at the time, than from the actual works of art at Assy which place Mary's role alongside Christ, not necessarily in hierarchical order or in a specific context of ascendency.

The fact that Rouault was Catholic did not divert criticism from the Catholic right. His work was considered devoid of beauty, full of agony, individualistic and private rather than communal. But the major attack was reserved for others. Granted that Lurcat's

apocalyptic tapestry, based on the twelfth chapter of the Book of Revelation, is non-traditional in its delineation of Paradise and the apocalypse, with its Dragon, the Woman and the Archangel Michael, the fact is that this was not the real issue. Lurcat was a Marxist, hence an unbeliever and communist. He had agreed only to do the tapestry out of his friendship for Couturier. Léger, too, who did the brilliant, colored mosaic on the facade wall, *The Virgin of the Litany*, was suspect because he had programatically announced that the materialism of his own work was a substitute for the sentimental and outmoded representations in the church.

Less controversial but yet troublesome were the works by two Jews, Lipchitz and Chagall. While believing that Judaism and Christianity were linked like no other two religions, Lipchitz, in his sculptural creation of the Virgin, with its tear shaped form, showing Mary with the dove descending, and the lamb, nevertheless was insistent that he not be misunderstood. Hence, on the back of the sculpture—both on the one at Assy and the one which Jane Owen secured for New Harmony, appear the words: "Jacob Lipchitz, Jew, faithful to the religion of his ancestors, has made this Virgin to foster understanding between men on earth that the life of the spirit may prevail."

Chagall's context, in contrast, is more ambiguous. Sought after as a potential Catholic convert, Chagall, though proud of his Jewish heritage, professed no religious propensities of his own apart from the poetry of all religions. His ceramic wall in the Baptistry, the *Crossing of the Red Sea*, can be interpreted as an Old Testament paradigm of the New, but his crucifixion within it, like his other crucifixions, in intention reflects the suffering of all, and of the Jew in particular, in the human world. Agony and joy, pieces of the world that reflect both, are juxtaposed in unfamiliar patterns of incandescent power.

More troublesome to Rubin apparently than to the Catholic Church was Bonnard's *Saint Francis of Sales*, which in Rubin's eyes is a weak work, inappropriate to the artist whose private world of gardens, friends, hills and coastline represented in his art, had nothing in common with a subject about which initially he knew nothing at all, and for which he at first had no personal sympathy. But the color of his palette and the unanticipated juxtaposition of contrasting scales provide a congenial setting for the saint and saintly values. Rubin is more positive about Matisse's *Saint Dominic*, which was modelled upon the one he was doing for the chapel of the Rosary at Vence. Here, too, the head has no features, but the power of the Saint Dominic lies in the turned head. In the instance of Matisse, Rubin, too, wants us to be clear that Matisse had no religious inclinations except as his attitude toward painting might be defined as religious. Rubin's position is obviously over against those who interpreted Matisse's association with Vence as a religious conversion. The problem remains, why that

question should loom so large from all sides.

Not surprisingly, when one considers the centrality of the crucifixion in Christian life and thought, Germaine Richier's *Crucifix* became the focus of the most violent attacks. Herself an atheist, Richier nevertheless became involved in the project to the extent of confessing that for her "unconscious things of a unique kind were being translated" (p. 16). The body of Christ suggestively emerges from the cross, not uncharacteristically resembling the craggy and weathered wood of her sculpture in general. The form of the *Crucifix* was so offensive to the hierarchy and some of the congregation, that the words of the condemnation were tags of rejection, rather than explanations of error or inadequacy.

The history of the next years is familiar enough. The *Crucifix* was ordered removed, the hold of the conservatives increased, and Rome increasingly attacked modern art, identifying it with all the modern forces the church opposed, within and without its life. The worker-priest movement, considered the source of many of problems with which we have dealt, was suppressed, and the role of the Dominicans was side-tracked. In that confusing history, theologians and philosophers like Maritain and Marcel were themselves on the wrong side. The hoped-for mutual alliance had corroded on the one side through the increasing independence of the leading artists, and on the other, by the increasing conservatism of the church, in which Tridentine conceptions of beauty and purity were reasserted in a world moving in quite opposite directions. Considering the two diverging movements, the surprise is not that Assy failed to create a future, but that it happened at all, that it survives as a monumental anomaly prodding us with issues we can now more peacefully address. The Catholic Church, too, has abandoned the stand of the 50's. Vatican II has changed all that, and the selection of a Pope from a communist country has lately defanged even the traditional responses.

In spite of the fact that Assy possesses no liturgical or theological harmony, and that the artists who executed its works were not believers — a fact that Rubin seems to think the church has a right to ask — and that some of the artists did better work elsewhere, Assy stands for a church rich in artistic perception. Surely its non-traditional riches are to be accepted rather than mundane artistic productions that follow the liturgical calendar or a specific theological agenda. There are, of course, those in the church who prefer the latter choice.

Rubin's sympathies for traditional subjects is surprising, since when it comes to the art itself, his comments are rather formalistic even as art criticism, not to say devoid of social or theological meaning. Rubin has defined the French theological direction, including its social setting, and the negative Vatican response; he has discussed how the individual works were commissioned, and

whether they are good or bad; but in his book the particular works of art and their context never meet. Rubin never tells us, for instance whether Germaine Richier's *Crucifix* is a work of artistic and religious perception, valid in its own right, or whether it is congruent or not-congruent with theological insight. That penchant for formalistic non-meaning, in which a work of art stands only on canons of its own, narrows the horizons of art itself. Art for social or illustrative purposes represents the opposite extreme. Surely great art meets artistic canons, but has multiple suggestive, contextual perceptions and meanings beyond its formal character as art. For that reason, Assy is more significant than Rubin thought, even if all that he says concretely is true.

During the western period of so-called Christian civilization, the artist and faith convictions were not issues. The artist, too, participated in the faith, and his or her particular talents brought such transcendent beauty to their art that even we, who may not share the same faith, are still left in wonder. Art expresses, and then, transcends as art, timebound convictions, When the free, natural alliance of faith and artistic talent no longer continues, the diverging sensibilities and perceptions ignore each other or engage in sporadic conflict. For much of reformed Protestant history and for Catholicism from Trent to Vatican II that situation was fairly pervasively true. In our own time, the perceptions of the artists and the church rarely coincide. Fewer western artists today are probably materialists or communists than was true at the time of Assy. It is not inconceivable that their perceptions may have had a profundity of passion and depth, however directed, which the church had lost in the defensiveness of a past that no longer breathed vibrantly. That depth, indeed, may be evident even in works where the subject matter was foreign. Surely that is the meaning of what Germaine Richier said about her work on the *Crucifix*.

Many artists today view their own work as converging in the grandeur of humanity, i.e., in terms of worth, spirituality, transcendence, ultimacy, even in the midst of sameness, tragedy, or destruction. Abstract Expressionism surely had that sublime intention, expressing depths no longer conveyed in the recognizable subjects of either art or religion. That is why the Rothko paintings and the Rothko Chapel encompass us, making us reflect, meditate, no matter from which tradition or non-tradition we may come. They reach us where traditional symbols no longer do.

That loss may also be an opportunity. The early church baptized the vital perceptions around it, joining contemplation, thought and action. In time, it, too, could create its own language for art, its own vitalities and forms. That, too, may happen again. It is surely an overwhelming experience to see Richard Lippold's shimmering, exquisite, wire metal construction, the baldacchino over the

altar in St. Mary's Cathedral, San Francisco. Our memory of history may let us see in it, as Jane Dillenberger remarked, the dome of heaven of the Early Christian baldacchinos or the Christ in Majesty of the Eastern Church. Historic realities, not historic memories, I submit, create great art. Hence, we move, not from traditional baldacchinos, or their equivalent, to Lippold. But sensing and experiencing the power of what this baldacchino is, we may see historic memories in new ways and be open to fresh perceptions and formulations.

Review of Reviews

The "Critique-Poésie" of Thomas Hess

BY DAVID CRAVEN

To be first in reacting favorably to a type of art is hardly the same as establishing an important critical precedent for approaching it. As Valéry noted, writing based on enthusiasm alone is ignoble. Just as art is significant in so far as it fosters a critical dialogue with viewers, so responses to art are important as art criticism in so far as they include critical reflections about these responses. Unqualified acceptance debases art by dissipating criticism. As is widely recognized, *Art News* under the leadership of Thomas Hess "was central to the development of post-World War II American art," and Hess was "famous for his early, eloquent championing of the Abstract Expressionists."[1] This essay will deal with Hess's early approach to Abstract Expressionism. The result will be an explication of how Hess's position engendered critical insights into this art, rather than just fine sentiments about it.

Certainly Hess, known for his "passionate prose,"[2] was aware

that the consummation of such a relationship through criticism entailed more than the urbane outpourings of a refined sensibility. Nonetheless, he wrote about his art with such evocative sensitivity, that Barbara Rose has called it a "kind of critique-poesie." Writing by Hess features a rare fusion of poetic prose—normally characteristic of involved appreciation—with penetrating criticism—often characterized by cooly detached prose. The reason for this distinctive criticism is attributed by Barbara Rose to Hess's supposedly extrinsic use of Surrealist "free association" which was controlled by his "disciplined, rationalist mind" and anchored concretely by his "art-historical background." As this article will reveal, however, Hess's prose poetry, with its epigrammatic turns and ironic twists, was a result of his critical method, as well as of his deft selection of words through it.[3] This poetic criticism was not in spite of, but because of his use of a cognitive mode which the Surrealists endorsed with much more fanfare, yet much less effect. Hence, Hess's mode of acquiring knowledge will become apparent when the poetic dimension of his criticism is disclosed.

A major reason for Rose's misreading of Hess's modernist poetic prose is her implicit use of the classical definition of poetry. "Poetic" in the days of classicism was, as Roland Barthes has noted, an ornamental variation of prose that was attained through verbal expertise, not by means of special coherence.[4] Modern poetry has inverted, however, the assumed relationship between thought and language in classical poetry. In contradistinction to classical poetry which translated ready-made thought into more elegant utterances, modern poetry uses words to produce "a kind of formal continuum from which there emerges an intellectual or emotional density which would have been impossible without them."[5] Significantly, Hess did not use Surrealist "free association" to embellish otherwise independent thought. His word usage was modernist because it was inextricably part of his cognitive process for approaching the art. These words concretely disclose Hess's view of the art; they are not, as in classical writing, the decorative transcription of a possible prose. Just as Jean-Claude Chevalier has observed that the "gôut du paradoxe"[6] is a major aspect of modern poetry, so Hess's notable use of paradox is intrinsic to his acute recognition of polarities and counter-forces in the art he is assaying. In this case as in others, Hess's poetic criticism is modernist because its poetry is a substance rather than an attribute, a sui generis component that carries its own nature within itself. Only by examining Hess's critical approach as a whole, can the poetic character of it be understood.

I.

Although the first established art journal to run features on

Abstract Expressionists was the *Magazine of Art* from 1948 to 1951, the second publication to do so was *Art News* which, as Irving Sandler has noted, ignored the Abstract Expressionists until Thomas Hess became its managing editor in January, 1948.[7] From then on *Art News* increasingly focused on these artists until in the 1950's this magazine became, as Dore Ashton has observed, the leading advocate of Abstract Expressionist painting.[8] The silence of *Art News* through the mid-1940's about de Kooning, Pollock, et al. contrasts interestingly with the fact that this magazine was probably the first member of the art press to mention Jackson Pollock's work, a reference which occurred in 1942.[9] Hess began his association with *Art News* as an Editorial Assistant in February 1946. Promoted to Associate Editor in April 1947, Hess seemed at first to endorse the journal's conservative posture. In "Triple Play to Center" (April 1947), one of Hess's earliest extended articles, the Whitney Annual was reviewed. His comments included a favorable reference to Andrew Wyeth's *Crystal Lamp,* along with "places of honour" for a Robert Motherwell collage as well as for works by I. Rice Pereira, Jacob Lawrence and Milton Avery.[10] Concerning the selection policy of the Whitney, Hess had supportive comments about its "new technique of stopping in mid-air—to be precise, just a shade closer to the right than the left." This half-way position was deemed "a most ideal state for a large annual," because "By juxtaposing traditions, by placing the young with the old and the good with the bad, one can examine the youth and death of styles and the boundless vitality and complexity of American art."

In these early articles Hess used a type of pedestrian journalism which markedly contrasted with his later manner. Nonetheless, a basic premise of Hess's significant criticism was divulged in it: a period perspective must deal with a complex network of counter currents, rather than with a slick notion of the mainstream that circumscribes the art. As Hess later wrote, "the history of art is like a kaleidoscope."[11] Precisely because Hess did approach art with this contextual sophistication, he avoided the shallow-based period formalism which made occasional, but usually facile overtures to ideas.

The January 1948 issue of *Art News* inaugurated Hess's new appointment as Managing Editor, the position which he used so effectively on behalf of the Abstract Expressionists. This issue was still dominated by the cautious moderation of Editor Alfred M. Frankfurter. Hess himself wrote an essay on John Marin with the conventional assessment that he was one of the greatest living American artists. It should be recalled that as late as 1948 Clement Greenberg, the early champion of Pollock, referred to Marin as probably the greatest living American artist.[12]

Immediately ensuing issues of *Art News* evinced a significant,

if not dramatic, departure from this position of cool reticence with regard to newer abstractionists. The April 1948 publication featured something new, an article with the name of an Abstract Expressionist painter in the title. Even though "Spotlight on: Evergood, Cushing, Harnett, Hartley, Miró, de Kooning" included only a concise paragraph about each with a reproduction of one work by each in a safe cross-section, the passage about de Kooning was noteworthy. Written by Renée Arb, the very positive discussion of de Kooning's New York debut (Egan Gallery), reflected incisive ideas about his art that Hess and Harold Rosenberg were later to develop more fully. Reference was made to de Kooning's "singular concentration of passion and technique" and his use of a "constant tension as space envelops and then releases these ambiguous forms," so that "his subject seems to be the crucial intensity of the creative process itself."[13] Here, as in other cases, Hess the editor succeeded in aptly using writing by another, which corresponded to and was doubtlessly influenced by his own views, to promote Abstract Expressionism. Arb's concern with synthetic elements—fusions of spontaneity with training, subject with object—was reminiscent of Hess's focus on the rich interchanges necessary for significant art.

In this respect, Hess assembled criticism like Marcel Duchamp's "real collectors." Unlike those who merely buy pictures for investment value, Duchamp's collector was an artist *au carré* who painted himself a collection.[14] Similarly, Hess not only constructed criticism favorable to Abstract Expressionism by selecting certain people to write it, e.g., Arb, Elaine de Kooning or Robert Goodnough, he also subtly used the divergent approaches of other critics to realize his own critical method. In the Summer 1952 issue of *Art News*, for example, Hess engineered with brilliant irony a kaleidoscopic fusion of critical approaches that was much more multi-faceted than any of the methods incorporated into it. He included an essay by Herbert Read, "Farewell to Formalism," that promoted a symbolic criticism opposed to the formalism of Roger Fry, yet also in this issue was a formalist article by Clement Greenberg, the heir to Fry's views. Similarly, Read and to a greater extent Siegfried Giedion in another article advocated a criticism involved with the "essential" condition of humanity, while the Marxist critic Arnold Hauser promulgated an expansive historicism. The result of this ironic combination was more than an "objective" look at different critical perspectives, since taken together these contradictory views formed an open-ended framework that characterized Hess's kaleidoscopic criticism at its best, e.g., in his books about de Kooning. We are reminded that irony, which can use negativity in a positive way, is as Kierkegaard wrote, an "underhanded patron" as fond of tricking friends as adversaries.[15] By acknowledging the strengths of these divergent approaches, while at the

same time paradoxically superimposing them so as to tacitly underscore their weaknesses, Hess used them synthetically, advancing yet negating them for his own ends. Significantly, Hess used methodologic irony, as did Kierkegaard, in a post-Hegelian sense that did not hinge on an absolute.

In the same article of the April 1948 issue that featured the unprecedented focus on de Kooning a section on Miró was included by Hess. This paragraph is one of the earliest examples of the "critique poésie" for which Hess is known. Writing about Miró's style from the 1940's, Hess noted epigrammatically: "Miró has consistently created symbols of menacing laughter with his precise actors looming against smudges of lyrical color."[16] When in March 1951 Hess again wrote about Miro in *Art News*, it was with even greater sensitivity to the same effects—forms which "still scamper with cheerful violence" on backgrounds "light in tone and heavy with texture" from Miró's "Never-Never Land" situated near his world-famous farm in Catalonia.[17] Hess's finely honed remarks contain a notable fusion of seemingly antithetical words which grew out of his experience of Miró's art. Hence, Hess's review simultaneously derived from, yet highlighted, the paintings by using what in poetry is called alliteration and oxymorons.

Miró's interest in the dialectical resolution of dream and reality into surreality, as stated by André Breton, was effectively addressed by Hess's interest in counter-forces and polarities. Here as in all his best criticism, Hess displayed an impressive awareness of how art united contradictory elements. Thus his language, part of this critical process, was replete with ironic fusions and oxymoronic phrases that did not ornament his view of the art, but concretely expressed it. The consequent poetry of his reviews was not a result of Surrealist "free association," but of Hess's choice of words in response to issues he did not freely choose. Thus, Hess's criticism was both poetic and incisive but concretely expressed it. The consequent poetry of his reviews was not a result of Surrealist "free association," but of Hess's choice of words in response to issues he did not freely choose. Thus, Hess's criticism was both poetic and incisive in so far as it realized the acuity of his observations about art he did not create but interpretively "completed." For this reason, Hess's use of words had a critical dimension that Breton's "free" appreciations do not. Because of his contextual self-consciousness, Hess was free of the naiveté which made the Surrealists unaware of their contextual "fetters." He acknowledged what Merleau-Ponty has stated, that there is no completely subconscious response anymore than there is a totally conscious one, that there is no purely emotional response anymore than there is a solely intellectual one. This self-reflective turn made Hess's critical approach more synthetic than the "purely" subconscious

essays which Breton erroneously considered dialectical. As Jean-Paul Sartre has noted, Surrealism was "an addition, a mixture, but never a synthesis."[18] Consequently, the subjective extreme advocated by Surrealism led to an escapist disassociation from the rational that made it a victim of the idealism which it had so fought against. Conversely, Hess contended that no "pure" responses were possible: "As soon as painting is approached, interpretation begins: observation becomes translation." Art and its viewers exist in "an atmosphere filled with multiple-meanings."[19]

A review by Hess in the December 1948 issue of *Art News*, "The Whitney: exhibit Abstract," broke the ice critically for Abstract Expressionism. In a sense, Hess's article must be seen as a rejoinder to Editor Alfred Frankfurter's "A Handful of Promise" which had appeared in the January 1948 issue of *Art News*. Referring to abstract art as a possibly moribund idiom, Frankfurter decided that the only promising work shown was by Stephen Green, Sidney Gross, and four other young artists who showed signs of a return to nature.[20] In contradistinction to this view, however, Hess maintained that the latest Whitney showed that there were at least as many good abstractionists as there were realists.[21] Furthermore, Hess believed that one particular "group of abstractions dominates the Whitney by their vitality and wealth of imagination."Unlike the anachronistic abstract pictures by artists like George L. K. Morris, e.g., his *Unequal Forces*, the paintings by Bradley Walker Tomlin, Adolph Gottlieb and Philip Guston were innovative and successful. "Outstanding in this group," however, was the work by Willem de Kooning: "A curiously milk-and-marble white ground on which plays an exploring, almost capricious line that would seem automatic if it did not wander so carefully through the thick layers of texture.... But it is obvious that de Kooning is trying for a good deal more than pleasing pigment in new arrangements. There is a definite attempt to suggest sensation by association."[22]

This early review of de Kooning's work not only presaged Hess's later writings about this artist, which include two significant monographs, it also presupposed a sophisticated position he merely developed more extensively in later works. It was already clear in this passage that Hess's review was more than art journalism tinged with value judgments. Implicit in his remarks was an historical grounding of the formal traits that precluded the glib pronouncements about taste which float groundlessly in reviews where "feeling is all." As Hess stated in *Abstract Painting* (1951) "abstract art both reflects and is itself a way of life . . . a social act."[23] He then concluded with a position not unlike the Whistler-Wilde life-imitates-art maxim: "The environment that the modern world chooses to accept . . . has been found to resemble the images of modern art." Thus, de Kooning's paint-

ing was considered significant not only for its formal innovations, but *also* for what these formal innovations connoted in extra-aesthetic senses. Pictorial components featuring a synthesis of forms—determinate yet indeterminate, seemingly spontaneous yet seductively controlled—were seen to be doing more than activating the canvas through a surface tension in an all-over pattern of gestural brushstrokes. As Hess later wrote, "the crisis of modern art" represented, at least in part, a creative,response to the crisis of culture:

> 'Nothing is less clear than geometry,' de Kooning once wrote. 'Life as we live it, obviously, is a matter of endless ambiguities and proliferating meanings; transparencies upon transparencies make an image that, while it blurs in super-impositions, takes on the actuality of rocks.'[24]

Consequently, Hess observed that "The dialectic between the revelation of this mystery and the ordering powers at the artist's command is, I believe, the content of de Kooning's art."[25] Hess recognized that de Kooning, like his compatriot Van Gogh, expressed "Nordic" content—"the existence of secret anguish." Yet he also saw that de Kooning worked out of the "Paris tradition of disinterested, pictorial means,"[26] so that Lawrence Alloway could remark that de Kooning was a late Cubist in comparison to Still and Newman.[27] Significantly, Hess's use of the term "Abstract Expressionism," applied to de Kooning and the others, involved a more sophisticated application of it than was common in most other criticism. For Hess the term was a synthetic one which allowed for both the French, i.e., "Abstract" or more formal tradition, and the Nordic, i.e., "Expressionist" or more content oriented tradition. In fact, sculptor Philip Pavia noted that "the Germanic twist of 'abstract expressionism' I never heard till Thomas B. Hess mentioned the two esthetic strains."[28] Hess's "poetic" criticism—his unique and unlikely coupling of words—was related to his profound understanding of how these polarities were aesthetically fused. Not surprisingly, the more self-consciously synthetic the art, the more accessible it was to Hess's critical approach. For this reason, de Kooning was considered by Hess to be the greatest "*peinture de la vie moderne*."

De Kooning was, however, much more than another Constantin Guys, since he became for Hess what Delacroix had been to Baudelaire. Indeed, even Hess's description of the "hidden *chef-d'école*"[29] of Abstract Expressionism was reminiscent of, if not consciously analogous to, Baudelaire's panegyric about the leader of Romanticism. De Kooning was a leftist who shunned ideologies, an individual who like Delacroix disdained groups while becoming "a numinous leader" of the avant-garde. Not unlike Baudelaire's Delacroix, de Kooning was more than just a

painter, but rather a total person for whom "Art was a way of life that, far from being an 'anti-progress,' ivory tower position, took in the whole intellectual world."[30] Delacroix had been to Baudelaire "passionately in love with passion, and coldly determined to seek the means of expressing it." De Kooning was to Hess "fanatically antifanatic" whose position, "one of the few tenable ones left for an artist, became a kind of programless program." Just as the ideal dandy was realized for Baudelaire in the aloof and aristocratic demeanor of Delacroix, so for Hess the likewise epigrammatic de Kooning had "an aristocrat's sense of irony and manners." Nonetheless, unlike the arrogantly elite Delacroix, whom Baudelaire considered a sort of innate patrician of the senses, de Kooning was an "aristocrat" for Hess, because he attained greater authenticity in an existential, most particularly Sartrean sense. His distinction came from the fact that he demanded more of himself than others, rather than because he assumed more for himself than others. Unlike an aristocrat, de Kooning's pre-eminence was arrived at experientially through a profound interaction with an historical situation he simultaneously called into question. In Hess's view, de Kooning worked on behalf of humanity, in spite of society, from a leftist position that had also been "an antagonistic part of the generally Communist-oriented activities," of the intelligentsia in the 1930's. Thus, de Kooning's position, characterized by what Nietzsche earlier called the "pathos of distance" or what Hess referred to continually as his "oddball" status, was an intense manifestation of history, not a result of isolated "genius."

Hess saw that de Kooning's paintings were "based on contradictions kept contradictory in order to reveal the clarity of ambiguities." Because of the richly uneasy interchange between life and art in de Kooning's pictures, they were unlike the simple, one-dimensional art which was either purportedly "apolitical" or exclusively "political," both types of which were naively "undialectical." In Hess's opinion, "The social protest inherent in modern painting—its essential aspects that shock or startle or disgust at first sight—was muffled in a 'big yes' of specialized professional taste (that only de Kooning's Women have been able to contradict since)." Revealingly, when Hess authored "De Kooning Paints a Picture" in *Art News* (March 1953), he discussed the painting of *Woman*, 1950-1952, which was then controversial and was in fact treated with dilettantish incomprehension by Henry McBride in the very next issue of *Art News*.[31] An art fecund with paradoxes resulted, an art "sometimes fragmented, often mysterious, always expressed as a complex of culture (instead of the usual simplification of Paris)."[32] This was the price de Kooning paid for working with one of the "most awesomely complicated of modern techniques" on which he imposed "the most self-critical of methods."[33] The unresolved complexity of

this art was rightly recognized by Hess, however, as the reason for de Kooning's greatness. Hess affirmed that de Kooning lived to the fullest the contradictions of this period. When in the April 1951 *Art News* Hess wrote about de Kooning's show "which surprisingly is only the second for this artist," he stated that the pictures of de Kooning had "an air of authority-in-crisis perhaps unique in contemporary expression. The dilemma is of the time."[34]

In early 1949 Hess wrote short reviews of Adolph Gottlieb's show at the Jacques Seligman Gallery (February issue) and of Mark Rothko's exhibition at Parson's (April issue). Hess's reaction to their work was generally favorable, although it was more ambivalent than it had been toward de Kooning's. Unorthodox paragraphs combined observations that Gottlieb had "more than anyone else given the word 'totemic' an opprobrious meaning in right-wing circles" with statements that "he had succeeded in translating Oceania and the Gold Coast into an idiom adaptable to modern penthouses."[35] Having declared the titles of Gottlieb's work to be pretentious (as Greenberg had earlier claimed of Pollock's titles) Hess added that Gottlieb had nevertheless achieved a "new complexity and freedom." This evaluation of Gottlieb was similar to Hess's *early* view of the myth-makers, i.e., Newman, Still, Gottlieb, Rothko, Reinhardt, et al. While Hess's position entailed some incisive observations, it was unfortunately a less complex assessment than his view of de Kooning. An extended discussion in *Abstract Painting* (1951) of Gottlieb—whose *Romanesque Facade* was the first Abstract Expressionist painting to appear on the cover of *Art News* (March 1951)—clarified the reason for Hess's restrained appreciation of his art.

Concerning the myth-makers' position, Hess noted that, "In theory, the idea is quite simple and noble: to re-vitalize form by conceiving of it as a part of magic, or myth, or preconscious knowledge."[36] He added, however, that Gottlieb had been successful in his art by being untrue to the implications of his position. This self-refutation resulted from a lack of self-consciousness. Gottlieb, like the other myth-makers, desired to reach a primitive state outside history from a sophisticated position characteristic of a certain period in history. As Hess noted, writing of their primitivism, "nothing could be further from the methods or the products of artists working in cultures concerned with myth than the act of creating myth." A primitivist desire for a simple, instinctual life style is hardly the same as a primitive unawareness of alternatives that are not instinctive. Thus, Hess disclosed the tenuousness of the myth-makers' assertion that "only that subject-matter is valid which is tragic and timeless. That is why we profess spiritual kinship with primitive and archaic art."[37]

As Jose Ortega y Gasset once noted, people are themselves and their circumstances. Unlike the contradictory situations embodied synthetically in de Kooning's art, the contradictory position of the myth-makers resulted from their avoidance and attempted "transcendence" of these problems. While the paradoxes of de Kooning's art were engendered by his creative response to immanent cultural issues, the paradoxes of the myth-makers were generated to a greater degree by escapist wishes which ironically bore witness to the historical context they sought to escape. As such, the myth-makers' intent was anti-synthetic; they wished to circumvent social and aesthetic contradictions by arriving at an assumed state of primordial unity. Hess's critique was penetrating in so far as he saw that their presumed affinity with primitive art was only partially tenable and that their thoughts about this connection were not sufficiently self-reflective. Unfortunately, having shown this fault in their intentionality, Hess was not really able to justify the significance of their art except in formalist terms which, in the case of de Kooning, he had already conceded were not enough. Unlike some later critics, Hess failed to show how theories with implausible premises nevertheless fostered in their case an art with an iconography of the sublime.[38] More importantly, Hess did not explain why their desire for "transcendence," even if unrealized, was itself a profound indication of artistic alienation from a certain period, as Wilhelm Worringer had shown much abstraction to be, particularly that of the avant-garde.

The uncertainty of Hess's position concerning the myth-makers is seen in his review (April 1949) of Rothko's first show of his color field paintings. Writing about the change in Rothko's style, Hess noted that it was "surprising to find that today he has almost entirely abandoned his magnificent calligraphy for abstractions of flat, thin, colored areas that float like clouds or fall like heavy rain over the large canvases."[39] Stating that the pictures did not work "by color alone," Hess said that they involved an impressive emotional strength. Because of their oriental reticence, he felt that Rothko's works simultaneously surpassed, yet failed to equal Whistler's paintings: the grandiose ambition which triggered them was not completely successful. Thus Rothko's work "resulted in the ambiguity of the decoration which cannot be decorative."[40] Since Hess sensed a certain anxiety in Rothko's desire to use the most reductive formal components for a supra-formalist statement, he was favorably disposed to this work. Nonetheless, Hess obviously believed that the simplified formal elements, along with Rothko's theoretical simplicity, amounted to a much less complexly dialectical, hence less profound, art than that of de Kooning. This was why in the early years of his criticism Hess preferred the gestural Abstract Expressionists to the color-field painters.

In May 1949 a significant new column was added to *Art News,* the one entitled ". . .paints a picture" (or ". . .makes a sculpture"). Although Ben Shahn was the first artist about whom Hess wrote, the column was unquestionably tailored for Action Painters like Pollock, de Kooning, Hofmann, and Tworkov (all later featured in it) for whom the act of painting was as important as the work which resulted. Similarly, the aim of this new section was obviously in keeping with the sensibility expressed in Harold Rosenberg's famous discussion of "Action Painting," the word he coined in *Art News* (December 1952), Allan Kaprow's explication of "Happenings" as the heir to Action Painting (*Art News,* October 1958), and Meyer Schapiro's consideration of Abstract Expressionism as "more passionately than ever before, the occasion of spontaneity or intense feeling" (*Art News,* Summer 1957). Influenced by Paul Valéry, whom he sometimes quoted,[41] Hess recognized that the process of creativity was as important as the object it brought into being. Thus, he understood what formalists have continually missed: the act of creativity initiates a process, only one aspect of which is the art object, which the critical reception of the work incessantly sustains and *can* profoundly advance when "all" other aspects of the process are considered. To look "only" at the art object is to comprehend little, because the unending process of which it is a part is otherwise aborted. Hess was unquestionably aware that the Abstract Expressionists saw their art from similar perspectives, for as Barnett Newman stated "the idea of a 'finished' picture is a fiction."[42] When at a discussion group in Studio 35 (April 21, 1950) several Abstract Expressionists addressed the issue of "finish," most agreed with Motherwell that "what is a 'finished' object is not so certain." Furthermore, Abram Lassaw concluded that, "It would be better to consider a work of art as a process that is started by the artist." In "Ben Shahn paints a picture," although in a more colorless journalism than usual, Hess showed how this process orientation worked. He simultaneously located Shahn's work contextually in an uncircumscribable process and justified the need for such an expansive contextual approach in the future. The opening paragraph cogently christened this enterprise:

> To trace the metamorphosis of one painting, *Nocturne,,* by Ben Shahn, from the first glimmer of idea to the final touch of the brush, one would need a detailed history of the artist's personality.... Also, needed, of course, would be an exhaustive stylistic analysis.... *Nocturne,* executed in January and February of 1949, is a product of the total personality, but cannot sum it up.[43]

A review by Hess in *Art News* (November 1949) of Ad Reinhardt's show at Parsons reveals Hess's own inadequacies as a critic. Not surprisingly, "this promising young abstractionist"

was rated highly in so far as "he caught the burning yellows and oranges of sunlight, the acid purples of the native cottons and the absorbent greens of the moist vegetation [where he had painted in the West Indies]."[44] Nonetheless, "In other works, based on large free-forms, the organization seems so tentative, the conception so awkwardly planned, that the result is only confusion." In other words, Hess considered Reinhardt's art to be successful only insofar as it expressed a forceful interaction between life and art. A notable difference in handling can be seen in Hess's review, in the same issue of *Art News*, of Jack Tworkov's work. Accompanied by a full page reproduction of Tworkov's *Figure*—an unprecedented emphasis in the review section—Hess's review of "one of the most masterful artists of his generation" was much more incisive and poetic than his commonplace look at Reinhardt.[45] In Tworkov's "landscapes and figure pieces one finds statements at once reticent and eloquent, emotional and disciplined." Complex pictorial tension is generated by his attempt "to anneal the anatomy of a seated figure or an apple to the taut surface of the canvas, yet still retain the freedoms and connotations of three dimensions." Understandably, these intense and textured paintings were closer to de Kooning, hence more accessible and acceptable to Hess.

Perhaps the most penetrating look at Reinhardt's work by Hess was in *Abstract Painting* (1951). In this book it was noted that unlike de Kooning's attitude towards art, "Reinhardt would prefer to have it know nothing—save its own material presence."[46] Here Hess seems to have implied that Reinhardt, who had "in a way, followed Rothko," was unaware of what much avant-garde art, most obviously Duchamp's readymades, had already shown—no art is pure because all art is composed of its "impure" contexts, as well as of "pure" objects. Hence, reductive art is radically "purified" only in a formal sense; it is hardly freed from contextual implications or meanings. Unfortunately, however, Hess increasingly became an apologist for Reinhardt, whose art he really only partly understood. In the December 1953 *Art News* Hess wrote an article on Reinhardt's art, "Reinhardt: the Position and Perils of Purity," in which he reiterated the artist's views. His article was less a critique, than a reluctant aesthetic collaboration, which contended that Reinhardt's black paintings could in fact "make your eyes rock. . .the energy is there."[47]Referring to Reinhardt's hackneyed notion of aesthetic purification and historical inevitability, as well as his glib "anti-definitions" of art, Hess merely observed that Reinhardt's position had "many difficulties." Ultimately, Hess was forced into a formalist position that lacked any poetic insights into Reinhardt's art. Consequently, Hess failed to deal with Reinhardt's interest in going beyond art through art, an important characteristic of much avant-garde art. Furthermore, he neglected to discuss

Reinhardt's aesthetic insofar as it pursued a religious transcendence, similar to that of his friend Thomas Merton or of Zen Buddhism.[48] Reinhardt's aesthetic, which was purportedly unsullied by dialectical interchange with anything "inartistic," remained ironically free from Hess's usually profound critical notations.

In "8 Excellent, 20 good, 133 others" in the January 1950 issue of *Art News,* Hess further underscored the significance of Abstract Expressionism, most particularly the gestural masters. Singled out for special consideration were works by Marin, Pollock, and de Kooning, with the most attention going to "De Kooning's all but unrecognizable figures—whose sections interchange with the marvelously confusing rapidity of images in metaphysical verse."[49] Paintings by these three, along with Hofmann's *The Red Table* and Motherwell's *Painting* made it clear "that America's young school of abstract art is one of our distinguished contributions to twentieth-century culture."

Ensuing reviews by Hess of the color-field branch of Abstract Expressionism were highlighted by ambivalent criticism. A case in point is the curious review Hess wrote (*Art News,* April 1950) of Barnett Newman's first one man show:

> Barnett Newman, one of Greenwich Village's best known homespun aestheticians, recently presented some of the products of his meditations. . . . These are large canvases painted in one even layer of color (scarlet, yellow, blue,etc.) and on which runs a vertical line (or lines) of white or a contesting hue. There were some terrific optical illusions: if you stared closely at the big red painting with the thin white stripe, its bottom seemed to shoot out at your ankles, and the rectangular canvas itself appeared widely distorted. It is quite like what happens to a hen when its beak is put on the ground and a chalk line drawn away from it on the floor. However, very few spectators actually become hypnotized. But then there was no interest here for the average spectator. Newman is not out to shock the bourgeoisie—that has been done. He likes to shock other artists.[50]

It is a more funny and witty review—highly ironic if unpoetic—than Hess had previously written. The allusion to the "homespun" character of Newman's aesthetics of the sublime—in fact derived from a grandiose European tradition which had nevertheless become intellectually passe, hence provincial—subtly undermines it. Moreover, Hess's reference to Newman as an aesthetician was ironical, in view of Newman's well-known low opinion of aestheticians. He recognized that Newman, who was sometimes profound, but more often clever, sought to give art

an ahistorical, ontological basis—an effort for which many aestheticians have been justifiably refuted. Thus, Newman's belief that aesthetics is to artists as ornithology is to birds was misinformed, because Newman showed a greater awareness of aesthetics than a bird had ever had of ornithology. By seeking to locate art beyond the cavils of aesthetics Newman's conception of the sublime also attempted, implausibly, to put his art outside the historical process. Not surprisingly, this desire for theoretical, cultural, and formal simplicity—all of which were viewed "unsynthetically"—was hardly the type of art which Hess would have extensively admired. Fortunately, however, with regard to Newman, Hess later expanded his critical approach so that he authored two very informative monographs on him. Nonetheless, here as elsewhere, Hess mistakenly elevated a recognizable flaw in the art into a flawless recognition of the art.

II.

It is noteworthy that Hess's criticism was most profound and poetic when it was most impassioned. At his best, Hess corroborated Baudelaire's position that, "To be just, that is to say, to justify its existence, criticism should be partial, passionate and political, that is to say, written from an exclusive point of view, but a point of view that opens up the widest horizons."[51] By writing *engagé* criticism when the period ethos called for "authenticity" and "commitment," Hess did more than express strong views in emotional terms. He realized deeply intellectual "prejudices" of the era while he wrote about its most distinctive artists. In the "deepest Sartre sense"[52] is how Hess described what he considered the unprecedented economic deprivations faced by the Abstract Expressionists, using prose that would now seem lugubrious and irrelevant. In a sense, New York became, for those alienated artists, a symbol of the post-war world, for as Sartre had stated it was the world's harshest city, a place where you never lose your way, but are always lost. Hess was not only sensitive to this historical situation, but he was able to recognize some of the major artists who expressed what de Kooning referred to as an existential mood.[53] An excellent example of Hess's fervid criticism was the extra-aesthetic significance he saw in gestural abstraction. When writing about the work of de Kooning, Pollock and Gorky (*Art News,* February 1951), he stated that in it "Human gesture becomes a new subject and a new means."[54] For this reason, Abstract Expressionism was not only a new artistic style, it was also "a new interpretation of nature and of man."[55] A passage by Rainer Maria Rilke vindicates Hess's contention:

> As someone who seeks for an object for a long time becomes more and more helpless, confused, and hasty, and finally creates a disorder in an accumula-

tion of things about him, so the gestures of mankind which cannot find reason for existence, here become more and more impatient, nervous and hurried.[56]

Understandably, Hess chose to deal with this tense and paradoxical art by means of a dialectical approach. The efficacy of Hess's "critique-poésie" can be attributed to his recognition that dialectic was not, as Hegel had contended, a metaphysical schema. Rather he understood dialectic as an expendable tool that could disclose complex dimensions of art, though not necessarily its "essence." Hess's post-Hegelian view was in keeping with what Kierkegaard first understood: the dialectical concept is valid only when it relates directly to concrete experience. Thus, Hess spoke for himself as well as de Kooning when he used a remark by Nietzsche as an epigraph for his first book about the artist: "The will to a system is a lack of integrity."[57] Similarly, Hess's admiration of de Kooning's art, which "became a kind of programless program," can be seen as relating to his desire for a dialectic without preconceptions. By opening up an extraordinary range of perspectives into de Kooning's art through an experiential use of dialectic, Hess more than justified his critical method.

Since, however, a dialectical situation is emphatic to the extent that it fuses distinctly antithetical extremes, a dialectic is obviously less present where elements are dominant or ancillary rather than synthesized. Thus a dialectical approach is very susceptible to abuse if it becomes a standard of artistic excellence instead of a descriptive means to locate art contextually. Unfortunately, Hess sometimes failed to recognize that the most self-consciously synthetic art was not *necessarily* the most significant or historically pertinent. When Hess used the dialectic as a standard for success, as in the case of the color-field abstractionists it transcended the experience out of which it was purportedly growing. The result was a crypto-Hegelian hypostatizing that betrayed Hess's historical approach. In fact, Hess realized this inadequacy and sometimes lapsed into an eviscerated formalism. In dealing with Motherwell's art, for example, Hess frequently used the bland words "elegant" and "beautiful,"[58] in spite of his apparent belief in other reviews, that "beauty"—formal harmony not charged with synthetic tension—was dangerously close to being undialectical. Doubtlessly Hess knew what Valéry had earlier stated: "In our time beauty is a corpse."

A discussion of the "art criticism" that Thomas Hess encouraged in other writers for Art News *is scheduled to appear in a future issue of* Art Criticism. *(Eds.)*

[1]Elizabeth C. Baker, "Thomas B. Hess, 1920-1978," *Art in America*, 66, (November-December 1978), p. 8.

[2]Barbara Rose, "Thomas B. Hess, 1920-1978," *Art in America*, 66, (November-December 1978), p. 11.

[3]Ibid., p. 12.

[4]Roland Barthes, *Writing Degree Zero* (1953) (New York, 1977), pp. 41-42.

[5]Ibid., p. 43.

[6]Jean-Claude Chevalier, *Alcools d'Apollinaire* (Paris, 1970), p. 12.

[7]Irving Sandler, *The Triumph of American Painting* (New York, 1971), p. 212.

[8]Dore Ashton, *The New York School* (New York, 1972), p. 158

[9]Francis V. O'Connor, *Jackson Pollock* (New York, 1967), p. 26.

[10]Thomas B. Hess, "Triple Play to Center," *Art News*, 45 (April 1947), pp. 35, 59.

[11]Thomas B. Hess, *Abstract Painting* (New York, 1951), p. 28.

[12]Clement Greenberg, "John Marin" (1948) in *Art and Culture* (New York, 1961), p. 181.

[13]"Spotlight On: Evergood, Cushing, Harnett, Hartley, Miró, DeKooning," *Art News*, 47, (April 1948), p. 33.

[14]"The Western Round Table on Modern Art (1949)," in *Modern Artists in America*, ed. by Robert Motherwell and Ad Reinhardt (New York, 1951), p. 36.

[15]Soren Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Irony* (1841) (New York, 1965), p. 265.

[16]Thomas B. Hess, "Miró," *Art News*, 47 (April 1948), p. 33.

[17]Thomas B. Hess, "Miró," *Art News*, 50, (March 1951), p. 44.

[18]Jean-Paul Sartre, *What is Literature?* (1947) (New York, 1965), p. 189. Sartre's observation confirms this failure of surrealism, since as Breton wrote in *Les Manifestes du Surréalisme*, Paris, 1955, the dialectical method would be used when surrealism finished "avec l'idealisme proprement," (p. 12). Similarly, Walter Benjamin said of Surrealism that it involved "an inadequate, undialectical conception of the nature of intoxication." W. Benjamin, "Surrealism: The Last Snapshot of the European Intelligentsia," *New Left Review*, No. 108 (March-April 1978), p. 55.

[19]Hess, *Abstract Painting*, p. 10.

[20]Alfred M. Frankfurter, "A Handful of Promise," *Art News*, 46 (January 1948), pp. 20-21.

[21]Thomas B. Hess, "The Whitney: Exhibit Abstract," 47 (December 1948), p. 24.

[22]Ibid., p. 59.

[23]Hess, *Abstract Painting*, p. 4. (The following quotation is also from this source.)

[24]Thomas B. Hess, *Willem de Kooning*, New York, 1959, p. 15.

[25]Ibid.

[26]Hess, *Abstract Painting*, pp. 99-100.

[27]Lawrence Alloway, "The New American Painting," *Art International*, 3 (1959), pp. 25-26.

[28]P.G. Pavia, "The Unwanted Title; Abstract Expressionism," *It is*, No. 5 (Spring 1960), p. 8.

[29]Hess, *Willem de Kooning,* p. 13.

[30]Ibid., p. 11. All the following quotations, with the exception of the one by Baudelaire, are from this source, pp. 11-15.

[31]Henry McBride, "Abstract Report for April," *Art News,* 52 (February 1953), p. 47.

[32]Thomas B. Hess, "DeKooning," *Art News,* 50, (April 1951), p. 24.

[33]Ibid. Also, *Abstract Painting,* p. 100.

[34]Ibid.

[35]Thomas B. Hess, "Adolph Gottlieb," *Art News,* 47 (February 1949), pp. 49, 58.

[36]Hess, *Abstract Painting,* p. 125. All quotations preceding the next footnote are from this source.

[37]See John W. McCoubrey, *American Art: 1700-1960* (New York, 1965), p. 210 for a reprint of this letter to the *New York Times* (June 13, 1943), signed by Rothko and Gottlieb.

[38]See, for example Lawrence Alloway, "The American Sublime," in *Topics in American Art* (New York, 1975), p. 31-41. Also, see a critique of "transcendence" in Donald B. Kuspit, "Symbolic Pregnance in Mark Rothko and Clyfford Still," *Arts Magazine,* 52, (March 1978), pp. 120-125.

[39]Thomas B. Hess, "Mark Rothko," *Art News,* 48, (April 1949), pp. 48-49.

[40]Ibid.

[41]In fact, Hess even referred to Valéry's unduly extreme position in this respect when he wrote, "The means cannot be separated from the ends in the finished work (as Valéry would like to do for all Art)." See *Willem de Kooning,* p. 27.

[42]R. Motherwell and Ad Reinhardt, eds., *Modern Artist in America* (New York, 1951), p. 12. The ensuing quotations by Motherwell and Lassaw are from the same source and page.

[43]Thomas B. Hess, "Ben Shahn Paints a Picture," *Art News,* 48 (May 1949), p. 20.

[44]Thomas B. Hess, "Ad Reinhardt," *Art News,* 48, (November 1949), p. 50.

[45]Thomas B. Hess, "Jack Tworkov," *Art News,* 48, (November 1949), pp. 44-45.

[46]Hess, *Abstract Painting,* p. 145.

[47]Thomas B. Hess, "Reinhardt: the Position and Perils of Purity," *Art News,* 52, No. 8, December 1953, p. 26.

[48]See, for example, "Five Unpublished Letters from Ad Reinhardt to Thomas Merton and Two in Return," *Artforum,* 17, (December 1978), pp. 23-27.

[49]Thomas B. Hess, "8 Excellent, 20 Good, 133 Others," *Art News,* 48 (January 1950), p. 34. The ensuing quotation is also from this source.

[50]Thomas B. Hess, "Barnett Newman," *Art News,* 49, (March 1950), p. 48. For a short, but very illuminating look at Barnett Newman's esthetic, see Donald B. Kuspit, "A Phenomenological Approach to Artistic Intention," *Artforum,* 12 (January 1974), pp. 52-53.

[51]Charles Baudelaire, "The Salon of 1846," in *Art in Paris 1845-1862,* (New York, 1965), p. 44.

[52]Thomas B. Hess, "Seeing the Young New Yorkers," *Art News,* 49 (May 1950), p. 23.

[53]Sandler, p. 98

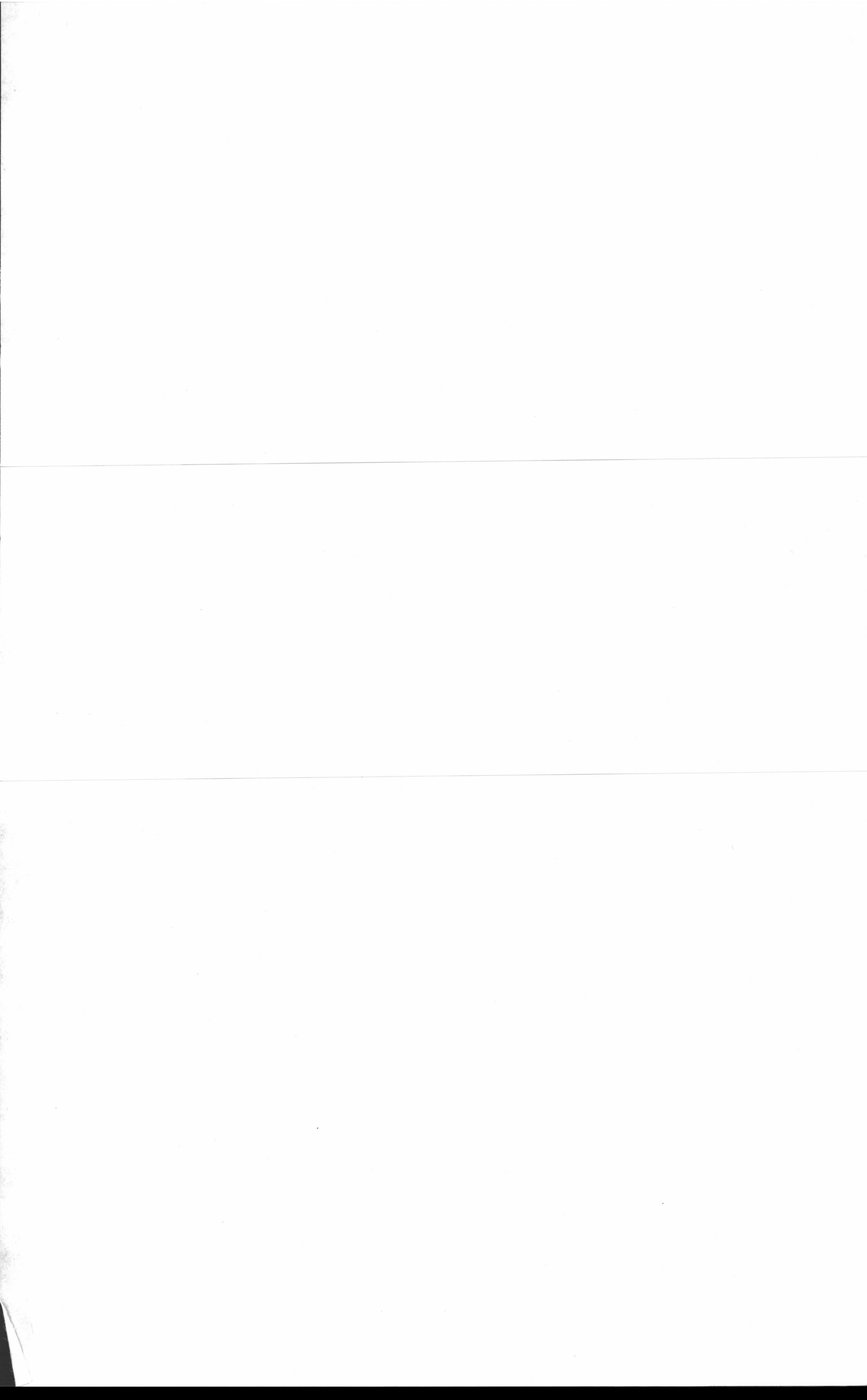
[54]Thomas B. Hess, "Is Abstraction Un-American?" *Art News,* 49 (February 1951), pp. 38-39.

[55]Hess, *Abstract Painting,* p. 157.

[56]Rainer Maria Rilke, *Rodin*(New York, 1933), pp. 46-47.

[57]Hess, *Willem de Kooning,* p. 7.

[58]For example, see Thomas B. Hess, "Robert Motherwell," *Art News,* 51, (March 1952), pp. 45-46.



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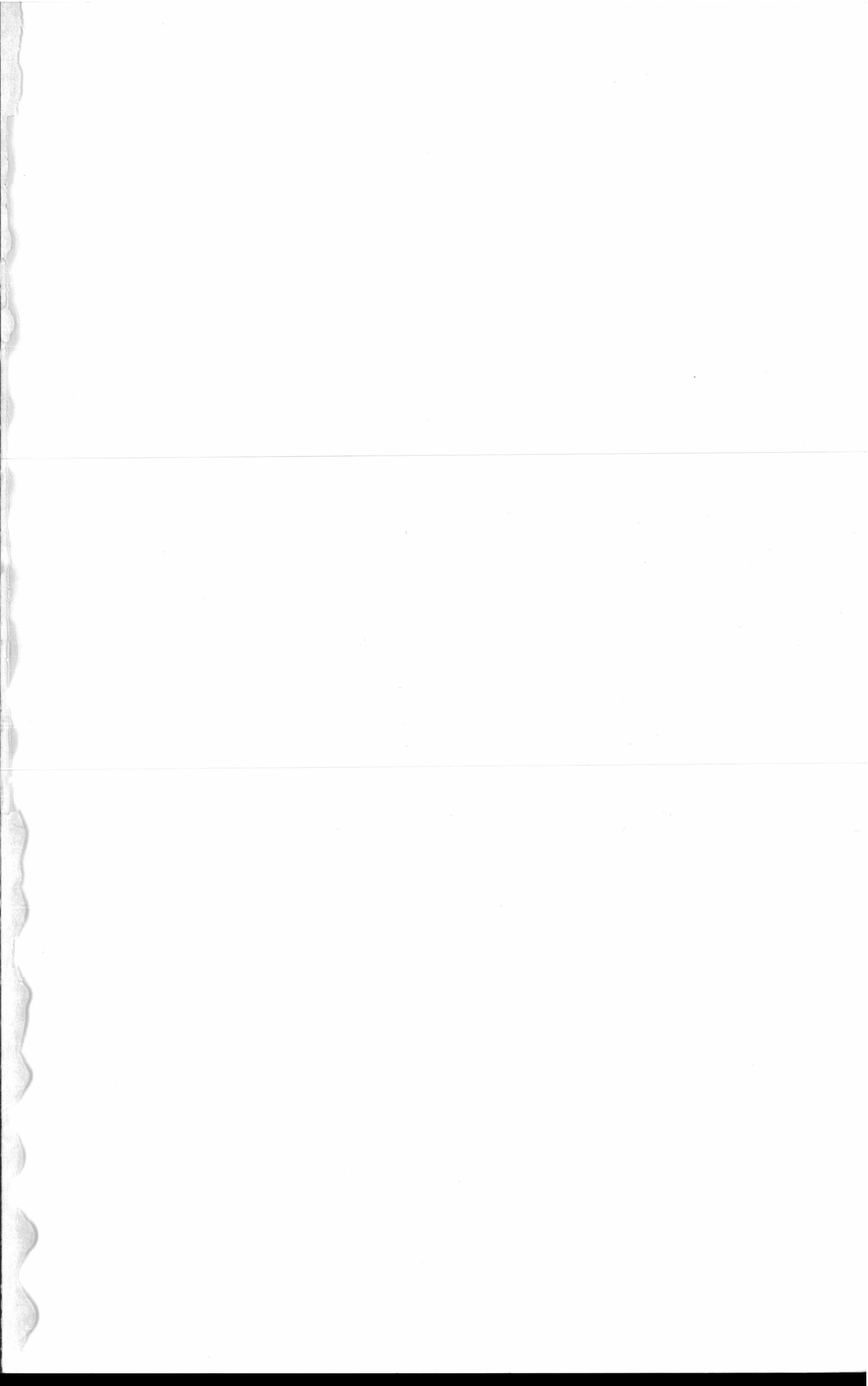

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