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With respect to the color of the cover:  
If works of art are to survive in the context of extremity and darkness, which is social reality, and if they are to avoid being sold as mere comfort, they have to assimilate themselves to that reality.

T.W. Adorno, "Black as an Ideal," *Aesthetic Theory*.



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# **Art Criticism**

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# Against Benjamin H.D. Buchloh's Attack on Painting

By Michael Peglau

Benjamin H.D. Buchloh is the most convinced and vehement of several Marxist art critics now writing in English. By the broad reach of "Marxist," I mean to say that Buchloh's work is founded on the writings of Marx and Engels, and that he makes considerable use of later writing within the tradition, notably that of Walter Benjamin and George Lukács. As his involvement with both Benjamin and Lukács suggests, Buchloh is quite eclectic, and he ranges within the Marxist tradition from the stringent 'scientism' of Louis Althusser to the 'mysticism' of Ernst Bloch, and, as I will attempt to lay out, he is also influenced by Lenin. However, the purpose of this essay is not to trace the Marxist genealogy of Buchloh's work, as revealing as that might be, or to read it toward a summation of its principles and basic positions. Rather, Buchloh's attack on painting will be my focus. I will make a critical reading of several key passages in that attack, with the aim of laying out what I think are deep flaws within his arguments, and with the further aim of exposing not just Buchloh's iconoclasm, but also his blunt hostility toward what remains a central problem in western painting, the problem which, broadly speaking, can be called mimesis. In particular, I will question Buchloh's attack on mimesis in terms

of the necessary corollary of his argument, the suppression of what I will call the other.<sup>1</sup> I will also discuss another aspect of his argument which is closely connected to that suppression, his antipathy to what I will call interiority.<sup>2</sup>

For Buchloh painting, in general, is an obsolete artistic form. This idea, not unfamiliar since 1913, leads him to see painting as now fundamentally historicist and illegitimate. Except for a few specialized uses, such as parody, he would discard or proscribe it. But painting for him is not simply and innocently obsolete, an antique curiosity. Rather it still possesses a dangerous openness to bourgeois motives, and an equally dangerous susceptibility to contagion with repressive ideology. In claiming parody as a still potentially legitimate use for painting, Buchloh touches on these conditions even as he unwittingly and comically overstates that claim:

From its very inception, Picabia's ultimately conservative work limited itself to dialectical juxtaposition of parodistic mimicry with the libidinal reification which operates within the signifying system alone. On the other hand, it is Duchamp's radicality that seemingly breaches the confines of Modernist esthetic practice by actually exchanging the individually crafted or painted simulacrum for the real mass-produced object in actual space. Paradoxically it is the radicality of this solution—a petit bourgeois radicality as Daniel Buren once called it—that obliterates the ideological framework that determines the manipulation of the code. In other words, the presumed autonomy of the signifying practice of high art is, eventually, institutionalized both culturally and socially in the museum. Picabia's position, which remains within the conventions and delimitations of the discourse while manipulating the codes in a parodistic fashion, is now once again the most potentially successful and comfortable position for artists to assume.<sup>3</sup>

Parody is not only discussed in this passage, it lurks in its language. Beyond the abstractness of the terminology and the remarkable length of the sentences, the historicism of the passage invites a mocking reading. While Buchloh wants to outline a situation in which certain present-day paintings might have critical purpose despite what he claims is painting's general obsolescence, that purpose is borrowed. Buchloh unwarily presents us with an historicist argument—past conditions apparently parallel to the present invite a renewal of past critical actions—not suspecting that within a discussion of parody such an argument might itself read as parody (similar historicist hand-me-downs occur in other of his essays). But this historicist device and Buchloh's language are superseded by the extensive and uncontrolled possibilities for parody which unsummoned drape Buchloh's view of the present.

The bite of Picabia's and Polke's painting depends on a knowing misuse of selected aspects of "high" art, and insofar as that misuse is parody, it is a kind of quotation or mime. Like its dour cousin appropriation, though in bolder costume, parody requires the at least nominal credibility of its model. Otherwise it dissolves into school boy or girl exercises. Parody is necessarily imitative: even when, like appropriation, it misquotes abstract painting, it must do so, so to speak, representatively. But Buchloh, forgetting the imitative basis of appropriation or parody, states in another closely related essay, "any at-

tempt to reinstate the conventions of representational painting after Cubism is absurd.”<sup>4</sup> Parody and appropriation, however, cannot trade on absurdity. Each, when it draws on images, is structured through conventions of representation, and both require that those conventions be sufficiently vital to sustain the ruse. Buchloh hopefully announces the death of representational painting, yet such painting in fact lives a horrible secret life in any parody, transforming what would prey on it into blank variations of itself. These variations, dead without its life, make its supposed death a double fiction, a death in life.

Buchloh halfway suspects this reversal and certain trends in current painting like the so-called ‘new cool’ play out his worst scenario of yet another variation of “a very limited and precisely defined set of operations on the signifier,”<sup>5</sup> another rerun of the undead yet the unalive. This recent, coyly abstract painting, so self-conscious in its references, declares such an operational terrain as its concern, and part of its ineffectiveness stands in the inevitable diminution of an appropriation from its source. Possibly, the apologetic and slightly intimidated quality of the ‘new cool’ owe something to Buchloh’s general proscription of painting. Likewise, the claim of the ‘new cool’ to be ‘simulation’<sup>6</sup>—a claim which obviously takes shelter beneath the mantle of Baudrillard—suggests a masquerade of not being painting, despite the material evidence to the contrary. Such a conceit is convenient in the face of Marxist analyses which stress the apparent ease with which painting can become a commodity: ‘simulation’ translates to ‘significance’ within the present market.

This obvious irony, that Buchloh’s criticism helps sustain certain easily named galleries and clearly defined sectors of the market, is of course rich in potential for parody, unwitting or otherwise. Without acknowledging his role as a promoter for the venture capital of this sector of the art market, Buchloh is nonetheless haunted by such reversals:

Each act of appropriation therefore inevitably constructs a simulacrum of a double position, distinguishing high culture from low culture, exchange value from use value, the individual from the social. It perpetuates the separation of various cultural practices and reaffirms the isolation of individual producers from the collective interests of the society within which they operate. It widens the gap that it set out to bridge, it creates the commodity it set out to abolish. By becoming the property of the “cultural” it prevents the political from becoming real.<sup>7</sup>

In this “inevitable” scenario Buchloh does not see that the traditional Marxist base/superstructure model underlying his analyses guarantees an endless succession of such ‘successes,’ and of such apparent reversals. As long as the artwork is defined in materialist terms, and as long as the base defines the superstructure, the artwork is condemned to the circuit of a market structured to transform “use value” into “exchange value.” Furthermore, in strictly Marxist terms an attempt to alter the base through tinkering with a minor apparatus in the superstructure is quite naive: art is scarcely the vehicle of choice for political or social action. Buchloh might instead have set out a fundamental questioning of the base/superstructure model, which is indeed quite questionable. Or he might have questioned another glaring and fundamental prob-

lem in his analysis: is the meaning of an artwork actually inherent in its material extension, is meaning fundamentally co-extensive with the work as an object? This problem goes undiscussed as Buchloh repeatedly focuses on the rites of the market, and the reduction of the work, in his view, to mere objecthood and commodity status. This reduction, of course, presumes that the work's meaning is entirely dependent on its status as an object of use or of exchange, and that this status is as fragile as changes of ownership. Buchloh does not seem to grasp that meaning, for instance, in figurative painting does not inhere in the objective material of the work but rather between the configured image and its reference, in a dialogue which embraces both but is caught in neither. While it is necessary to see the work to know its meaning, seeing the work is no guarantee of understanding it, and understanding is certainly not conferred by ownership, nor is the work's meaning realized through whatever price its reputation generates. Ownership confers nothing other than the negative right to withhold the work from others, and reputation demands to be seen through.

The fatalism of Buchloh's view of the art market—indicated by phrases like “therefore inevitably constructs”—suggests that he is under the spell of his hatred of what he would call the “auratic status”<sup>8</sup> of “high art,” or what Mary Boone and Leo Castelli would market as “charisma.” While he rightfully is no supporter of the concoction of such status, his negativity toward it is perhaps excessive. It is etched in the moralistic tone of the Marxist “do's” and “don'ts” which so mark his essays and it appears to distort his thinking. Evidently, “high culture” has an unforgiving power over Buchloh. Like the painting of “high art,” it is an object of special hatred. Not only does he see it as institutionally dominant. “High culture” is greedily omnivorous in its capacity to subsume the formerly radical, and it even has the power to resurrect the corpse of painting.<sup>9</sup> Furthermore, it enforces on those who would challenge it either a denial of entrance or the condemnation of acceptance.<sup>10</sup> In the potency he grants to it Buchloh comes close to hypostatizing “high culture” into a jealous and devouring god, and because he cannot see the wit in the extremity of his view, he cuts himself off from the possibility of saturnalia and satire. His recourse is to a set of proscriptions, and an attempt to deny the validity of art forms such as painting, which unsettles both his understanding of artworks and the proscriptive project of his criticism. We will now examine four aspects of that criticism, its authoritarian rhetoric, its dread of mimesis, its suppression of interiority, and its nostalgia.

## II

In “Figures of Authority, Ciphers of Regression” much of Buchloh's discussion implicitly or explicitly involves the concept of false consciousness. Together with the related concepts, reification and ideology, it both sets the tenor of his essay and shapes the direction and content of his attack on figurative painting:

The stereotype of the avant-garde's audacity having become convention is, of course, used primarily by those who want to disguise their conser-

vatism as its own kind of audacity (Cocteau at the time of "Rappel à l'Ordre" had just turned to Catholicism). They deny the fact that conventionalization itself is a manoeuvre to silence any form of critical negation, and they wish to share in the benefits that bourgeois culture bestows on those who support false consciousness as it is embodied in cultural conventions.<sup>11</sup>

Determining just what Buchloh means by "false consciousness" in this passage is not easy. The concept seems broad enough to include almost anything which could be called cultural or conventional, or anything of which the bourgeoisie have ever approved. Furthermore, in this sweeping reach and in the pointed moralism of the combination of "false" with "consciousness," the term implies the rooting out of such culture and the re-forming of the "consciousness" which gives rise to that culture and which inhabits it. Yet Buchloh does not specify just how "bourgeois culture" manufactures "false consciousness," or how that culture is the natural habitat of "false consciousness." To get a surer idea of their intrinsic relationship for him, I will have to move the discussion to a brief consideration of the concept in its original formulation by Marx and Engels.

Engels succinctly stated the principal thrust of the concept for them in a letter to Franz Mehring:

Ideology is a process accomplished by the so-called thinker, consciously indeed but with a false consciousness. The real motives impelling him remain unknown to him, otherwise it would not be an ideological process at all. Hence he imagines false or apparent motives. Because it is a process of thought he derives both its form and its content from pure thought, either his own or that of his predecessors.<sup>12</sup>

Initially, this statement might read as psychological, but actually its basis is quite different. As Engels indicates in the last sentence, falsity here is not the result of unconscious motives, but rather of the grounding of ideology in so-called "pure thought." The possibility of such pure thought is both the basis of the division of labor and its expression:

Division of Labor only becomes truly such from the moment when a division of material and mental labor appears. (The first form of ideologists, *priests*, is concurrent.) From this moment onwards consciousness *can* really flatter itself that it is something other than consciousness of existing practice, that it *really* represents something without representing something real; from now on consciousness is in the position to emancipate itself from the world and to proceed to the formation of "pure" theory, philosophy, etc.<sup>13</sup>

Buchloh's essay doggedly echoes this fateful discussion of the division of labor, and its stress on the unreality of anything not directly based on the actuality of the means of production. To paraphrase him, true modernism radically questioned the production process of painting for painting's claim to organic unity, aura, and presence, and it replaced these by "heterogeneity, mechanical procedures, and seriality."<sup>14</sup> In this replacement true moder-

nism—presumably through its adoption of modern ‘production processes’—‘transgressed’ bourgeois ideology, though Buchloh does not detail how those aspects of ‘bourgeois ideology’ which must found modern industry were in fact challenged. Rather, ‘bourgeois ideology’ is apparently a monolithic and coherent edifice for him, and it is maintained by a class of ideologists, who at their worst are little more than intellectual racketeers:

The mock avant-garde of contemporary European painters now benefits from the ignorance and arrogance of a racket of cultural parvenus who perceive it as their mission to reaffirm the politics of a rigid conservatism through cultural legitimation.<sup>15</sup>

In the nefarious separation of their mission these “parvenus” closely approximate the role of bourgeois ideologists for Marx and Engels:

The division of labor, which we already saw above as one of the chief forces of history up till now, manifests itself also in the ruling class as the division of mental and material labor, so that inside this class one part appears as the thinkers of the class (its active, conceptive ideologists, who make the perfecting of the illusion of the class about itself their chief source of livelihood), while the others’ attitude to these ideas and illusions is more passive and receptive, because they are in reality the active members of this class and have less time to make up illusions and ideas about themselves.

False consciousness thus plays a different role in the collective life of humankind from liberated consciousness, a role which can appear ‘true’ to whole classes of people. Clearly, then, Buchloh understands the essence of his project as debunking what he sees as a class-determined illusion. False consciousness, moreover, is not an error in a logical, cognitive, or metaphysical sense. Such traditional philosophical terrain is purely scholastic.<sup>17</sup> Consciousness can only be judged for its falseness or correctness from an absolute understanding of the emancipation of humankind from its enslavement in the class structure, and from the domination of material objects and the structure of production. Given the vanguard position of the party, it is not hard to feel Bakunin’s dread of an implemented Marxism,<sup>18</sup> in which the party, in arbitrating the idea of total and final emancipation, would also arbitrate thought.

In his effort at debunking bourgeois artistic “false consciousness,” Buchloh claims the role of the correct Marxist ideologue. Not only does this claim back up his use of concepts such as false consciousness, but it permits him confidently to impugn any artist he thinks of as articulating a ‘bourgeois’ illusion. Artists such as Picabia, or Picasso, become as though ideologists who have lost their former revolutionary enthusiasm. Yet Buchloh’s accusations run deeper. He considers the former vanguard turned revanchist to have cynically allied itself with a bourgeois ideological position, pretending in this reversal to invalidate the very principle of “revolutionary” artistic action, all in the interest of sharing in the bourgeois hegemony of power and money. If I slightly overstate the treachery, it is in the interest of suggesting how closely Buchloh’s statement on turncoat artists echoes certain statements by Lenin, for example, from “Our Program” (1899):



Has anything new been introduced into this theory by its loud-voiced “renovators” who are raising so much noise in our day and have grouped themselves around the German Socialist Bernstein? [A one-time orthodox Marxist.] *Absolutely nothing*. They have not advanced one single step the science which Marx and Engels enjoined us to develop; they have not taught the proletariat any new methods of struggle; they have only retreated, borrowing fragments of backward theories and preaching to the proletariat not the theory of struggle but the theory of cession, cession to the most vicious enemies of the proletariat, the government and bourgeois parties, who never cease to seek for new means of baiting the Socialists.<sup>19</sup>

Buchloh’s language is not so charged as Lenin’s (evidently not so much is at stake—Buchloh is no initiator of a real revolutionary program), yet he voices much the same situation of the betrayal of ‘true’ principle and opportunistic accommodation to an entrenched bourgeoisie. The parallels, however, go beyond the denunciation of the artists’ complicity with the bourgeoisie, and their betrayal of revolutionary principles. Like Lenin, Buchloh avows the importance of the idea of revolutionary renewal,<sup>20</sup> obviously a central notion to any vanguard conscious of itself, particularly in that the ‘new’ and the ‘revolutionary’ are spoked to the same axle. But while Buchloh and Lenin invoke the idea of revolutionary renewal, and while each invocation is to some extent rehearsed, the idea for neither of them is simply a trope. Rather, both see it as final and unconditional. The revolution is to be permanent and unceasing, and each views himself, at least in part, as the guardian of the principle. But that guardianship finally has its conditions. Buchloh no less than Lenin sets his critique in a language heavy with its own repressive implications.

Buchloh subtitles the second section of his essay “Repression and Representation,” hoping apparently through the coy alliteration and assonance to smuggle a connection between two words which do not have any necessary causal or ordinary contextual relationship. Buchloh in fact seems to hope for a magical connection, one made by incantation. The device also operates simply as ‘catchy’ phrasing, and several other subtitles within the essay are akin in this regard: “Art, Past and Master,” “The Return of the New,” and so forth. While it might be argued that Buchloh intends at least some of these as irony, the ring of such phrasing belongs to a familiar province of writing, i.e., to advertising copy and propaganda. More than a few passages in this essay, or in “Beuys: Twilight of an Idol, Preliminary Notes for a Critique,”<sup>21</sup> resemble propaganda in other, more obvious ways. For example, Buchloh never tires of using the basic device of imputing bad faith and outright cynicism to artists whose work he feels violates correct practice:

But would it not be more appropriate to conceive of these radical shifts of the period between the wars, with such decisive selections of production procedures, iconographic references, and perceptual conventions, as calculated? Should we not assume that everyone making these decisions would be aware of their ramifications and consequences, of the sides they would be taking in the process of aesthetic identification and ideological representation?<sup>22</sup>

If one allies these assumptions with the earlier accusation of cynical betrayal of revolutionary principle, and one assumes further 'class' identification, what degree of assumption is off-limits? Buchloh's use of "appropriate," instead of cautioning measure and a careful ordering of evidence, already invites further charges on whatever grounds an aroused invidiousness might conceive. Buchloh has no hesitation in pressing such attacks, and some of what he imputes to Beuys is nearly libel:

It would be possible to see in Beuys's work the absurd aftermath of that nightmare, a grotesque coda acted out by a perfidious trickster. Speculators in Beuys' work did well: he was bound to become a national hero of the first order, having reinstalled that sense of a—however deranged—national self and historic identity.<sup>23</sup>

The nightmare to which Buchloh refers is of course the Nazi era and its multitude of horrors for which he makes Beuys both an apologist and a profiteer. Such attacks, the contention of complicity on the part of many artists with the forces of "ideological domination" or the unwitting collaboration or cowardly submission to such forces, is close to a basic subcategory of much propaganda after Lenin—"deviationism" as a particular form of "revisionism." It is also the stuff of diffuse conspiracy theories. Thus for Lenin, "deviationism"<sup>24</sup> is necessarily broken down into "right deviationism" and "capitalism" (the third minor category, "left deviationism," is probably now void, what with the dissolution of practice in the present era). Now, whether or not Buchloh has his implicit categories first hand from Lenin, accusations of complicity or perfidy, when made on the basis of notions like "ideological representation" or "the received ideas of petit bourgeois anarchism,"<sup>25</sup> are more than mere rhetoric—at least if Buchloh believes in the ends of anything he utters.

Not surprisingly, Buchloh finds occasion to invoke Lenin:

When Lenin said that "Nationality and Fatherland are the essential forms of the bourgeois system," he could hardly have anticipated that "history" would subsequently assume the same function.<sup>26</sup>

Buchloh neglects to mention the stinging irony of Lenin's dictum that "no nation can be free if it oppresses other nations,"<sup>27</sup> but he is not turning to Lenin with questions. Rather, Lenin stands as a figure in a tradition to which Buchloh also belongs, and the substance of the rhetorical manners of the tradition are things to which Buchloh subscribes:

Facing the deadlock of their own academicization and the actual exhaustion of the historical significance of their work, Picasso, Derain, Carrà, and Severini—to name a few of the most prominent figures—were among the first to call for a return to the traditional values of high art. Creating the myth of a new classicism to disguise their condition, they insisted upon the continuation of easel painting, a mode of production that they had shortly before pushed to its very limits, but which now proved to be a valuable commodity which was therefore to be revalidated. From this situation there originated their incapacity or stubborn refusal to face the epistemological consequences of their own work.<sup>28</sup>

Beyond the now-familiar charge of calculated cynicism, and as part of the implicit charge of false consciousness, these artists are accused of “incapacity or stubborn refusal” to comprehend the changes their earlier work imposed on the ordering of knowledge and perception. That is, Buchloh asks us to believe that the carefully orchestrated bad faith of these artists somehow engenders their incapacity to understand the epistemological implications of their earlier work—these foxes cannot smell their own dens. Buchloh clearly is not presenting an argument here, but his procedure is not merely a harangue against dead traitors and enemies, or a practiced litany for believers. Rather, the tone and the meaning of this passage, as with much of Buchloh’s writing, rises from the manifest certainty with which each assertion is added to the preceding. Buchloh evidently utters each sentence, each accusation—no matter how absurd—in full confidence. Brusque transitions do not trouble him, no matter how much they might shame any adequate marshalling of historical evidence and the ordering of it into a believable argument. For instance, he clearly is not bothered by a formulation such as, “from this situation there originated their incapacity . . .,” even though the particulars of the “situation,” which would have permitted such authoritative use of the passive voice, have in no way been established. Similarly, Buchloh does not trifle over working out a precise connection between his contention of “incapacity” and that “situation,” and at no point are the “epistemological consequences” of the earlier work of these artists so much as sketched. Buchloh likewise does not bother to cite any other writing on this issue, rather he asks us to believe that whatever epistemological transformations were wrought by this earlier work, or whatever else made it historically consequential, were quickly superceded. One might indeed wonder if epistemology is quite so febrile, or if, say, the Cubist work of Picasso in 1911-1912 was quite as consonant with Severini’s in its epistemological implications as Buchloh fantasizes.

Argument, evidently, is not needed, and effort at historical or critical insight is unnecessary because Buchloh proceeds as an authority whose pronouncements are beyond question. Again, Buchloh uses rhetorical procedures which are common to much authoritarian political writing, and Lenin once more stands as a typical example:

The majority of the European Socialist leaders, both the social-chauvinists and the Kautsky trend, have become so much a prey to purely philistine prejudices, fostered by decades of relatively “peaceful” capitalism and bourgeois parliamentarism, that they are unable to understand what Soviet power and the dictatorship of the proletariat mean. The proletariat cannot perform its epoch-making emancipatory mission unless it removes these leaders from its path, unless it sweeps them out of the way. These people believed, or half-believed, the bourgeois lies about the Soviet regime in Russia and were unable to distinguish the new, proletarian democracy—democracy for the working people, socialist democracy, as embodied in Soviet government—from bourgeois democracy, which they slavishly worship and call “pure democracy” or “democracy in general.”<sup>29</sup>

As Alain Besancon has pointed out, Lenin’s typical address to his reader (or listener) was to write and speak as though what was being stated was too

obvious to need careful elaboration.<sup>30</sup> He proceeded as an authority who was putting forth facts over which there could be no disagreement and proofs which, whatever their abbreviation, belonged to an already known and incontrovertible body of knowledge. Buchloh assumes a no less assured and no less authoritarian tone, and like Lenin, he is fond of invective:

The German neoexpressionists are equally protean in their unearthing of atavistic production modes, including even primitive hewn wood polychrome sculpture, paraphrasing the expressionist paraphrase of "primitive" art (Immendorf). The rediscovery of ancient teutonic graphic techniques such as woodcut and linocuts flourishes (Baselitz, Kiefer), as does their iconography: the nude, still life, landscape, and what these artists conceive of as allegory.<sup>31</sup>

The strengths of Immendorf's work, which are largely located within its insistent satire, and its weaknesses, which at least in part arise from that insistence, become repetitious, are unfortunately removed from anything actually protean or atavistic. Buchloh would do much better to write a careful, descriptive critique of Immendorf, or of Baselitz, or of Kiefer, and avoid pretending that linocuts are "ancient" or "teutonic." Otherwise, one waits for Buchloh to accuse an artist he has supported of ideological weakness.

### III.

The central contention of "Figures of Authority, Ciphers of Regression" is that figurative painting confirms and "re-presents the hieratics of ideological domination."<sup>32</sup> Buchloh does not defend this contention in detail. He fails to show a necessary relationship between the structure of representation in even one tradition of figurative painting and either the conceptual underpinnings of any form of ideology or the rhetorical structure of that form.<sup>33</sup> Nor does he demonstrate on the basis of historical documentation some kind of relationship. He in fact does little more than state repeatedly and often opaquely what seems a superstitious fear of figurative painting in general, and especially of mimesis:

This appearance of a unified pictorial representation, homogeneous in mode, material, and style, is treacherous, supplying as it does aesthetic pleasure as false consciousness, or vice versa. If the modernist work provides the viewer with perceptual clues to all of its material, procedural, formal, and ideological qualities as part of its modernist program, which therefore gives the viewer an experience of increased *presence* and autonomy of self, then the historicist work pretends to a successful resolution of the modernist dilemma of aesthetic self-negation, particularization, and restriction to detail, through absence, leading to a seductive domination of the viewer by the experience of alienation and perversion that ideology imposes on the subject.<sup>34</sup>

I suggest we rephrase this tangled passage to extract a clearer sense of Buchloh's fear of figurative painting. Buchloh manages to tell us that the false consciousness attendant on figurative painting is the result of two conditions.

First, the “treacherous” unity of the picture elicits from the onlooker, presumably through that unity’s proximity to a familiar model, a feeling of pleasure. That feeling, however, and the conventions which sponsor it, are false because they apparently mirror, in some unstated way, an alienating ideology. Second, the unified and seamless picture displaces the beholder, again in some unspecified way, from the beholder’s actual “presence” before the work and from the beholder’s “self,” which again in some unstated sense would be ascertained through the materially present strategies of “self-negation, particularization, and restriction to detail.” Buchloh has collage or some variety of it like photomontage in mind as the paradigm of his “modernist” work, and his phrase “homogeneous in mode”—though scarcely alluding to the “modes” of Poussin—together with the word “historicist,” suggests that some form of academic classicism is his paradigm for figurative painting.<sup>35</sup> This last inference is partially confirmed by Buchloh’s peculiar insistence on using the term “viewer,” when “onlooker” or “beholder” would better suit his argument. For in using “viewer” he implies that the “modernist” work is also somehow a view, even as he assumes that the seduced viewer of the “historicist” work has no more sense than the bird of Zeuxis in the story that Pliny tells to the credit of both Zeuxis and Parrhasius.<sup>36</sup>

Mimesis, then, in the spectral outline made by Buchloh’s cloudy writing, seems to be a special danger, precisely the contradiction of the correct or “righteous” modernist work. It is as though Buchloh does not understand that all artworks, no matter how directly evident their materiality or what the fissures in their continuity, are never simply identical with the materials from which they are constructed. Even the most perfectly mimetic painting is not a flawless mirror of the real, somehow stable and unchanging. Buchloh appears to have made the most elementary of errors in his dread and banishment of mimesis: that the artwork is to be identified with its material vehicle, its material extension, as though the written text of the poem were the poem.<sup>37</sup> The ordering of meaning in the work, or the work’s meaningful order, no matter how grounded in material, ultimately sublimates and transforms that material, makes it metaphorical. No artwork finally and unconditionally consists of its material extension. All are shot through with an “as if.” But this basic shifting in the artwork, its intrinsic ambiguities of matter and image, seem unbearable for Buchloh. It is as though he hoped to assure his “self” by means of the bare and evident materials of the collage—forgetting, however, that collage has its own illusions, which are just as seductive as the paradoxical and speculative mirages of figurative painting; forgetting also that the illusions of collage are by now even more limited and more familiar than those of figurative painting.

Buchloh attempts to find firm critical ground in the equally familiar idea that the “pure heterogeneity of collage,” the internal contradictions which typify collage’s structuring of its images and its signs, is still revolutionary and constitutes a “transgressive” artistic and political “practice.”<sup>38</sup> Largely materialist, his understanding of collage centers on collage’s laying bare the “fragments and materials of experience,” which it reveals as “fissures, voids, unresolvable contradictions, irreconcilable particularizations.”<sup>39</sup> While he attrib-

utes to collage a dialectical function, that function is shaped by a strangely flattened reading of Walter Benjamin's ideas on allegory. The searching counterpoint of Benjamin's understanding of allegory—his view that the many tiers of the emblem house not only general categories such as time, or religious ideas such as fallenness, but also moral problems such as guilt which elide into the life of the allegorist and his reader and into the world that is allegorized<sup>40</sup>—is reduced by Buchloh to formula. As Buchloh states in "Allegorical Procedures: Appropriation and Montage in Contemporary Art":

In the splintering of signifier and signified, the allegorist subjects the sign to the same division of function that the object has undergone in its transformation into a commodity. The repetition of the original act of depletion and the new attribution of meaning redeems the object. In the scriptural element of writing, where language is simultaneously incorporated into a spatial configuration, the allegorist perceives the essential site of his or her procedure: the Dadaist poet depletes words, syllables, and sounds of all traditional semantic functions and references until they become visual and concrete. Their dialectical complement is the liberated phonetic dimension of language in the Dada sound poem, where expression is freed from the spatial image of language, and the usages of imposed meaning.<sup>41</sup>

Apparently unaware of the "dialectical" contradiction which the words "redeemed" and "scriptural" introduce into his argument, Buchloh makes the emblem into a "signifier" and the "signifier," in turn, into little more than a noise. Similarly, the found images of the collage are stripped of their suggestions of a world recognized in fragments, or allusion, or unvoiced decay,<sup>42</sup> and instead those images are seen merely as commodities emptied of use or exchange value and made over into "depleted signifiers."

Buchloh presents us with a nearly mechanical understanding of collage and allegory, and in so reducing both he unwittingly makes Dada poetry (this perhaps deservedly) and collage into a model for *Erlebnis* in Benjamin's *Erfahrung/Erlebnis* dichotomy.<sup>43</sup> He does not grasp that allegory is fundamentally a retelling, in which a known narrative or image is reprised through another, whose proper life has been sacrificed. The emblem is never merely a "signifier" broken off from a "signified" and muted against "imposed meaning." Quite the opposite, the emblem becomes a vessel through which another and imposed meaning is realized. It gives itself over to another voice, another tale, and a parallel, often invented, world. In misunderstanding allegory, in flattening it instrumentally into a semiological operation which he believes typifies a tradition of art or of poetry, Buchloh hints that for him art is contiguous with the operational world. He does not seem to understand, to paraphrase Emmanuel Levinas, that all artworks are withdrawn from the world, that they are interposed between us and it.<sup>44</sup> I will add that artworks will never be understood so long as the thinking about them does not conceive their material structure from out of their imagistic purpose. Buchloh does not seem to comprehend that any artwork which attempts to define itself through procedures which can be reduced to a materialistic language, or which imagines that such procedures are its intersection with history (as, e.g., "appropriation art") will join in the fate of other objects of use elevated to fashion.<sup>45</sup> And art



criticism which bases itself in such language hastens its own favored objects' desuetude.

As his flattening of allegory suggests, part of Buchloh's fear of figurative painting is a fear of engulfment, a fear of losing the "self" in the worlds that figurative painting pictures or invents—hence his materialistic reading of the "figuration" of collage. And as this flattening further suggests, part of his dread lies in the way figurative painting lends itself to allegory. For like allegory it transmutes ordinary things, which before its intervention might have been neutral, inert, or dead, into at the very least emblems of themselves. Again to paraphrase Levinas, figurative painting makes things over and places them apart from the role and place which they held in the previous order—a transmutation that is true of even the most meticulous realism.<sup>46</sup> Furthermore, in this transmutation the painted things are separated from our experience and thus ask us to confront our interiority. In this transmutation of things real and imagined into images, figurative painting echoes an essential aspect of allegorical thinking, and more than any other art form except poetry, it best houses the allegorical mind. If Buchloh really believes that allegory is a basic procedure for undermining reified things, and if he also believes that "the visual object/image has become the essential ideological correlate of private property,"<sup>47</sup> then his best hope actually lies in his formulation that the illusions of figurative painting in some way parallel the illusions of bourgeois ideology. For while the term "visual object/image" seems maladroit in reference to painting, it implies a hall of mirrors where immanence might at least be staved off, and where art might again reconnect with other than commonplace ideas.

But there is another aspect of Buchloh's fear which makes this allegorization impossible for him. This is figurative painting's failure to die its prescribed death. Buchloh hopes for this death and needs it in order to square with a determinist history. Yet in his under-strutted deployment, this history seems as much prophylactic as anything else:

If the perceptual conventions of mimetic representation—the visual and spatial ordering systems that had defined pictorial production since the Renaissance and in turn had been systematically broken down since the middle of the nineteenth century—were reestablished, if the credibility of iconic referentiality was reaffirmed, and if the hierarchy of figure-ground relationships on the picture plane was again presented as an "ontological" condition, what other ordering systems outside of aesthetic discourse had to have already been put in place in order to imbue the new visual configurations with historical authenticity? In what order do these chains of restorative phenomena really occur and how are they linked? Is there a simple causal connection, a mechanical reaction, by which growing political oppression necessarily and irreversibly generates traditional representation?<sup>48</sup>

Buchloh unfortunately avoids answering any of these questions in detail, or in terms which could stand as a convincing argument to someone outside his idiosyncratic Marxism. For example, the basic linked problems of how "perceptual conventions" shape "mimetic representations," and how in turn

those conventions are interpolated from mimetic forms, go unmentioned. Nor does he even begin to outline what constituted the “systematic” breakdown of what he apparently understands as a consistently evolving tradition of spatial order. He also avoids the problems attendant on “the credibility of iconic referentiality” for photography and film, for despite the “indexical” aspects of their process, their effectiveness as images stands obviously and deeply in what is taken as their mimetic precision. And the interesting question of how “figure-ground relationships on the picture plane” relate to ontology is addressed only in scare-quotes. One would expect that key arguments in support of his contentions against figurative painting could be built through discussing these problems—and if Buchloh’s questions are to be read as anything other than rhetorical, those discussions are demanded. Yet as our consideration of Buchloh’s proximity to the authoritarian voice of Lenin has shown, “Figures of Authority, Ciphers of Regression” is, like much of Buchloh’s writing, highly rhetorical, and what answers Buchloh does advance for his questions are in the main circular.

A key to seeing through the rhetoric in the above-quoted passage is the phrase “pictorial production.” On first reading this phrase may seem merely awkward, a nugget of jargon half-comical in its juxtaposition of the presumably hand-made against the industrial connotations of “production.” Yet this phrase implies other important terms used in the essay, terms such as reification, and this implication calls forth related ideas such as false consciousness. Production is a variable term in Marxist analysis, and a basic one. It is the fulcrum, e.g., for many of the analyses of *The German Ideology*.<sup>49</sup> Its variability in part is a matter of its abstractness, as Marx states in the *Grundrisse*,<sup>50</sup> and in part it stems from the fact that the term can carry connotations of value. While it often is simply neutral, it can sometimes be laudatory (as in Buchloh’s tendency to use the word in relationship to the Russian Constructivists<sup>51</sup>), while at other times, when coupled with words such as “capitalist,” it is condemnatory. It appears that Buchloh’s special concern in using the phrase “pictorial production” in “Figures of Authority, Ciphers of Regression” is to introduce the idea that the making of paintings is directly analogous to other practices of “bourgeois” economic production, that painting is also an expression of basic underlying conditions such as reification. Once this is granted, it follows in a Marxist analysis that these conditions of production correspond exactly to a system of social relations, and in their interdependence both determine the general conditions of society. The reaffirmation, then, of “iconic referentiality” as a fundamental aspect of “pictorial production” would imply for Buchloh a causal connection to “growing political oppression” and ultimately to the “hierarchies of ideological domination”—never mind that in the string of implications which make up this essay Buchloh neglects to demonstrate, let alone cite, any study of how the making of iconically referential paintings is significantly akin to at least some other form of “bourgeois” economic production. Nor does he substantiate how the reestablishing of the “conventions of mimetic representation” is intrinsically related to “growing political oppression.”

Instead, after a further and equally tendentious question, which he poses

immediately after those quoted above, Buchloh offers an affirmative reply to his series of questions, yet a reply dissembled by being stated in the conditional:

Does the brutal increase of restrictions in socio-economic and political life unavoidably result in the bleak anonymity and passivity of the compulsively mimetic modes that we witness, for example, in European painting of the mid-1920s and early 1930s?

It would certainly appear that the attitude of the *Neue Sachlichkeit* and the *Pittura Metafisica* cleared the way for a final take over by such outright authoritarian styles as Fascist painting in Germany and Italy and socialist realism in Stalinist Russia.<sup>52</sup>

Thus Buchloh asks “if” iconically referential painting is linked with political oppression and finds that “yes,” in variations of academic naturalism, it is the official style of two of the most murderous and totalitarian states in history, not to forget the somewhat lesser monstrosity of Fascist Italy. But he does not even hint that the problem at stake is what specifically about academic naturalism made it so appropriate to Soviet or Nazi purposes. Nor does he ask why figurative painting in general is stained by this “appropriate” connection, and thus made into a hostage of “repressive” ideology. Rather, he attempts to deflect such issues through a peculiar comparison of “traditional” Marxism with western liberalism:

Paradoxically, however, both traditional Marxism and standard liberalism exempt artists from their responsibilities as sociopolitical individuals: Marxism through its reflection model, with its historical determinism; liberalism through its notion of the artist’s unlimited and uninhibited freedom to produce and express. Thus both political views extend to artists the privilege of assuming their determinate necessity to produce unconscious representations of the ideological world.<sup>53</sup>

A great many artists and writers living under “traditional Marxism” might question Buchloh as to the degree of their exemption, or the degree to which they might be unaccountable for “unconscious” representations, or indeed just how unconscious any artist or writer living in such a regime dares be of ideology, official or otherwise. Yet even if we imagine all western painters awash in their irresponsible privileges, Buchloh still has to detail how even academic naturalism is an “unconscious” representation of “the ideological world.” To argue this he has at the very least to enter into a careful discussion of mimesis, and evidently he is unprepared to do so.

As I have already suggested, part of Buchloh’s problem in addressing mimesis lies in its lack of fit to “pictorial production.” In relation to mimesis this phrase must be taken to mean that the complex of tasks which form a painting is primarily determined by the problems of building mimetically believable spaces, images of people, and so on. Buchloh in the series of questions cited above admits this determining priority by stating that “the conventions of mimetic representation had determined pictorial production,” and in this admission he inadvertently undermines the materialistic intent of the phrase. For mimesis, in all of its many guises, subverts the materiality of paint-

ing. It structures matter into an image which, while formed of matter, also transforms matter.

At a root level, mimesis hints that the material tasks of painting answer to an other which is outside of their logic and which in its difference and in the manifoldness of its own life is at least partly outside of culture. Mimesis asks that the artwork be answerable or in response to the other which it attempts to engage. Mimetic painting is founded in a looking which grants priority to the other. The mimetic impulse is stirred by the recognition of the life of the other, and it glories in that life. Mimetic painting attempts to make images of the sensuous manifoldness in which the other in part makes itself known. In this address, mimetic painting acknowledges that its image of the other will always be provisional and partial. Thus the constructing of the image is intrinsically conditional. While the structure of the work is shaped by the mimetic impulse, mimetic vision challenges structure. And yet structure in its logic limits and forms both vision and image. As Theodor Adorno has written, while distinct from the order of material construction, mimesis is not simply opposite to it:

The dialectic of mimesis and construction resembles its logical prototype in that the one realizes itself only in the other, not in some space between them. Construction is not a corrective of expression, nor is it a shoring-up of expression by means of objectification, but is something that has to emerge in an unplanned way from the mimetic impulse.<sup>54</sup>

I will add that the imperative of this unplanned emergence is crucial to both the protection of mimesis and to the other. While the mimetic work attempts to construct an image of the other, that image should not attempt a final objectification of the other, if such an objectification were actually possible. Such an attempt would presume that the other could be captured, that the other could be understood to conform to the constructed image. In such a conformity the other would cease to exist for the beholder as other, it would become simply another facet in a field of operations. The presumed coincidence between the mimetic image and the other is therefore as a duplicate in a community of agreement about appearance. Nor is it a name for an image which conforms to some pre-established model. Fundamentally, mimesis forces the artwork outside of what is technically controlled. At its root the mimetic impulse opposes the conventional and already seen.

Mimesis, therefore, can never arrive at a completed and resolved form, as it stems from recognizing the other in the other's difference. Mimesis depends finally for its efficacy on the life of the other, on letting the other remain other, remain animate in the world. The mimetic impulse requires an ethical relation to the other. It has to resist the objectification of the world. The provisionality of mimesis also arises from the limits of any attempt to make an image of the other. Mimesis suggests that if paint can imitate things, these things mime with and interact with one another. They are not still, not simply there awaiting us. Mimesis acknowledges that the apparent is under constant change, that the world is unstable and only partially present through the apparent. It undermines any totalization. It also acknowledges that what was once evis-

dent can in turn become hidden, even in conditions which seem transparent. For while mimesis addresses that which comes into appearance and shows itself, that which shows itself can disappear even as one looks. For this showing is a kind of shining, with all the fragility and momentariness such a metaphor of light implies. What comes into appearance shines through the not fully apparent which surrounds it and which pulls it back into invisibility. Mimesis hints that light is other than simply a condition for vision, or for visibility. Mimesis intrinsically places the significance of the artwork outside of its material constitution.

That Buchloh forces "pictorial production" into such an inhospitable and unlikely context further cues us to reading his series of questions as an attempt at an abbreviated and crudely determinist history, where systems author things and where people are both subject to the systems and the things. A determinism is also suggested in the rhetorical pattern of the questions. They do not serve to open an analysis, but stand as questions whose answers are already implicit or known, so that, as outlined above, these questions for Buchloh require only a doctrinaire response. "Pictorial production" also implies that mimetic painting developed in an essentially technological way analogous to the evolution of some class of useful objects; painting therefore is to be understood as matter formed by some precisely definable intent. That mimesis, in the complexity of its history, much of which is still not well understood, does not conform to such a rigidly conceived model probably needs no further emphasis. Its diversity of image and the richness of the theoretical tradition accompanying those images will always remain as grit in the machinery of a determinist history. It is not surprising, then, that Buchloh would like to see mimesis safely disposed of as a historical or critical issue, even at the expense of trying to hide those issues through a series of rhetorically conceived questions.

#### IV.

The concept of reification is of great importance to Buchloh. Together with false consciousness, it lies at the base of his work as an art critic, but, as with false consciousness, he neglects to give the concept a careful exposition. Instead, Buchloh makes a problematical tie of the concept of reification to the psychological concept of repression. He introduces this tie in "Figures of Authority, Ciphers of Regression," where he replaces careful argument with a deferral to authority:

This transformation of art from the practice of the material and dialectical transgression of ideology to the static affirmation of the conditions of reification and their psychosexual origins in repression has been described as the source of a shift toward the allegorical mode by Leo Bersani: It is the extension of the concrete into memory and fantasy. But with the negation of desire, we have an immobile and immobilizing type of abstraction. Instead of imitating a process of endless substitutions (desire's ceaseless "travelling" among different images), abstraction is now a transcendence of the desiring process itself. And we move toward an art of allegory.<sup>55</sup>

At this point in his essay, Buchloh has in no way detailed how “the conditions of reification” have “their psychosexual origins in repression,” and at no point does he. Even if we tacitly agree with him, it is by no means clear that this quotation from Bejsani’s *Baudelaire and Freud* actually supports Buchloh’s position: it might be read more directly as pointing to an allegorical trend in Malevitch’s work. The Black Square is then not an icon of revolutionary “material and dialectical transgression of ideology,” but a hermiting away from vital and immanent concerns. Similarly, the proposed connection between “reification” and its “psychosexual origins in repression” is more logically read as meaning that what augurs reification is not figurative art, but the suppression of psychological life, which in its most telling and basic form is a life of images.

Buchloh in fact is attempting to join two not altogether compatible concepts. Conflating political repression with psychological repression, he wants to graft this awkward conflation onto reification, a term whose origin and specificity lie outside of psychology. Presumably, the strength of his point is supposed to derive from allusion to Georg Lukács, for reification, and to Sigmund Freud, for repression, but the link between these concepts is by no means easy or automatic. It would require skill in two methods, and a precise analytic focus, to forge such a link—otherwise it can yield no more than another banal psychologizing of history and culture. Buchloh, however, never defines his use of either term, and he leaves them quite unspecified by context. Ironically, we could say that he himself submits to Lukács’ dictum, that reification is the necessary, immediate reality of every person living in capitalist society,<sup>56</sup> for in Buchloh’s case reification extends to his own use of the term “repression.” With this in mind, it seems appropriate briefly to examine these concepts in order to see what differentiates them.

Lukács develops the concept of reification in *History and Class Consciousness*, particularly in the chapter “Reification and the Consciousness of the Proletariat.” While the concept, in the complexity and breadth of its reach, is not easily reduced to a statement, Martin Jay provides a succinct formulation when he defines reification as “the petrification of living processes into dead things, which appear as an alien ‘second nature.’”<sup>57</sup> For Lukács, reification addresses a broad, but for him necessarily interconnected, social and intellectual universe, ranging from economic relationships to the idealist tradition in philosophy. He derives the ideas underpinning the term from Marx’s analysis of commodity fetishism in the first volume of *Capital*, and in particular from the opposition between value *per se*, whose source is productive labor, and the manipulation of production toward a never-ending increase in exchange value. Under these conditions relationships between people are hardened into their roles in the system of production and exchange, and the individuals becomes as though objects.<sup>58</sup> Through this objectification each individual becomes simply a component in an ever-enlarging productive mechanism<sup>59</sup>; each structure within this gigantic system, whether economic, social or political, is formally similar to the others; and all of these structures are based on the rationalized system of production and exchange.<sup>60</sup>

Lukács especially focuses the concept of reification on the long-standing



problem of the thing-in-itself, that final and unbreachable barrier to formal, rational thinking.<sup>61</sup> Lukács argues that the basic procedure of modern critical philosophy, to treat the world as though it were a static aggregate of things stilled and waiting for rational analysis, is but an expression of the reified structure of bourgeois consciousness. To quote Frederic Jameson's elegant discussion of this issue:

It is as though our primary relationship to the things of the outside world were not one of making or use, but rather that of a motionless gaze, in a moment of time suspended, across a gap which it subsequently becomes impossible for thought to bridge. The dilemma of the thing-in-itself becomes, then, a kind of distorted reflection of this initially immobile situation which is the privileged moment of middle class knowledge.<sup>62</sup>

The "contemplative" structure of reality, the polarity of the mystified bourgeois consciousness and the brutally rationalized social world which in its totality escapes middle-class understanding, is to be overcome by the proletariat's realization of its historic role. As the producer of all value, the proletariat will come to recognize the commodity nature of the bourgeois world and will realize that within that world it is nothing but a commodity itself.<sup>63</sup> Recognizing this, the proletariat will understand that in its role within the capitalist order reification has achieved its most absolute form. In this utter alienation, however, lies the possibility of the proletariat's awakening, and of revolution. For unlike the bourgeoisie the proletariat is capable of genuine self-consciousness.<sup>64</sup> By becoming aware of itself as a commodity the proletariat dialectically can become aware of the totality of the relationships which both shape its role and society as a whole. In this awakening to intolerable conditions and their causes the proletariat will recognize itself as a class and revolt against all forms of reification. Acting as the subject-object<sup>65</sup> of history it will free society from the objectification of the individual, from the illusive moral and epistemological antinomies of bourgeois thought, and from the thrall of objects.<sup>66</sup>

The final critical objective of the concept of reification for Lukács, the radical and historical constitution of the proletariat as revolutionary subject and object, is scarcely compatible with psychology or with the concept of repression. Repression as a concept for cultural analysis is given its most influential presentation by Freud in *Civilization and its Discontents*:

It is impossible to overlook the extent to which civilization is built up upon the renunciation of instinct, how much it presumes precisely the non-satisfaction (by suppression, repression or some other means?) of powerful instincts. This 'cultural frustration' dominates the large field of social relationships between human beings. As we already know, it is the cause of the hostility against which all civilizations have to struggle.<sup>67</sup>

These well-known words cut squarely against the concept of reification in its classic articulation by Lukács. The basic ground of the concept of repression is the subjective interrelationship of the ego and the unconscious. The ego, which conceives of itself as autonomous and unitary, continues inwards, as it were, without a sharp or final demarcation, into unconscious mental ac-

tivity.<sup>68</sup> Significant complexes within that unconscious activity are inadmissible to the ego. Some of these contents may have been known before they came to be withheld from consciousness, while others may be primitive expressions of instinct which likewise contradict the position of consciousness.<sup>69</sup> On the one side, then, repression is a kind of forgetting,<sup>70</sup> a subjective removal by the ego from the object of the id, yet on the other, Freud argues, repression is also organic, fixed by heredity and providing the very basis for the possibility of civilization.<sup>71</sup>

The concept of repression therefore contradicts Lukács' understanding of reification on at least three fronts. First, repression depends structurally on the separation of the ego-subject from the id-object. Not only does this separation fatally echo the contemplative removal of bourgeois consciousness from the reified world; for Freud, its perpetuation is necessary to civilization. Second, repression is at least in part organic, that is, it does not admit of historical change. Reification, of course, is a concept whose critical thrust is toward historical and revolutionary transformation. Third, repression posits the fundamental ground of culture to be that contested terrain between consciousness and the unconscious. It therefore denies the primacy of economic structure as determining and final to social conditions and historical possibility. Given these contradictions, reification and repression can at optimistic best enjoy only an uneasy auxiliary relationship, if one concept is not to gut the other. Furthermore, if we acknowledge the essential place held by aggressiveness or the death instinct in Freud's mature thinking, we must realize that repression involves not simply a renunciation of a socially disruptive pursuit of pleasure, but an even more crucial denial, and one which no social order can afford to override for very long.<sup>72</sup>

If we add to these considerations two further distinctions between reification and repression, then Buchloh's attempt to yoke the concepts together seems at best ill-advised. The concepts of repression, and psychoanalysis in general, not only parallel the contemplative detachment Lukács ascribes to bourgeois consciousness. Ultimately, they are centered on and derive their significance from, the singular, unique individual. The given, basic tension between an individual consciousness and the unconscious, which is formed crucially of contents rising from the intimate experience of the individual, can never be fully squared with the idea of the individual articulated within the concept of reification. There, the individual is to be transformed from an isolated entity, defined negatively by a role within the system of production, into the subject-object of revolutionary change—and, as Lukács states, this "means the abolition of the isolated individual."<sup>73</sup> It also means the abolition of the root subjectivity which defines psychological individuality. In a fundamental sense, the meaning of the repressed, and of the ego's relationship to the repressed, is grounded in subjectivity, where pathological detail is crucial. Psychoanalysis as a method for the study of culture only escapes from formula through the detailed examination of subjective instance, through the discussion of the particular manifestation of the culturally repressed in all of its trauma, ugliness and opacity to our assumptions. Second, in Buchloh's formulation, the breakdown of repression on a societal scale would apparently

replace the development of class consciousness by the proletariat as the generating principle of social transformation, and presumably we would be faced with the droll possibility of an analyzed artistic avant-garde appropriating the vanguard role of the proletariat and the party.

Now it might be argued in Buchloh's defense that he may be turning to a later treatment of Freud's ideas, to a diminution of the depth and pessimistic force of what remains compelling thinking. The optimistic sense in which he joins the elimination of repression to the supposed breakdown of reification is suggestive of Marcuse or of Fromm,<sup>75</sup> and at certain points his essay suggests some acquaintance with the French feminist revision of Lacan.<sup>76</sup> But again he does not bother to cite his source(s) for whatever revision he is making of repression, and he does not explain just how he is using this concept which has a key place in his essay. As for reification, his further use of the term makes it seem as though he wants to retain at least Lukács' insistence on the economic base with its anti-individualistic implications:

Modernist high culture canonized aesthetic constructs with the appellation "sublime" when the artists in question had proven their capacity to maintain utopian thought in spite of the conditions of reification, and when, instead of attempting to change those conditions, they simply shifted subversive intentions to the aesthetic domain. The attitude of individual powerlessness and despair is already reaffirmed in the resignation implicit in a return to the traditional tools of the craft of painting and in the cynical acceptance of its historical limitations and its materially, perceptually and cognitively primitivist forms of signification.<sup>77</sup>

Thus the "artists in question," who go unnamed, would seemingly be accused of "utopian thought," specifically in contrast to the unmentioned proletariat, and the absolute grounding of its class consciousness in the conditions of reification. Likewise, the "materially, perceptually, and cognitively primitivist" craft of painting is only to be understood in its full obsolescence against the necessarily advanced tools and procedures of modern capitalism, procedures, we might add, which ever more forcibly seek to control and standardize images along lines derivative of advertising. (I might also remark that 'advanced' socialism is no less concerted in this regard, just less inventive.) The individual, and individualistic pursuits such as painting, are in Buchloh's words powerless and cynical in their presumed acceptance of reification and in their asserted backwardness, their primitivism in the face of the technological development of the economic base. Yet Buchloh actually does not make these connections.<sup>78</sup> He does not even hint what the supposed dereliction of painting is to be measured against. Rather he wheels out, once again, the old-fashioned mechanism of counter-revolution, nameless enemies supported by bourgeois elements, acts of cynical compliance, and so forth. In the context of such clichés, reification can do little more than point to Marxist verities. Not only does Buchloh not bother to define repression or reification, or to cite his sources for the vague conjunction he proposes between them. He does not really use these concepts for their critical leverage. He opens nothing new through them.

On no issue is this lack of criticality more obvious than in Buchloh's failure

to ask if there is a positive relation between painting and the repressed. Ostensibly, if reification is somehow to be dismantled through the breakdown of repression by the making of art, any artform with access to the repressed should be useful. The basic approach to the repressed is necessarily through the language in which the repressed makes itself felt and known, and any procedure which fails to engage that language can only reproduce familiar ideas about the repressed. The repressed makes its appearance fundamentally through the imaginal. It assumes form and articulation through the various means of fantasy, dream, the un-occasioned word, the symptom.<sup>79</sup> An artwork which does not preserve the somatic force of the symptom—the occasion into which the word intrudes, the tissue of the dream, the vividness of the fantasy—will not touch the repressed, which lives in the psycho-somatic instance and disappears in all generalization. The breakdown of the repressed, which is a deeply complex process, furthermore requires the imagined, corporeal presence of the repressed itself, for it is essentially a process of metamorphosis, and the symbolic material must be there in its full weight and strangeness. It hardly needs emphasis that within the so-called visual arts painting has the most ample resources for presenting such material. Indeed, in Buchloh's scheme of things, the very fact that painting is as though a regressed<sup>80</sup> and pathological undertaking should give it great advantages. But it would seem that painting's supremacy in such a *paragone* further unnerves Buchloh. Parallel to his dread of mimesis and its intrinsic celebration of the other is an equal fear of the otherness of the repressed:

This carnival of eclecticism, this theatrical spectacle, this window dressing of self-quotation become transparent as a masquerade of alienation from history, a return of the repressed in cultural costume.<sup>81</sup>

Buchloh here takes the position, so to speak, of the historical materialist ego, banishing anything which does not conform to its determinism, to a shadow and fringe existence. However, in so doing he betrays the possibility of any serious restructuring of existing Western culture through some integration of the repressed. He also betrays his claim that reification somehow stems from "psycho-sexual repression," for without an urgent and open program for seeing and listening to and feeling the repressed, such a claim is mere pretense. Furthermore, in avoiding such an open addressing of the repressed, Buchloh suggests that he is trying to barter off the inadequacy of his Marxist historicism by a rhetorical invocation of psychoanalysis. And by reducing the repressed, by making it merely "a masquerade of alienation from history," he further reveals that psychoanalysis for him is merely a convenient and conventional term in a rehearsed discussion. If the persistence of reification is somehow to be explained through repression, the appearance of the repressed in even a bourgeois party costume asks for more than sarcastic dismissal. The repressed in any of its intrusions, no matter how banal or disturbing, in fact asks for a probing questioning of method and assumption. The masks of its carnival, after all, come from all social strata, and the voices of the repressed are not all simply generated by capitalist "repression." The repressed rather is always other and apart, and any psychology worthy of the name must respect

its difference. As Max Horkheimer wrote, "Psychology in its proper sense is always psychology of the individual."<sup>82</sup> No psychology can be so if the repressed is generalized. Buchloh, however, is willing to psychologize both culture and history, partly, as stated above, to paper over the inadequacies of his historicism, but also partly to sustain the determinism of his view of the individual as ultimately constituted "in language and ideology."<sup>83</sup> Neither of these concepts can house the incarnate and somatic particularity of the repressed, or even its symbolic promiscuity. Nor can they account for the gravity and specific tensions between consciousness and the unconscious which shape each person. For Buchloh repression, like allegory or mimesis, is a concept gutted of its complexity and content.

Given the importance reification has for him, and given the special derelict condition of figurative painting for him, Buchloh surprisingly fails to develop a line of argument, stemming from Lukacs' reification, which potentially could be critical of at least certain traditions in mimetic painting. Briefly, this argument would contend that the contained and distinct world of a naturalism—a world based on clear contour, where light is present only as an agent of visibility, and where the form of the depicted things submits closely to a community of agreement about their appearance—would mirror the static reified world of "bourgeois" contemplation. Leaving aside the issue of how adequate such a reflection theory would be even to the explication of academic naturalism, it remains that Buchloh employs a theory of mediation, as his gutted use of repression indicates, which is scarcely more penetrating. While he would like to maintain that language, with its structuring of meaning, and social order are all dynamically linked and interdetermining,<sup>84</sup> his analyses functionally depend on their categorical separation. Typically, he contends that certain artists, or an artform like painting, express an evident or partially masked class reality, or that they are negatively mediated by a vaguely defined "ideological" position. With the aid of a generalized concept like repression or reification, he claims to remove the distorting aspects of the art to reveal the social reality which is presumably there, static and pre-existing. If he is conscious of the weaknesses of such a procedure, they cost him no pause:

Inasmuch as this sexual and artistic role is reified, *peinture*—the fetishized mode of artistic production—can assume the function of an aesthetic equivalent and provide a corresponding cultural identification for the viewer.<sup>85</sup>

The role to which Buchloh alludes is that defined by Carol Duncan as the virile, sexually dominating male whose objectification of women and himself to stereotypes crudely defined by gender is said to parallel the basic structures of domination in capitalist society.<sup>86</sup> That in the work of even the most avowedly bourgeois of painters the relationships between self-image, intention, societal norms, the iconographical tradition, and the unconscious—to name at least some of the principal qualifying terms—are a good deal more variegated and complex is obvious enough. Likewise, "reified" is nearly meaningless when it is used in as tired a sense as it is here: "hackneyed" would better suit the context. Even if we grant validity to the metaphor of

“role” and the scripted and pre-determined social order implied in that metaphor, Buchloh’s or Duncan’s notion of iconography as a reading of “concealed” “psychosexual ideological” relationships only reiterates patent and foregone conclusions. Aside from the all-too-manifest interpretive value of iconography understood as an investigation of class and sexual identity—in short, an iconography whose first task is to identify class interest—the reading undertaken by Duncan and borrowed by Buchloh voids iconography as a hermeneutic method. Precisely analogous to his flattening of allegory, the purpose of such a voided iconography is to reduce any artwork to a legible system of signs representing familiar Marxist categories of social and economic analysis, i.e., to ascertain the artwork as no more than a “mediated” reproduction of class realities.

In this loosely circular scheme any painter can confidently be identified with that class whose interests painting is said to serve, whether or not a hermeneutic reading of those paintings would confirm that identification. In this conformity Buchloh or Duncan assume between their reduction of the imagery of a painting to familiar categories and the categorization of the painter to an equally simplified “role,” painting is necessarily understood as constituted of transparent acts. Intention,<sup>87</sup> in short, conforms to image, and both can be seen through as “ideological” constructs of class realities. In his hopeful and intensive simplification Buchloh denies the painter any possibility of interiority: the painter essentially reflects class realities. In so reducing painting and painters he in fact reifies them, renders them as things, as mere components in a system. Reification, and mediation which for Buchloh is so uncritically tied to it, are used as little more than labels, a way of keeping an inventory of the “enemy.” Any careful and analytic discussion of images, painters, and reification might overly complicate that inventory. Thus, the relationship which might be articulated between Lukács’ understanding of reification and certain naturalistic traditions goes unexamined for a straightforward reason. To develop that epistemological comparison, if it were possible to do so convincingly, would undermine the blunt reduction of painting to “fetishized production.” Both “production” and “fetishized” would be thrown open to critical examination in relationship to a complex and powerful epistemology, one that Lukács himself did not navigate in complete safety.<sup>88</sup> Anything about painting which threatens such reduction—its imaginal complexity and suppleness to allegory, the intrinsic allusiveness of images, the intrinsic recognition of the other in mimesis, and the root interiority of painting and the painter—Buchloh must dismiss or dare not address. Reification for him is not a concept through which interpretive bridges are structured, or through which insight is focused. It is at most a simplified category or label, part of a received vocabulary which too frequently he uses merely for denigration.

## V.

Buchloh’s attack on painting is fashioned from a worn rhetoric and a historicist revolutionary awareness. It requires, as we have seen, the exposing

of traitors, a history the machinery of which needs lubrication, and the invoking of basic Marxist concepts which are far from exploratory or adroit. It also requires a denunciatory use of psychology, not only to ornament terms such as reification, but also to darken the diffuse conspiracy theory which is the necessary corollary of an accusatory history too simple in its determinism to account for the conditions it attempts to address. "Figures of Authority, Ciphers of Regression" is characterized by all of these rhetorical embellishments, but it is also cast with a retrospective longing, with an obvious nostalgia. For example, shortly after accusing the neo-expressionists of cynical complicity in a "climate of authoritarianism," Buchloh lays out a familiar historical pattern:

First there is the construction of artistic movements with great potential for the critical dismantling of the dominant ideology. This is then negated by these movements' own artists, who act to internalize oppression, first in haunting visions of incapacitating and infantilizing melancholy and then, at a later stage, in the outright adulation of reactionary power.<sup>89</sup>

The trite is not always nostalgic, but the invoking of a passed revolutionary moment is, and that recollection is so persistent in Buchloh's essay that it is surprising hankies were not enclosed in the issue of *October* in which it first appeared. The nostalgia is reinforced by the fact that the thralldom of the failed revolutionaries is not immediately discussed, and it is never well explained. Rather, Buchloh moves to an elegiac recalling of Walter Benjamin and his ideas on melancholy and allegory—without apparent awareness of the irony of this recollection given the context of this essay.<sup>90</sup> As for the thrall of the artists, it is generalized, on the one hand into vague melds of psychological and historical categories; on the other, it serves as the background for attacks on specific artists:

The Harlequins, Pierrots, Bajazzos, and Pulcinelles invading the work of Picasso, Beckmann, Derain, and others in the early twenties (and, in the mid-thirties, even the work of the former constructivist/productivist Rodchenko in Russia) can be identified as ciphers of an enforced regression. They serve as emblems for the melancholic infantilism of the avant-garde artist who has come to realize his historical failure.<sup>91</sup>

It is by no means certain, of course, that these comedic figures function in such a sweepingly identical way in the works of these artists, and even if one can speak of an iconographical phenomenon, to explain it through "enforced regression" asks for a repression of critical thinking. There is also an uneasy *ad hominem* air to this "melancholic infantilism," an air which brings to mind Buchloh's shrill and unwieldy psychological charges against Beuys:

But, of course, the repressed returns with ever-increasing strength, and the very negation of Beuys' origin in a historical period of German Fascism affirms every aspect of his work as being totally dependent on, and deriving from that period. Here lies, one has also to admit, certainly one of the strongest features of the work, its historic *authenticity* (formally, materially, morphologically). Hardly ever have the characteristic and peculiar traits of the analretentive character, which forms the

characteriological basis of authoritarian fascism (inasmuch as these features once specific to the German petit-bourgeois, have now become dangerously universal) been more acutely and accurately concretized and incorporated into an act of the postwar period.<sup>92</sup>

One would imagine that psychiatry as a state undertaking—with correct vigilance against fascist tendencies—were our only hope. But Buchloh envisions a singularly humorless world, one where clowns are always sad and complicity is rampant. These blunted psychological ideas, along with a deterministic history and the proscription of an entire artform as “fetishized,” “ideological,” and “obsolete,” stand as basic markers in a cleansed prison yard of the mind. What is the next form to be proscribed, poetry?

It is scarcely surprising, then, that nostalgia for a revolutionary past is Buchloh’s solace, for he certainly does not allow for the idea of individual psychological life and hence the possibility of specific and articulated feeling. And even the perfect community could not vanquish the individual and bitter dilemmas of life (with the absolute destruction of interiority, these dilemmas would still incarnate themselves physically). Indeed, in Buchloh’s terms the artist, or the person, is at most a stock actor in a morality play—and actually a “cipher” in a social and historical situation where the only redeeming line of action is to recognize what stands as correct “material and dialectical transgression of ideology.” As Buchloh can suggest little convincing “transgressive”<sup>93</sup> art after 1923, “Figures of Authority, Ciphers of Regression,” despite its acerbic attacks, reads finally as an exercise in nostalgia, as a eulogy to dead and explorative figures such as Benjamin (even if Benjamin’s messianic hopes go unmentioned), and also to some of the art in the radicality of its original moment.

Other essays by Buchloh are based on the same co-habitation of nostalgia and “correct” practice. For example, in “Allegorical Procedures: Appropriation and Montage in Contemporary Art,” his discussion is grounded in the idea that the “dialectical potential of the montage technique” and its sponsoring of agitprop forms are still valid and effective artistically, at least in some “isolated pursuits of the contemporary avant-garde.”<sup>94</sup> In principle, it is difficult to see how this contention is different in its historicism from the hopelessly “regressive” practices of the neo-expressionists. An attempt to update ideas of John Heartfield or Alexander Rodchenko is on the face of it no less nostalgic than work which derives from the ideas of E.L. Kirchner or the rather different ideas of Max Beckmann. Buchloh, of course, does not acknowledge this potential line of criticism. Rather, he apparently believes that the conditions which early appropriated and montaged work addressed, such as Duchamp’s *L.H.O.O.Q.*, have persisted in basic enough form that a mannered and increasingly tendentious continuation of those techniques is of special contemporary significance. The crux of his contention is that Benjamin’s ideas on montage ultimately augered new forms of perception:

The beginning of the Modernist avant-garde comes at the historical turning point where, under the impact of the rising participation of the masses in collective production, the traditional models that had served in the character formation of the bourgeois individual were rejected in favor of



models that acknowledged the social facts of a historical situation where the sense of equality had increased to such a degree that equality was gained from the unique, by means of reproduction. This perceptual change denied unique qualification and it dismantled by implication the hierarchical ordering system of the bourgeois character structure. This transformation of the individual psyche as well as that of larger social structures was anticipated in the new techniques and strategies of montage, in which a new tactility established a new physiology of perception.<sup>95</sup>

One might debate how much the physiology of touch or vision was altered between, say, the paleolithic era and the present, but I assume that if one is a materialist and confident in those terms of the efficacy of avant-garde political or artistic practice, changes must be registered somewhere. The hopeful extrapolation that Benjamin<sup>96</sup> made from Alois Riegl—that perception understood as a way of organizing experience was inflected by historical circumstance<sup>97</sup>—is transformed by Buchloh into a *fait accompli*, where one pole of the tactile/optical opposition has achieved such predominance that it not only forms a mold which coordinates tendencies in art and applied art to deep changes in the tenor of history, but it actually reorganizes human physiology. Why, then, the long wait for the new man? Possibly we could read this passage as allegorical, in much the way that Benjamin invites an allegorical reading, but these words and figures of Marxist thought, despite their awkward rhetoric, are not things from which life has gone, at least for Buchloh. They are not things which need invention with a second emblematic life. Buchloh's nostalgia is much less freely given than Benjamin's,<sup>98</sup> and it is not formed of any deep inhabitation of even the art which arouses it. That art, like its makers, is always subject to the necessities and determinism of the history which is really its author and legitimization. In fact, to hear Buchloh tell it, the artworks are as though antique manifestations of libido, little more than abandoned rafts made of, say, Duchamp's bachelor apparatus:

Perceptual and cognitive models and their modes of artistic production function in a manner similar to the libidinal apparatus that generates, employs, and receives them. Historically, they lead a life independent of their original contexts and develop specific dynamics: they can be easily reinvested with different meanings and adapted to ideological purposes. Once exhausted and made obsolete by subsequent models, these production modes can generate the same nostalgia as does iconic representation for an obsolete code. Emptied of their historical function and meaning, they do not disappear but rather drift in history as empty vessels waiting to be filled with reactionary interests in need of cultural legitimization. Like other objects of cultural history, aesthetic production modes can be wrenched from their contexts and functions, to be used to display the wealth and power of the social group that has appropriated them.<sup>99</sup>

The nostalgia aroused by old forms of "iconic representation" is no greater than the nostalgia gone sour which underpins this passage and which peaks out in phrases like "empty vessels." As with his nostalgia for a passed revolutionary moment, Buchloh hardens the residual nostalgia here into a simplistic and brutal view of the present. To stave off such appropriation the obvious

inference is to raze museums and to burn libraries, and one may ask if even all the works of Marx himself should be preserved. For with the suppression of interiority, the individual is cut off from the basis of critical judgment: one can only hope that someone besides Buchloh is not hostage to "reactionary interests." Otherwise, not even the continual destruction of the artifacts and thinking of the past will suffice, for the further necessary inference is that all those tainted by antiquated and corrupting cultural forms must be re-educated or removed from society—that is, if a revolutionary course of action is to be undertaken. Clearly, then, figurative painting of any era is a dangerous form because its preservation of "obsolete" relations between individuals and "the libidinal apparatus" can at best delay the transformation of society for which Buchloh most impatiently longs. Furthermore, as "libidinal apparatus" indicates, the individual who is not constituted by "bourgeois character structure," is one in accord with the currently correct expression of such "apparatus," whatever our cultural commissars and state psychiatrists decide that might be.

Buchloh's critique of figurative painting and its purported alliance with authoritarianism is actually an attack on interiority and any artform which is capable of articulating interiority. In tone, rhetoric, and intention, his criticism is finally proscriptive and authoritarian. In the train of such criticism, it is not hard to imagine art even more stolidly ideological than that of Elk Eber or V.I. Mukhina.<sup>100</sup> More pointedly, if Buchloh's implicit revolutionary program were enacted, one would expect the forced "re-education" of people along lines similar to those proven effective by earlier experiments in that direction.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup>By other I mean the "not-I," that which in its difference asks our respect and care in protecting its particularity and separateness. First and foremost, then, the other is another person, whom we may encounter or know of. But the other may be another creature, or nature, or an aspect of nature in the otherness. The other is violated by any attempt to change it, to manipulate it through whatever field of operations.

<sup>2</sup>By interiority I mean that which is within oneself but distinct from the "I," that which through its tension and difference helps to form an "I" within oneself, and which in its otherness asks self-awareness of the "I."

<sup>3</sup>Buchloh, "Parody and Appropriation in Francis Picabia, Pop, and Sigmar Polke," *Artforum* 20 (March 1982):30.

<sup>4</sup>Buchloh, "Allegorical Procedures: Appropriation and Montage in Contemporary Art," *Artforum* 21 (September 1982):48.

<sup>5</sup>Buchloh, note 3, p. 28.

<sup>6</sup>Cf. Hal Foster, "Signs Taken for Wonders," *Art in America* (June 1986):80ff.

<sup>7</sup>Buchloh, note 3, p. 30.

<sup>8</sup>Buchloh of course borrows the word from Walter Benjamin. For his famous exposition of it, see "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," in *Illuminations* (New York, 1968), pp. 222-26.

<sup>9</sup>This is a principal theme in "Figures of Authority, Ciphers of Regression," *October*, no. 16 (Spring, 1981), pp. 39-68. The essay was republished in truncated form in *Modernism and Modernity* (Halifax, Nova Scotia, 1983), eds. B.H.D. Buchloh, S. Guilbaut, and D. Solkin. This volume, a collection of papers presented at the Vancouver Conference on Modernism (March 12-14, 1981), includes transcripts of discussion on the papers. Buchloh's essay was again republished, with a postscript, in *Art after Modernism: Rethinking Representation* (Boston, 1984), ed. Brian Wallis, pp. 107-134. Page references to this essay will be to this, as it were definitive, edition.

<sup>10</sup>This again is a basic theme in Buchloh's writing. It is treated in a notable and sustained way in Buchloh, note 3, especially pp. 28-30, and see also the concluding paragraph on p. 34.

<sup>11</sup>Buchloh, note 9, pp. 115-117.

<sup>12</sup>Friedrich Engels, letter to F. Mehring, 14 July 1893, *Marx and Engels: Selected Correspondence* (New York, 1935). This letter is cited by Georg Lukács at the beginning of his interesting and powerful discussion of "false consciousness" in *History and Class Consciousness* (Cambridge, Mass., 1985), trans. R. Livingstone, cf. pp. 48-55, esp. p. 50. Lukács' discussion is in particular distinguished by a dialectical rigor which goes well beyond what is to be found in *The German Ideology*. My citation of the letter is from Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford, 1977), p. 65. Williams' discussion of "false consciousness" within the broader and related issue of ideology is very useful and my discussion follows his outline. I am also indebted to Leszek Kolakowski, *Main Currents of Marxism*, Vol. 1, "The Founders" (Oxford, 1978), pp. 174-76. Kolakowski's discussion of *The German Ideology*, and Marx's early work in general, was both a starting point and a guide to me.

<sup>13</sup>Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *The German Ideology* (New York, 1985), pp. 51-52.

<sup>14</sup>Buchloh, note 9, p. 123.

<sup>15</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 132.

<sup>16</sup>Marx and Engels, note 13, p. 65.

<sup>17</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 121.

<sup>18</sup>See Kolakowski's discussion of Bakunin and his relationship to Marx within the First International, in *Main Currents of Marxism*, Vol. 1, pp. 246-257, esp. 248-251.

<sup>19</sup>V.I. Lenin, *Marx-Engels-Marxism* (Moscow, 1951), p. 125.

<sup>20</sup>This is a basic theme in Buchloh's writing and an implicit subtext in "Figures of Authority, Ciphers of Regression." For a direct statement of it, see especially Buchloh, note 4, p. 56.

<sup>21</sup>Buchloh, "Beuys: The Twilight of an Idol, Preliminary Notes for a Critique," *Artforum* 18 (January 1980), pp. 35-43.

<sup>22</sup>Buchloh, note 9, p. 108.

<sup>23</sup>Buchloh, note 21, p. 38-39.

<sup>24</sup>See Alain Besançon, *The Rise of the Gulag: Intellectual Origins of Leninism* (New York, 1981), pp. 239-240.

<sup>25</sup>Buchloh, note 9, p. 130.

<sup>26</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 125.

<sup>27</sup>Lenin, note 19, from "The Socialist Revolution and the Right of Nations to Self-Determination" (Jan.-Feb. 1916), p. 339.

<sup>28</sup>Buchloh, note 9, p. 110.

<sup>29</sup>Lenin, note 19, from "Greetings to the Hungarian Workers" (May 27, 1919), p. 464.

<sup>30</sup>Besançon, note 24, p. 210.

<sup>31</sup>Buchloh, note 9, p. 123-4.

<sup>32</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 124.

<sup>33</sup>In his postscript Buchloh apologizes for what he terms the “sketchiness” of “Figures of Authority, Ciphers of Regression.” He then proceeds to restate in no less general terms several of the claims and contentions of the essay. If he would in fact have paused and written a careful analytic demonstration of the structure of some typical neo-expressionist painting’s image and how that image precisely configured a specific ideological position, he would have taken a first and necessary step toward giving his essay credibility. He also would have taken a first step toward the support of several other of the claims which are the stuff of his writings. See his postscript, pp. 132-4.

<sup>34</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 119.

<sup>35</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 119, footnote 19.

<sup>36</sup>Pliny the Elder, *The Natural History* (Cambridge, 1938), trans. H. Rackham, Vol. IX, book xxxv, paragraphs 65-6, pp. 308 ff.

<sup>37</sup>On such an understanding of poetry, see Robert Bringham, “At Home in the Difficult World,” *Descant*, 39 (Winter, 1982):57-81.

<sup>38</sup>This is the central theme of his “Allegorical Procedures: Appropriation and Montage in Contemporary Art.” See Section V below. It also is an important counter to the “cynical complicity” of figurative painting in “Figures of Authority, Ciphers of Regression.” See pp. 111-12.

<sup>39</sup>Buchloh, note 9, p. 119.

<sup>40</sup>See Walter Benjamin, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama* (London, 1977), “Allegory and *Trauerspiel*,” particularly Benjamin’s general discussion, pp. 159-177. In this sentence I have in mind the remarkable section of Benjamin’s text which precedes this synthesizing sentence which fronts the following section: “The allegorical outlook has its origins in the conflict between the guilt-laden physis, held up as an example by Christianity, and a purer *natura deorum* (nature of the gods), embodied in the pantheon.” Cf. pp. 220-226.

<sup>41</sup>Buchloh, note 4, p. 44.

<sup>42</sup>See Benjamin, note 40, pp. 177-182.

<sup>43</sup>See Benjamin’s “On Some Motifs in Baudelaire,” in *Illuminations*, pp. 176-79, for a sense of experience in the sense of *Erlebnis*, where shock, discontinuity with an internal life, and the fragmentation of a situation are basic conditions. For *Erfahrung* see his “The Storyteller: Reflections on the Works of Nikolai Leskov,” also in *Illuminations*, pp. 83-109, and particularly pp. 93-97. *Erfahrung* is experience in the sense of a deep synthesis of events into memory, communal culture and tradition, and into the person as grounded in them. I use the German words following Martin Jay’s sound example in his *Adorno* (Cambridge, Mass., 1984), cf. pp. 74-5.

<sup>44</sup>Emmanuel Levinas, *Existence and Existents*, trans. A. Lingis (Martinus Nijhoff, The Hague, 1978), p. 52.

<sup>45</sup>We might say that in its uncoupling of the dialectical relationship between the thing-like aspects of the work and those which are virtual, in devaluing that relationship, it will obey Adorno’s dictum: “art that runs away from illusion, seeking refuge in play, actually ends up in a class with sports and such things.” Cf. *Aesthetic Theory* (London, 1984), pp. 145-48. This sentence concludes the first paragraph of “The crisis of illusion,” the first subsection of “Illusion and Expression.” In my opinion, it is important, however, to read it back and against the preceding subsection, “Thing-like quality of art,” of the preceding chapter, “The Beautiful in Art.”

<sup>46</sup>Levinas, note 44, p. 53.

<sup>47</sup>Buchloh, note 4, p. 56.

<sup>48</sup>Buchloh, note 9, p. 107.

<sup>49</sup>See, for example, Marx and Engels, *The German Ideology*, pp. 48-50.

<sup>50</sup>Marx, *Grundrisse* (London, 1973), p. 85.

<sup>51</sup>Buchloh's use of the word carries a special proximity to some Russian Marxist art theory. See his citations of Bakhtin/Medvedev, *The Formal Method in Literary Scholarship* (1928) (Baltimore, 1978), and of Boris Arvatov, *Kunst and Production* (1925) (Meunchen, 1972), in "Michael Asher and the Conclusion of Modernist Sculpture," *Theories of Contemporary Art* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J., 1985), pp. 225 and 231.

<sup>52</sup>Buchloh, note 9, p. 107-8.

<sup>53</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 108.

<sup>54</sup>Adorno, note 45, p. 65.

<sup>55</sup>Buchloh, note 9, p. 112.

<sup>56</sup>Lukács, note 12, p. 86.

<sup>57</sup>Martin Jay, *Marxism and Totality* (Berkeley, 1984), p. 109.

<sup>58</sup>Lukács, note 12, p. 86.

<sup>59</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 88-89.

<sup>60</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 95.

<sup>61</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 114.

<sup>62</sup>Frederic Jameson, *Marxism and Form* (Princeton, N.J., 1971), p. 185.

<sup>63</sup>Lukács, note 12, p. 169.

<sup>64</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 169-171. See also Andrew Arato, "Lukács' Theory of Reification," *Telos* (Spring, 1972): 57ff.

<sup>66</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 200ff. For an excellent and brief discussion of some of the many problems which haunt Lukács' solution to the "antinomies of bourgeois thought," see Jay, note 57, pp. 108ff.

<sup>67</sup>Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and its Discontents* (New York, 1961), trans. James Strachey, p. 44.

<sup>68</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 12-13.

<sup>69</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 65.

<sup>70</sup>Freud, *Totem and Taboo* (New York, 1951), p. 30.

<sup>71</sup>Freud, note 67, p. 46, n. 1, p. 52, n. 3.

<sup>72</sup>*Ibid.*, especially pp. 58-62.

<sup>73</sup>Lukács, note 12, p. 171.

<sup>74</sup>Cf. *ibid.*, p. 193.

<sup>75</sup>See Martin Jay's discussion in *The Dialectical Imagination: A History of the Frankfurt School and the Institute of Social Research, 1923-1950* (Boston, 1973), pp. 106ff.

<sup>76</sup>For an introduction in English to some of this writing, see *New French Feminisms: An Anthology* (New York, 1981), eds. Elaine Marks and Isabelle Courtivon. See their introduction and its discussion of "Psychanalyse et Politique," pp. 24-26, 31-33.

<sup>77</sup>Buchloh, note 9, p. 121.

<sup>78</sup>Buchloh's determinist position, with its stress on materiality and production, scarcely allows him the alternative of proposing, say, that reification is now met most tellingly in the protean world of the commodity understood as symbol, in Baudrillard's melancholic world of simulation, where signs enjoy a promiscuity, a fluidity of syntactical transposition, and a transmigration of semiological system to make any materially or symbolically transgressive art practice seem naive and nostalgic. For a discussion of Buchloh's nostalgia, see Section V of this essay.

<sup>79</sup>Freud's stress on such manifestations of the repressed is of course well known, and figures in virtually everything he ever wrote. For an interesting and somewhat corresponding insistence

on pathology, but from a competing point of view, see James Hillman *Re-Visioning Psychology* (New York, 1975), especially "Pathologizing or Falling Apart," pp. 53-112.

<sup>80</sup>See Suzann Boettger, "Regression in the Service of . . .," *Art Criticism*, Vol. 2, no. 2, pp. 57-68.

<sup>81</sup>Buchloh, note 9, p. 118.

<sup>82</sup>See Max Horkheimer's letter to Leo Lowenthal quoted by Martin Jay in *The Dialectical Imagination*, note 75, p. 102.

<sup>83</sup>Buchloh, note 3, p. 34.

<sup>84</sup>See his approving quotation of Jean Baudrillard, *ibid.* p. 28. The post-structuralism of the discussion immediately following, however, is soon superceded by an analysis of the acculturation of appropriation which relies on a base superstructure model, with emphasis on the base. See pp. 28-30.

<sup>85</sup>Buchloh, note 9, p. 123.

<sup>86</sup>Carol Duncan, "Virility and Domination in Early Twentieth Century Painting," *Artforum* 12 (June 1984): 38.

<sup>87</sup>On the complexity and problems of this term for the analysis of art, see David Summers, "Intentions in the History of Art," *New Literary History*, 17 (Winter 1986): 305-22.

<sup>88</sup>Again see Jay, note 57, p. 112ff.

<sup>89</sup>Buchloh, note 9, p. 108.

<sup>90</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 109.

<sup>91</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 118.

<sup>92</sup>Buchloh, note 21, p. 38.

<sup>93</sup>For a Marxist critique of the prospect of "transgressive" art, see Hal Foster, "For a Concept of the Political in Contemporary Art," in *Recordings: Art, Spectacle, Cultural Politics* (Port Townsend, Wash.), pp. 149-55.

<sup>94</sup>Buchloh, note 4, pp. 43-4.

<sup>95</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 46.

<sup>96</sup>Cf. Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," *Illuminations*, pp. 224-5.

<sup>97</sup>Buchloh has passages of Benjamin in mind, e.g., Part III of "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," in *Illuminations*, p. 222f. Benjamin writes of the rising participation of the masses in contemporary life, finding its artistic expression in the need to bring everything "'closer' spatially and humanly," which he relates to the destruction of "aura." Benjamin's essentially cautious position derives in particular from Riegl's division of antique relief into works which base their coherence in "near-seeing," "normal-seeing," and "far-seeing." Cf. Alois Riegl, *Spatromische Kunstindustrie* (Vienna, 1927), pp. 32f. and 122f. While Benjamin's notion that the near-seeing, i.e., the haptic (tactile) mode, is democratic, may seem like a simple misreading of Riegl, it is more probably an intentional materialist inversion of Riegl's position (as pointed out by David Summers). In Benjamin's treatment, however, "near-seeing" remains unconvincing in its democratic reach; Riegl's identification of the optical mode with the greater participation and involvement of the individual seems the sounder generalization. For a trenchant criticism of the basic naivete of thinking that the history of art in some way parallels a history of vision, see E.J. Gombrich, "Andre Malraux and the Crisis of Expressionism," *Meditations on a Hobby Horse* (London, 1963), p. 82ff.

<sup>98</sup>On Benjamin and nostalgia, see Jameson, "'Walter Benjamin, or, Nostalgia,'" in *Marxism and Form*, pp. 60-83.

<sup>99</sup>Buchloh, note 9, p. 119-20.

<sup>100</sup>For a pointed and witty discussion of matters related to these masters of, respectively, the official realism of Nazi Germany and the social realism of Stalin's Soviet Union, see Inga Karetnikova and Igor Golomstock, "The Encounter in Paris," *National Review*, May 9, 1986, pp. 42-5.

# A Dialogue of Silence: May Stevens' *Ordinary/Extraordinary*, 1977-86

By Patricia Matthews

... she had no words to give. What she wanted to say became too big to be sayable. . . she had gained the ability to speak, but lost a life to speak of.

May Stevens, speaking of her elderly mother.<sup>1</sup>

Silence and discontinuity are charged with a potent and moving communicative force in the recent work of May Stevens, *Ordinary/Extraordinary* (1977-1986). Through a renewal and transformation of narrative structure, the moral strategies and issues confronted by women are embodied in a newly integrated visual, psychological and ethical framework.

*Ordinary/Extraordinary* contrasts the roles of May Stevens' mother, Alice Stevens, 1895-1985, "Housewife, mother, washer and ironer, inmate of hospitals and nursing homes," with those of Rosa Luxembour, 1871-1919, "Polish/German revolutionary leader and theoretician, murder victim." Stevens' intention as she describes it in her artist's book of the same title, is to "examine and document the mark of a political woman and mark the



life of a woman whose life would otherwise be unmarked."<sup>2</sup>

Despite the obvious oppositions of these two women—political versus apolitical, self-willed versus impotent, “male” versus female roles—this work represents not an ordinary woman as opposed to an extraordinary one, but, as Stevens insists, both aspects of each woman, to point out that all women, as all human beings, are imbued with both. The ordinary and the extraordinary, the personal and the political, the marked and the unmarked, the marking and the re-marking: these are the dialectics that inform this piece.

Narrative is the perfect vehicle to visually convey the lost histories of women. Through an emphasis on narrative time rather than on information, Stevens has redefined the meaning and nature of traditional narrative structure. She has understood that the demands of new content require a new mode of expression, and accordingly has developed a self-conscious narrative structure to magnificently reveal the human and particularly female concerns inherent in the theme of two ordinary and extraordinary women.

Stevens has not attempted to utilize what Hayden White calls the “orthodox and politically conservative” nature of traditional narrative, in order to create a “false sense of coherence” or continuity, or an “illusion of sequence.” Her work, rather, more closely reflects Paul Ricoeur’s sense of narrative as an “‘open’ interpretive structure” or a “model for the redescription of the world.” Like psychoanalyst Roy Schafer, she wants to “understand and redescribe [these women’s] life stories in ways that allow for change and beneficial action in the world.”<sup>3</sup>

In this new narrative structure, choreographed more than composed, with a cinematic sense of climax and resolution, the mute voice of Alice returns as she is presented talking to herself through her gestures in *Go Gentle*, 1983. After years of silence, in asylum and nursing home, her voice vehemently attempts to free itself. However, it is not the futile gestures of insanity or senility that Alice plays out in this work, but the dance of the morally wounded. In the first three images, she is not pathetic, but intensely dramatic, enacting a ritual dance of exorcism and angry denial, with a flash of passion and escape, before her final return back into her passive but alertly intelligent self. It is an image of strength in decay, a last calling forth. In communication with no one but herself, the fluttering dialogue of her hands remains a dialogue of silence.

Alice is not telling us anything specific. She is not transferring information. The meaning lies in her inarticulate discourse rather than in any “plot” or “story.” Her conversation of silence, her unspoken language, her communication without information, is far more real and eloquent than all the brash, noisy harangues of our society of spectacle, in which insignificant yet empowered narratives attempt but fail to fill the void. No cooptable information has been presented, in recognition perhaps that it is such information that creates the hierarchical structure of our society which excludes the inarticulate such as Alice. Her narrative as presented here is a sign rich with contentless syntax. It cannot be spoken, nor has it been visualized before. There is no stereotype of such figures in our culture. In a society in which individuals are fragmented into private selves with private language that inhibit the abili-

ty to communicate universally, words are charged only perhaps with an ideological certainty that ultimately denies their validity. In the face of the controlling megastructures of our society, meaning seeps through Alice's uncorrupted silence.

Stevens' particular use of photographic images as sources for her painted images compels this speaking silence. For her, the immediacy of the photograph allows an interaction between subject and artist not available with a passive, waiting model. Through photography, Stevens captures body language, gesture, in effect all those things that speak without words, the things the subject says that she herself does not hear or see.

Like her *Big Daddy* Series, created in response to the Vietnam war, and based on her feelings about her father as well, *Ordinary/Extraordinary* is an overtly political yet personal work. To be effective, art must contain both, according to the artist:

... if the ideological input in art is administered in some doctrinaire or dutiful way, it doesn't work. This input, that seems to be organic, is only valid and powerful when it is first internalized. If it is not profound, *deep* in your nature, you're going to get something superficial. It has to be *close* to you, very important to you.<sup>4</sup>

This work reflects a feminist stance by setting its own terms for the examination (through personal issues) of women's lives, and their exclusion as significant figures from our culture. Most importantly, Stevens represents and recaptures a sense of the lost history of these two women, and returns women's stories to us.

Without stories a woman is lost when she comes to make the important decisions of her life. She does not learn to value her struggles, to celebrate her strengths, to comprehend her pain. Without stories she cannot understand herself. Without stories she is alienated from those deeper experiences of self and world that have been called spiritual or religious. . . . If women's stories are not told, the depth of women's souls will not be known.<sup>5</sup>

The work also addresses issues of power and powerlessness in our culture, the "essential dichotomy," as Adrienne Rich tells us (*Of Woman Born*, 1976). We hear the lost voice of Alice, represented in her old age by her daughter.

... she had no words to give. What she wanted to say became too big to be sayable. . . she had gained the ability to speak, but lost a life to speak of. . . . When she read the newspaper she said: some people died who never died before. They died just now, she said.

Alice's voice is heard in its extraordinary aspect as well.

Once she said, 80 years old, living in a nursing home, eating the food, waiting for change, forgetting more each day, sliding toward a slimmer consciousness, slipping softly away: Everybody knows me.<sup>67</sup>

Her mother's lost self is equated with the repressive society in which she was

not allowed voice, with the "patriarchal socialization that literally makes women sick, both physically and mentally,"<sup>7</sup> and therefore she slowly retreats from the world into the self. Self-exile and self-imprisonment are typical reactions to society's imprisonment of women. Unable to become her true self, "her response to [its] departure . . . is a lapse into illness."<sup>8</sup>

Sexism and classicism, male authority and poverty-and-ignorance were the forces that crippled my mother.<sup>9</sup>

Stevens, as many women writers have done, exposes the myth of insanity as causally linked to the repression of women.

The lost voice of Alice, sometimes silenced, sometimes irrational, reflects her dual status as outsider. Like female oracles in the ancient past or the "masked truth" spoken by the mad, the silence of Alice imbues her new-found voice with authority and power. It reverberates with almost prophetic resonance. Despite our systems of exclusion for both the mad and the female, we ironically attend to their voices as a result of the prohibition against them. Their very folly as opposed to society's rule of reason is credited with "strange powers," as though "revealing some hidden truth" or "predicting the future," or "revealing, in all their naivete, what the wise were unable to perceive."<sup>10</sup> In particular, the recurring motif of the hands of Alice reflect a mode of revelation. In *Fore River*, 1983, Alice reads her hands as though divining prophecy. In the 1985 *Signs*, she converses silently with her hands as though they held an answer. They become the tool of her rage in *Go Gentle*, 1983. The images of Alice seeking to find her lost self resonate in these paintings as Sibyl and as reflection of society's repressive forces. Vision and delusion risk each other.

The complexity of May Stevens' work, *Ordinary/Extraordinary*, exists on the visual as well as the narrative level. By visual, I refer not only to the various media incorporated into the piece—an artist's book, collages, and painting of different scales from the intimate to the monumental—but also the complexity of composition within each work, that often reveals characteristic Postmodern techniques of disruption, disunity, and discontinuity.<sup>11</sup> Unlike similar devices in the works of artists from Robert Rauschenberg to David Salle and certain works by Julian Schnabel (such as *Exile*, 1980), Stevens' discontinuous and disjunct structure is the inevitable product of her discontinuous narrative content as well as a signifier of society's fragmentation. The history of a life like the history of a culture cannot be seen any longer as a linear progression of cause and effect, as Michel Foucault makes clear in his epistemological studies. It is indeed the abrupt breaks, the discontinuous, the landslides and breakdowns, the contradictions, of what in normative terms would be the story of a lower middle class American woman and a revolutionary public figure, that May Stevens exposes in her images. The discontinuous structure of many of the canvases themselves, embodies this story.

This structure is especially vital to the painting, *Go Gentle*. A faded Alice stands before us and smiles out benignly if a bit self-consciously as a young woman; then she exists before us intent and bright-eyed as a child with her siblings; and with sudden explosive force, the fabric of the silvery veil of

assumptions and expectations of female existence in our society, is split by the violent and damning gestures of Alice in her old age, before it is lowered again on the calmly inquisitive Alice in the final image. Her explosion represented through the visual projection of form and color, a visual rent in the placid fabric of the canvas, is reminiscent of the "explosive violence of 'moments of escape'" in nineteenth-century literature by women.<sup>12</sup> The progression of the sequence of a life is disrupted by its failure and a raging against that failure. In the energetic denial or condemnation of Alice, we are given at once, as only an image as opposed to a written text can do, the rupture, its effect, and its agony.

The images of Rosa also employ a shattered and shattering dense compositional web that allows the meaning of her life, as understood by the artist, to surge forth. Despite their pale and monotone nature as past, and in fact largely because of it, these images are as violent and forceful as those of Alice. Three of these works center on the protest accompanying Rosa's murder: *Demonstration*, 1982, *Voices*, 1983, and *Procession*, 1983. All recall the distressing political assassinations of our own times. The demoralizing and destructive force of such events are manifested particularly well in the latter two works. The molten figures are seemingly burned into the canvas, as though lit by a nuclear explosion. Stevens has painted them as harshly and starkly as possible to infer the tremendous impact of such events burned into our memory. The black and white comes alive through an infusion of phosphorescent, eerily glowing purples and red. A flash of blue sweeps across the canvas in *Demonstration*. The surfaces of these dark paintings are intensely vibrant through stroke and texture as well. In *Voices*, the cry of Rosa, "Ich bin, ich war, ich werde sein" (I am, I was, I will be), reverberates like sound vibrations against the flat white of coffins and faces. A compressed, explosive energy characterizes these works.

In works of both Rosa and Alice, the sense of temporal or narrative sequence is manifested through stillness interrupted by gesture. The tremendous, even monumental agitation of the elderly Alice, powerful in her pain and her wrath (*Go Gentle*) and in her profound silence (*A Life*), like the *terribilita* of Michelangelo's *Moses*, stands in judgment of us and of society, before the other, faded images of Alice. The silent but just as powerful voices expressed through the surging clatter of the painted words of Rosa in *Voices*, also sound the anger and threat of the repressed. In *A Life*, the withdrawal of Alice is interrupted only slightly by her gestures and turns of attention. Such sparing differences in gestures creates an extremely rich cinematic sequence.

May Stevens' pastiche-like format recalls the description in many texts today of collage as a Postmodern technique *par excellence*.<sup>13</sup> Walter Benjamin, in his often cited text, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," describes the way in which a reproduced image, such as the photographs used by May Stevens in this work, is deactivated by taking it out of its original context, and reactivated by being placed in a new context.<sup>14</sup> Similarly, Gregory Ulmer relates Derrida's concept of the gram to the process by which collage elements acquire a double meaning as well: "that of the fragment perceived in relation to its text of origin; that of the same frag-

ment as incorporated into a new whole, a different totality."<sup>15</sup> May Stevens' use of the early photographs of her Mother and of Rosa have a similar extended meaning. They represent what was possible, in their original context, and what is destroyed, in the context of the victimization of both women. The sense of hope, or at least of a normal future, in the images of the young Alice, is juxtaposed against its failure in the image of the elderly Alice: from the healthy self to the lost self. The meaning in the gap of this juxtaposition of images contains its content: the personal loss and failure; society's betrayal of women and the elderly; society's loss. It is the space between that speaks, as May Stevens herself tells us.

... let the space between speak, the empty space that we each can fill as that which is present and juxtaposed stirs up, brings into life, new aspects, shadings, modulations—gentle events.<sup>16</sup>

The collage format itself employs and involves a horizontal networking of meaning corresponding to the multiple text of Barthes:<sup>17</sup> in the disjunct and discontinuous narrative, in the images of different scale and power, in her use of different times, from different places of memory or desire or yearning or a past not Stevens' own, in the abrupt shift from one moment and one mood and one act to another in *Go Gentle* or the sharp division in *Fore River*, several stories emerge. They intertwine and move in and out of focus depending on the place where one stands in the sequence. We are told of the lost voices, of their strength, of their lives, of their victimization. We know at once the personal and the political aspect of every image. We know its disruptions and its continuities. This format thereby denies a vertical probing of meaning in depth, but instead conveys meaning through a horizontal fabric of interwoven and multiple meanings that do not close the work to the meaning of an individual life. All lives of women, all histories of failure or short-lived success and ultimate suppression, are brought forth through this format. All stories can be encompassed by this one: of the strong and the weak, of repression and the cost of rising against it. Such a format of fragmentation and discontinuity also exposes through correlation and disruption the contradictions that exist in our society's pretension of unified control. The gaps between, the disruptions in unity in these works are thus the signs of their disrupting narrative.

Returning leitmotifs are aligned through their visual treatment. Quiet and somber images and pale, silvery colors reflect the past or the still death of the present, as in Alice's youthful images and her elderly self in *Go Gentle*. Vivid though often grotesque (as though deteriorating) colors, and violent action, reveal the protest against: an absurd but powerful life force in *Go Gentle*, or a vibrating intensity in *Voices*. The flesh and blood images are those of captivity, those of Alice. The only images of hope are those of memory, of a dead past.

The one exception to this is in the last image to date, *Forming the Fifth International*, 1985. Within the totality of this narrative, the past emerges more and more, until finally, in a lush green field, Rosa sits with Alice, as large as she, though still disengaged and separate as a dimly painted memory

through her paleness. "Color from Rosa would be a lie." Past, present, future. The two are brought together in *Forming the Fifth International*, and allowed to speak across time and across differences, as sisters in their victimization and in their triumph through the presentation of their stories. Alice speaks to the distant Rosa as to a friend. Rosa turns out toward the viewer to involve us all.

If we ask the question posed by Lacy and Labowitz<sup>18</sup> concerning a new art aware of its social consequences, "What is its vision of the future, and how does it support action in that direction?", we come to understand the positive aspect of this work, as presented in its last image. Brought forward into the moment with Alice, both now lost (this was painted after Alice's death), they represent together the opportunity still potentially ours. Through confrontation of the issues both represent, and through revival of Rosa's still untried legacy, a new Women's International will struggle with the conflicts and contradictions of the life of Alice. Rosa represents a template, a still not exhausted source for political action in the "Reagan era of backlash and cuts in social service" and the subsequent "hardening to the need of the poor, sick and old, this period of cheerful indifference, masking over real cruelty," a situation represented by Alice.<sup>19</sup>

Alice and Rosa talking together as *equals* represent the value of each human life, the complementarity of intellect and instinct, the symbolic joining of body to mind, form to content. The still-great distance (in color, in time) between them admits no easy solution but holds out, tenuously, promise, and necessity. A sad humor, illogic and vague hope play here with utopian intensity.<sup>20</sup>

The transformative potential of identity that Christopher Knight refers to in his perceptive review of *Ordinary/Extraordinary*,<sup>21</sup> is therefore of central importance to this work. It can be seen in fact as an attempt to wrest into the present moment the lost personal identity of Alice and the lost historical identity of Rosa, "one voluntarily mute and the other slain because she was not silent," not only to allow them to speak again as human beings, not only to restore their humanity and give them place in our society, but also to allow them to speak to us about their potential to change our situation.

The widespread revival of figurative and narrative art in the last decade of which May Stevens' work is a part, is more than just a return to earlier modes of presentation and content.<sup>22</sup> The impulse really cannot be understood as a return or revival at all, but rather as part of the Postmodern freedom to choose and combine styles and motifs from whatever past in whatever mode necessary to express content. The content itself has changed, however. May Stevens shares with other ambitious and aggressive figurative art the impulse to challenge assumptions, aesthetic and social, with an address closer to the New Expressionism than to naturalist realism. But the nihilist and sensationalist stance of Salle, Fischl, Mariani and Chia for example, surfaces in Stevens' work with totally other intention. Her choices are made out of inner compulsion (with the kind of unified vision of a true Expressionist like Munch) which results in a form and content which are indistinguishable, and which make a powerful attack on the loss of a communicative human potential. Her

nihilism is purposeful; it prepares the ground for other possibilities. Sensationalism here is truth.

The power of this work thus results from a synthesis of form and content. It is about the fragmentation of our society, the forceful rending apart of a person from herself. But by using a new narrative structure, a narrative of unspeakable content, it presents this fragmentation in a coherent way. May Stevens has managed to “present the unrepresentable” in cultural philosopher Lyotard’s terms (*The Postmodern Condition*). She has allowed those without voice to speak through a silence that undermines the societal structures that repressed them. Her work reflects the moral concerns of women who wait, without voice, for their chance to speak, revealed through a narrative of time, and in the very nature of the work, implicitly reveals the responsibility we have to ourselves, to each other, and to our society.

Feminism as the voice of the “other,” of those who stand outside of the privileged ideology, from its very first manifestations, began the dismantling of that ideology by exposing its contradictions, specifically concerning the myths surrounding women. May Stevens moves beyond the first stages of radical feminist art in which she played an important role, to embrace and extol a more subtle but more insidious and potentially more influential female aesthetic.

\*I would like to thank May Stevens for her insights and her generosity.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup>*Ordinary/Extraordinary*. Artist’s book, n.p.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup>For a discussion of narrative as a truth-telling device, see W.J.T. Mitchell, ed., *On Narrative* (Chicago, 1981), p. viii-ix, Foreword.

<sup>4</sup>Cited by Lucy Lippard, “Masses and Meetings,” *May Stevens, Ordinary/Extraordinary: A Summation, 1977-1984*, Boston University Art Gallery, Feb. 29-April 1, 1984, n.p.

<sup>5</sup>Carol P. Christ and Charlene Spretnak, “Images of Spiritual Power in ‘Women’s Fiction,’” in *The Politics of Women’s Spirituality*, ed. Charlene Spretnak (Garden City, N.Y., 1982), p. 327.

<sup>6</sup>Artist’s book.

<sup>7</sup>Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic* (New Haven, 1984), p. 53.

<sup>8</sup>As Catherine in *Wuthering Heights*, *ibid.*, p. 278.

<sup>9</sup>May Stevens, “My Work and My Working-Class Father,” *Working It Out: 23 Women Writers, Artists, Scientists and Scholars Talk About Their Lives and Work*, eds. Sara Ruddick and Pamela Daniels (New York, 1977), p. 112.

<sup>10</sup>Michel Foucault, “The Discourse of Language,” in *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (New York, 1972), p. 217.

<sup>11</sup>Some say such disjunct structures reflect the fabricated, deferred meaning of a Postmodern era in which the signifier reigns. See Frederic Jameson, “Postmodernism and Consumer Society,” and Jean Baudrillard, “The Ecstasy of Communication,” in *The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on Postmodern Culture* (Port Townsend, WA, 1983), ed. Hal Foster.

<sup>12</sup>Gilbert and Gubar, p. 85.

<sup>13</sup>See for example, Benjamin Buchloh, "Allegorical Procedures: Appropriation and Montage in Contemporary Art," *Artforum*, Sept. 1982, pp. 43-56; and Gregory L. Ulmer, "The Object of Post-Criticism," in *The Anti-Aesthetic*, pp. 83-110.

<sup>14</sup>Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations*, ed. and introd., Hannah Arendt (New York, 1969), p. 221.

<sup>15</sup>Ulmer, p. 88, from pp. 34-35 of Group *Mu*, eds., *Collages* (Union Generale: Paris, 1978).

<sup>16</sup>Letter from May Stevens to the author, Feb. 18, 1986. She cites the phrase of physicist Geofrey Chew.

<sup>17</sup>Roland Barthes, "The Death of the Author," *Image, Music, Text* (New York, 1977), esp. pp. 147-48.

<sup>18</sup>Suzanne Lacy and Leslie Labowitz, "Mass Media, Popular Culture, and Fine Art," in Richard Hertz, *Theories of Contemporary Art* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ), p. 177.

<sup>19</sup>Letter from May Stevens to Josephine Withers, March 9, 1985.

<sup>20</sup>Letter from May Stevens to author, June 24, 1986.

<sup>21</sup>Christopher Knight, "She paints of politics and power," *Los Angeles Herald Examiner*, Sunday, April 21, 1985, p. SE2.

<sup>22</sup>Figurative art of course was continuously made through the period of American hegemony in art (Leon Golub immediately comes to mind); therefore its "revival" implies its widespread acceptance in relation to the earlier Modernist denial of it.



# Dorothea Tanning's Occult Drawings

By Donald Kuspit

I was tempted, so tempted, to begin this essay with a citation from a male Surrealist, perhaps from Dorothea Tanning's husband Max Ernst, as if men had the monopoly on the idea of Surrealism, and as if male Surrealists, with their annexing of the female body as their own territory, as *the* domain in which the surreal was most manifest, had the right to speak of the body of a female Surrealist's art. And as if, in using such a citation, I would assert my own conqueror's rights to the territory of Tanning's drawings—my own male rightness about the nature/meaning of her surreal imagery. It is true that all Surrealists have an abiding faith in the unconscious as a source of form/content. But it is also true that the female and male unconscious must be different. And it must be true that the female and the male see art differently, want different things from it, see it as differently as they see their own bodies.

In Tanning's drawings, the difference is articulated in two images of women: the maenad and the mother, sometimes both in one. These are the climactic images of her art, the images in which most of it is invested, the images most responsible for her new looseness of handling, her headlong flexibility. But let me begin elsewhere, at what I think is the beginning image of her art, the beginning image of much art: the image of the female model. In the contrast between that image and the image of the maenad and the mother is the

story of Tanning's development, her growth into her own identity as artist and person.

In a 1977 drawing, *Still in the Studio*, Tanning shows a female figure posed on a chair, a figure she perhaps identified with, a figure that perhaps is a spiritual if not physical self-portrait. The scene is her Paris studio. It is the year after Max Ernst's death, a year she described, in her chronology, as "terrible." She has lived in France since 1949, and will return to the United States in 1980. The map of France is relatively clear, as is the view out the window, but the figure is blurred—blurred, it seems, because it has been abandoned. Its face and curvaceous contours are made of blotted ink, while the rectangles of the map and window are clearly delineated. The sociality represented by the map and the scene out the window are nothing to the isolated figure, turned away from them, facing us, its nakedness confrontal—its pelvis and thighs are thrust toward us, in a female gesture of seduction, but also of abandonment to the viewer. It is an odalisque, half-upright, half-reclining: it is a picture of woman from man's point of view, of woman as faceless but full-bodied, "selfless" yet seductive, inert yet promising physical intimacy. Tanning shows woman from a male point of view: shows the female model passively on exhibition—man's idea of "the eternal feminine" that draws him on, or rather, that is the victim of his voyeuristic will. Voyeurism, the will to conquer with the eyes, to overpower through the gaze to which nothing is forbidden, is man's prerogative in the classic male artist/female model relationship. And what is seen is the sexuality of the woman, not her spirit, a sexuality that is the most accessible part of her otherness, and that is easily grasped in her body's shape.

Through the 70s, Tanning's drawings were made from a male point of view. *Early Eye*, 1948 and *Untitled*, 1950 show the meticulous handling of many male Surrealists, from Ernst to Salvador Dali, and their coy use of symbology. The eye on end is the primitive cave of the vagina, the eyeball with its pupil the point of clitoral awakening and clarity, in delicate yet sharp contrast to the crinkly pubic hair at its base. The bird in the 1950 drawing is probably Loplop, Ernst's legendary emblem. It is set within his ambiguously mineral/organic world, and linked to a phallic vegetable form by puppet threads of ambivalent attraction. It is a relationship articulated in broken as well as unbroken lines. But the key point is the detailed, fastidious character of the image, signs of the male will to dominate the image emerging from the unconscious. Even the blurred parts of the 1950s drawing seem prescribed and self-contained, a fixed demonstration of what Ernst called the "irritability capacity of the mind's powers," opening the closed field of realistic vision to surreal input.

Tanning takes a male point of view toward drawing: it must be controlling. It is a kind of forming with an iron fist. It must never risk the formless more than is necessary: it must impose passivity on the dynamic formless that is the sign of the mind's inherent "irritability." It must issue very quickly in a sign, an omen: it must never stay in the unknown longer than is necessary. It must not *linger* with the unconscious, but shoot up for air into consciousness. Drawing must be a conscious act imposing control on unconscious material—a

demonstration that the unconscious is not so intractable as all that. It is subject to the artist's absolute will.

This attitude completely changes in the 80s: Tanning gives herself almost completely to the fluidity which drawing can be. She gives up the stylized Surrealism of her earlier drawings. And she gives herself to her femaleness. What she gave her femaleness to in 1965 can be seen in *Blue Waltz*, and in a different way, in *High Tide*, 1972. A young girl dances cozily—cheek-to-cheek—with an obscure animal monster, bearlike but more treacherous in its anonymity and maturity. Is it her unconscious image of the male? For all the danger involved, she fears no risk. The male monster leads, she submits to his guidance. In the 1972 drawing, the fluidity is stylized, as if to control its threatening character. The imps of the perverse are less anonymous— indefinite, inarticulate—than the blur of the female figure. They represent the male power determining the female's articulation of her being—a minimum articulation. The indefiniteness in both these drawings is greater than in the two earlier ones described, but it is just as artificial—the contrived, calculated indefiniteness that the Surrealists hoped would be evocative, force to be evocative. It was the indefiniteness of the female in their minds—her malleability into any shape that suited their perverse fancy.

In the maened and mother drawings of the 80s there is none of that forced quality, and no perversity. In *Murmurs on Paper*, *On Japan*, *Friends of Friends*, *Orbit*, all 1986, the flow is as abandoned as the figures, from the fluidity of their contours to the "moving atmosphere" in which they are immersed. There is a dazzling restlessness to these images, a restlessness confirmed by the virtuosity of the touch, alternately soft and hard, thick and thin. There is a verve to these works that is absent in the more stylized—and stylish—earlier works, which are more conventionally Surrealist in their imagery as well as attitude. That is, more male-oriented.

What is it to be female-oriented? For one thing it is not to accept the male point of view: the point of view that imposes passivity on the female, and livens up the passivity by regarding her as the object of perverse—one should perhaps say destructive—desire. Whatever else she represents, the maenad represents an independent female dynamic. As does pregnancy. Many of Tanning's new females are maenadic mothers. An important case in point is the 1986 *Artist and Models*. Compared to the 1977 *Still in the Studio*, we see a much more vital, autonomous female figure. Her head is thrown back in a maenadic gesture of abandonment—intense self-absorption—and she is with her child. (The imp of the perverse has become the infant, a symbol of rejuvenation, of immortal vitality.) She is not giving herself to the artist, but to herself. She keeps her face to herself; thrown back, the artist cannot see it. He is presumably male, and a blob on the other side of the canvas who may or may not comprehend what he sees, may or may not be able to capture the likeness of the "holy couple." Indeed, the mother and child are a kind of holy surreal couple, unconsciously united—united in the unconscious. The bond between them is the closest human connection known. Tanning gives herself the fantasy gift of a child, a gift that symbolizes her closeness to her own unconscious, the child being its most direct and immediate symbol. In

*Murmurs on Paper* we see mother and infant asleep in the cosmic unconscious, united in the depths of their dream: they can only dream of each other.

The double function of the child—as symbol of the unconscious, and of woman’s creativity (woman’s special closeness to nature and the unconscious)—is of crucial importance for understanding the iconography of Tanning’s 80s imagery. Tanning rejuvenates and primitivizes the Madonna and Child imagery. They are not only naked in a state of nature, but without the usual necrophiliac dimension subliminally present in the Christian image of the mother and child—the suggestion, in the child’s vulnerability, that it will become the crucified Christ. The couple is made transparently biophilic, an absolute affirmation of life. The stylization of the inchoateness of the pre-80s imagery—a typically male-oriented Surrealist strategy, determined to stylize or overcontrol the unconscious—implied a curiosity about, even a peculiar fascination with death. For stylization carries with it the look of death, which seems to bring life “under control.” Tanning’s new unstylized, freshly intense imagery, implies freedom from the unconscious death-fixation of the male Surrealists, a fixation inseparable from their pursuit of power: they wanted to kill the female by their “mastery” of her. Tanning’s new freedom and vitality shows not only in her freer handling, but conceptually, in the freedom she now has to deal directly with the female figure and, by implication, to assert her own femaleness directly—without the malevolent disguises the male Surrealists put upon it. She no longer treats the female body in the ironical, subversive—even mutilating—way of the male Surrealists, but as a free force, as a kind of untrammelled energy, articulate in itself rather than dependent for an outside (male) power to animate it. Out of love for a male Surrealist, or to be artificially mysterious the way woman was supposed to be for the male Surrealist—accepting man’s definition of her as mysterious is to accept her enslavement by him—Tanning must have been unconscious of the fact that it was her own femaleness she was so mistreating in her pre-80s work.

In her 80s drawings, Tanning has given us uninhibited—spontaneously creative—drawings of the uninhibited female. She is “uninhibited” not in the philistine male sense of the term—sexually uninhibited, that is, open to all the possibilities of his embrace—but creatively uninhibited, open to the fullness of her own creativity. The female sexuality the male Surrealists were so obsessed with has been transformed into female creativity in Tanning. Her female figure is an allegorical personification of the spirit of female creativity. No longer is she the female with the vaginal head, as in *Study for Cousins*, 1971, or the *Solitary* female (1973, 1974)—both images of the female from a male point of view. (That is, the female is shown as either a purely sexual being or next to nothing at all when she is not viewed sexually, that is, when she is not the object of male desire—seen through the lens of male consumption of her in sexual activity.) Tanning at last depicts the female free of the male and his point of view—the woman in no need of man’s point of view to give her fullness of being, in no need of man’s investment of his desire in her to make her feel whole. In the 80s drawings, Tanning has finally—she is in her 70s—freed herself of the male point of view that she had internal-

ized most of her life, and that she thought was the source of her creativity. Man, she now implicitly acknowledges, is not "responsible" for her creativity. Her femaleness is creative in itself.

In liberating herself, she has breathed fresh life into a clichéd Surrealism, rejuvenating it by creating a female-oriented Surrealism—Surrealism from a female point of view. She has freed us from the stylized unconscious—the stylized illogicality—given us by the male Surrealists. Her work is brisk and clear with female logic. Here Surrealism is celebratory not of women's sexual victimization by man, but of woman's real capacity to give birth, and her surreal capacity for creativity, that is, her special closeness to the unconscious—her inherently "occult" character. Tanning's drawings are the sign of her great awakening to her autonomous creative power.

The psychoanalyst Phyllis Greenacre, in an article dealing with women who are creative artists, notes the phallic significance of creativity, where "phallic" is the symbol of narcissistic wholeness. Where is the phallus in Tanning's occult drawings? I submit that it is in the crescent moon: a fantasy of the phallic. This crescent moon has much the same function that the broom does in Hans Baldung-Grien's images of witches, with which I think Tanning's are indirectly comparable: it represents the phallic integrity of the witch, just that integrity which confirms her in her witch's power—her power to bewitch, that is, to put us in direct touch with the unconscious, more precisely, the "fantastic" creativity of the unconscious. This is woman's power alone; it is not unconnected to her power to give birth. It is woman's privilege to "really" give birth and to be inherently "surreal," that is, to have the special, direct line of communication, as it were, with the unconscious—to have a witch's power.

It was late in life that Tanning discovered her witch's power, a discovery perhaps not unconnected to her return to the United States—her liberation from the stylized, male-dominated Surrealism of France. In my opinion, *To The Barricades*, 1986, epitomizes this liberation. (Woman has always been the symbol of liberty, and truth, because of her special relationship to the unconscious. From Plato's Diotima on, she has had sibylline powers. The male Surrealists unconsciously recognized this, which is why they designated woman as the most surreal of beings—ultra-surreal. But in malevolent envy they pressed her into exclusively sexual service, violating her witch's power and autonomy.) This is, I think, because her creativity was under the domination of male creativity for most of her life.

The psychoanalyst Janine Chasseguet-Smirgel has said that "Man's creativity has been attributed to a desire to compensate for the fact that he cannot bear children . . . and thus create life . . . Yet creating is a means of alleviating deficiencies at various levels of instinctual maturity, and this results in attempts to achieve narcissistic integrity—represented in the unconscious by the phallus." The male Surrealists with whom Tanning was associated passionately desired woman's ability to bear children, which is why they desired woman. Indeed, I would argue that much of Surrealism is an attempt to appropriate woman's power to give birth by every treacherous means possible. Much surrealist imagery can be understood as the product of a false pregnancy—a strangely aborted product from a female point of view. Male anxiety about

the inability to give natural birth masks a deeper male anxiety, aroused by uncertain possession of the phallus—unconscious doubt that having a penis is an automatic guarantee of phallic power, narcissistic integrity. One may have a limp penis, but that doesn't mean one will necessarily have a powerful—"hard"—phallus.

In Tanning, who in her drawings has at last recognized her power to have children—who no longer presents the female as a victim-object of male fantasies of possessive dominance—a phallic moon is unequivocally present. There is no need of a real penis when one has an idealized phallus. It is the phallus of the new Diana—of the female autonomous in herself, sure of her creative integrity and power, in a sense, the ultimate witch. Freshly virginal, Tanning is in fact freshly creative. Her drawings, full of fresh—virginal—creativity, accomplish something forever beyond male creativity and power: they unite recognition of the female power to give birth with (nominally male) phallic integrity in a single image. It is a truly occult achievement, a truly synergistic compounding of creative forces. Tanning has discovered that the virgin goddess has uniquely creative, sibylline powers.

# Architecture of Democracy

By Allan Greenberg

During the next 40 or 50 minutes, I am briefly going to make the following assertions: One is that mainstream American architecture is classical and that this architecture, which I call the architecture of democracy, was carefully crafted for us by the same group of men that put the Constitution, the Declaration of Independence, and the Bill of Rights together. It is an architecture unlike any architecture that has existed before and that in order to bring architecture back to its roots in the United States, to develop an architecture that is appropriate for us—not only in the late 18th and early 19th century but for the last two decades of the 20th century—an understanding of this is absolutely fundamental.

American architecture is classical architecture and classical architecture is the mainstream of western architecture from 1000 BC to the present, that is, a period of 3,000 years. During that period, there have been various other highways and byways of this which have been explored by architects. The architecture of Byzantium grew directly out of the basic tree trunk of classical architecture; the architecture of the Middle Ages is based in fundamental ways, not only on the classical moldings but on Roman architecture. At the crossing of Rome's Cathedral you have piers which have four Corinthian columns; and I would assert that the master builder of that building saw himself as a

classical architect. Nonetheless, despite the fact that Gothic architecture has its own state identity and it is the only language of architecture that does, other than classical, it is rooted in the most fundamental ways in classical architecture; and without that root it would have taken completely different forms. It is important to understand at the most basic level why there are three portals at the west front: they grow out of the memorial arch motif from ancient Roman times.

Subsequently, one has the Greek revival, associationism, and all sorts of other “isms” that came about in the 19th century. Almost all of these are based on the classical past, but they were essentially short-lived. And the last of the isms is, of course, what we call modernism, and 3,000 years of history have told us that as each of these isms have run out of energy, so architecture has always in the west returned to its mainstream. Now, there are two basic characteristics of classical architecture: One is its syntax and the other is its meaning. During this lecture I am going to focus on the aspect of meaning; but I want to say a few words briefly, as an introduction, on the notion of syntax. Classical forms are, of course, always based on models and precedent, and the models and precedent come from ancient Rome but also from all the other generations of architecture that have grown out of that.

While precedent is important, people who write about it today ascribe to the model power and a virtue which actually belongs to the artifact that is produced because the model is only there to suggest. In writing a novel or a poem in English, the final artifact is based on our use of the English language; and classical architecture is for us in the United States today as fundamental as the English language is to our notions of democracy, of law, and governments and procedure. Selecting models is extremely important. The Renaissance believed that in choosing your sources you demonstrated who you were yourself, the more noble the more challenging the models you selected was a reflection of the aspirations you set for yourself in your own work.

Further, the syntax of classical architecture is, of course, based on moldings which have names; the classical orders of architecture are compound features which have become conventional—temple fronts, domes, forms which are used for architraves, ways of articulating doorways, some of which are hierarchical. They are based on notions of building types, on notions of urban design and city planning, of landscape architecture and, of course, the role of the man-made within the greater natural world. It is a comprehensive system, and the system itself is there simply to provide a model. What is fundamental and what is important is how each individual architect, how each generation of architects and how each culture uses these models, because looking at the Parthenon one could not possibly confuse it with a building of Louis XIV. Each culture, democracy in the United States, absolutism in Europe, the imperialism and supernationalism of ancient Rome, the architecture of England, of regions in England and parts of the United States, all used the classical system, but expressed it quite differently—with its own demonstrable and incidentally recognizable single characteristics. So over this 3,000 years of classical architecture, a tremendous vocabulary and a tremendous literature



of buildings and the precedent and the work of individual architects has been accumulated; and it is a truism, but nonetheless, you should be able to tell the identity of an architect not only by the overall building but by the shaping and sequence and proportioning of the individual moldings.

I would like to start with slides of a Court House I did in Manchester, Connecticut about six years ago. The building was converted from the supermarket you see on the right to the building on the left. The slide is simply to demonstrate how easy and simple it is to give a non-descript building an identity using the temple front, rustification, the theme of brick and limestone, of arched windows, string-courses and lettering. To denote a specific building in New England, the architectural forms used there are very characteristic of the area east of Hartford, using rustification and the 20th century brick and limestone.

In looking at the Corinthian column on your left by John Russell Pope at the National Gallery—perhaps *the* most magnificent example that I know of a Corinthian column—you should recall that there are at the United States Capitol seven different Corinthian capitals quite easy to identify, each of which is different in proportion and organization of the different leitmotifs. Pope's Corinthian capital has a genealogy that goes all the way back to the Corinthian capitals at the Pantheon. The language is as applicable to the detail of the building, to the overall city, but also to the artifacts of the interior architecture, and to furniture in this great Bombay Secretary with its own Corinthian order.

The system extends to the great and major problems of civic architecture and in this case you see the Interdepartmental Auditorium by Arthur Brown, 1932-5, on Constitution Avenue seen from a distance and one of the corners seen in a detail. That is a 20th century detail; you will not find a detail like that in Renaissance architecture. Some of the work perhaps of Carlo Rainaldi gravitates to this, but there are 32 different planes, going from the plane of the temple front on the right of the slide to the bridge that spans a street at the left—an extremely innovative detail; you will notice the mutule at the corners is *round*. The proportioning of the capital is slightly different from almost any that I have seen. Unless one has mastered this literature, the intricacies and the aspect of innovation and development here are difficult to detect. If one has not mastered English, it is difficult to read and understand it.

Now, turning from syntax to meaning—I would assert that the single most radical gesture in the history of architecture is the great dome of the United States Capitol. We see this dome in its second version, the dome of Thomas Walter, but we can just as easily imagine the dome proposed by Benjamin Latrobe or actually realized by Bulfinch. And what Latrobe, and more important, more fundamentally, what Jefferson and Washington had in mind was suggesting that in the world's first democracy, the power of absolute monarchies of Europe and of the church in Europe was now given to the people of the United States because under this dome you have not an emblem of royalty nor do you have a religious symbol. You don't even have an important space because the Senate and the House are off to the side, but you simply have an empty space for the citizens of the United States. The axis of this

building, as it goes north-south and east-west, clearly extends to our borders, collecting everyone to the conception center of the government of the United States. You have a place for people to congregate, to debate the future in the form of legislation, and to watch and participate in the political life of the country through their representatives in the House and in the Senate. Other than the Greek agora, formal place like this has never existed in the history of architecture. This is quite new and it is as carefully prompted and thought out as are the documents on which we base our government. Part and parcel of the new capitol was the new City of Washington because both the plan of Washington and its architecture was meant to be a paradigm for the state and for cities for their own architectural growth and development along the lines of democracy. And in the plan of Washington, one has expressed the separation of powers in the Capitol and the White House and at this time the critical role of the judiciary in the life of the United States had not been, I think, foreseen, which is why L'Enfant in his writings talked about somewhere along the area of 8th street, half way between the Capitol and the White House, as an appropriate place for the court but this was never really formalized. Further, instead of a great formal boulevard or parade ground, one has as the core of spine of Washington, D.C., simply a park.

As Washington, D.C. grew and developed as one sees in the slide on the right, prepared in 1901 by the McMillan Commission for the growth and development of Washington, D.C., it renewed its vision of Washington, by again returning to the vision of L'Enfant, of Jefferson and of Washington, who at least in my mind, ideologically were coauthors of that plan, establishing the mall and the development of either side of it that we see today. When this plan was done, there was a railroad marshalling yard and station which went right across the mall, approximately where the Archives and National Art Gallery are today and the rest of it up to the Washington Memorial was an English forest with walkways curving through it as well as a forestry reserve for the Smithsonian. The vision of the mall as this great open space of free standing museums on one side and government buildings on the other, is the McMillan Commission's reinterpretation in its own time of the original ideals and the plan; and they proposed (and it was eventually realized) Henry Bacon's Lincoln Memorial which ends the mall. This was the setting for Dr. Martin Luther King's great speech. (And where else in Washington, D.C. could that speech have been given?) A major work of architecture not included nor celebrated in any major textbook on the history of the 20th century architecture, but the classical vision of Washington, D.C. as aired in our time to the universal culture of ancient Rome, is realized and expressed anew in the McMillan Commission Plan and Bacon's great building.

This vision was also based on the Colonial experience. You see on the right the town center of Salisbury, Connecticut. The Building unfortunately just burned down, but you have the town hall in the center with the house on the left, a Congregational house of worship on the right and the extension of that, of course, is the State House. All of these building types have domestic connotations and with that domestic connotation the notion of accessibility by the people; even the architectural forms of the town hall are domestic except

for the temple front which gives it its civic importance together with its power. Clearly, the colonists very quickly took the architectural heritage of England and transformed it to their own requirements in the United States. The Yeomen's house is a 15th and 16th century Yeomen's house which had a set hallway with a chimney in the middle with two rooms on either side and is quite close to the ground and is asymmetrical in England in its organization, very very quickly, almost instantly, in the United States became lifted up off the ground on a plinth and further made symmetrical; and, of course, characteristic of most of our colonial architecture is the notion of symmetry. This of course was extended through the 19th century; and you can see the central green in New Haven, Connecticut, nine squares based on specifications directly from Vitruvius in its planning and its geographical location. Vitruvius said you should have the marshes between your city and your harbor so that when an enemy attacks you can go around the marshes. You should turn your building 22½ degrees to the prevailing winds to deter the bad winds. All of that was done in New Haven and when they built the State House in the 1830s, of course, they saw it as a temple, a temple of democracy.

Now this heritage continued after the McMillan Commission Plan of 1901 and between that date and 1930, one has what I believe to be the largest, most comprehensive building program in the history of architecture which transformed the United States into city of towns. And lower Manhattan, which we see just now, became a symbol of modernism; it was in fact the creation of a group of architects classified as students of McKim, Mead and White. This building program, which was inspired by the 1893 World's Fair, was not any sort of rebuilding of main centers, Chicago, Los Angeles, New York City, Washington, D.C. The towns and villages of the United States throughout the 1900s were 11,000 independent civic associations, part of the "City Beautiful" movement, whose goal was to rebuild the towns to channel their growth and development along organized lines inspired by the work of the McMillan Commission, whose publication was the handbook or how-to-do-it book. I am going to run through the achievements of this program. Starting at the national level is the great Archives Building of the late 30s. When you look at this building, it was built at the same time as Le Corbusier was beginning to think about the Unite, Mies van der Rohe was doing his Reichsbank project and the first transformation of the International Style was taking place. You have the Archives Building, whose great capital I showed you earlier, Roman in its organization, a building that certainly would have fascinated the Roman architects. The slide on the left shows you a detail of the corner of the tympanum with its great eagle guarding the treasures of the Archives, its wonderful corners, its mouldings, its use of typography to demonstrate, to show to the people what this building is about. Implicit in everything I say is the notion that the function of architecture is to express the meaning and the significance of the institutions it houses.

From the national to the state level, based on the great model of the Capitol, a 20th-century state capitol from the first decade of this century, by Cass Gilbert, the great capitol of Minnesota at St. Paul; and on the right, the Civic Center, getting down to a more regional level, of Pasadena, California, by

certainly one of the two or three great 20th century architects, Arthur Brown, whose Interdepartmental Auditorium I showed you before: a building certainly that if it would be simply lifted up in the sky and dropped in Northern Italy, somewhere between Venice and Vicenza, would be a major pilgrimage site for architecture students but because it happens to be local and Californian is relatively unknown.

On the left, the Court House at Santa Barbara by McArthur and Company. Again, part and parcel of this great Renaissance of American architecture was the discovery not only of the connections between the mainstream of Colonial, Federal architecture and the architecture of North Italy and Rome, but of local expressions of regionalism within the North American continent, in this case, at Santa Barbara, of the Spanish-Colonial heritage. And on the right, in the village of Rockville, Connecticut, and all the little towns of Connecticut, when proposing new plans for themselves, went to the great architects of New York City, you have the Maxwell Memorial Library by Charles Platt, a superb building, and I simply point out the slight exaggeration in scale of all of its mouldings which give to this building this tremendous presence. It is a very small building, yet as you look at it, it has its own sense of monumentality.

Religious building on your left, Temple Emmanuel in San Francisco, again by Arthur Brown. While reinforced concrete was discovered by the modernist architects in the 30s, 40s and 50s, in the teens and twenties the buildings were already of reinforced concrete. And you will notice that you do not see too many cracks. On the right hand side, the expression of our national prerogative toward universal education, expressed in the land-grant colleges and the architecture of public schools from the late 19th century and through the early 20th century, here you have the exquisite campus of Penn State University set in the geographical center of the State of Pennsylvania. A complex of buildings known as West Halls is very simple and exceedingly cheap Georgian architecture, but given life by an extraordinary landscape which was planned around this complex of buildings. I simply point out the small bush of Junipers, the longer beds on either side and smaller and larger plantings, the staircases with their plantings of shrubs and then this avenue of trees around the side of it and it expands into a great courtyard in the center. It is really a masterpiece of landscape architecture but no one knows who did it.

Private Houses. There was a great renaissance of house building—here you have a magnificent building by Laurence Bodomy just outside of Richmond, Virginia of the early 1930s; and 15 years earlier, one of the first public housing projects in the United States (on the left) set in Bridgeport, Connecticut. What is important about that project is the fact that those who needed the subsidy were not given a different architecture. They were not stigmatized. In a sense, they were recognized as part of the greater community, and their architecture is the same as the architecture of the very rich. It is Georgian architecture. The essay on the right is brilliant; the essay on the left is mundane; but the forms and the meanings associated with those forms bring the project on the left into the greater community of buildings, and those buildings are actually no different and almost undistinguishable from speculative middle-

class housing of the time. Although that project is now 60 years old and is still extant and needs much renovation, it is still cherished by the people who live there.

For the first time in the history of architecture, industrial buildings were a major preoccupation; not of builders but of important architects. The slide I wanted to use was of a building which was used by both Mendelsson and Le Corbusier in their books, the great Army warehouses in the Brooklyn Navy Yard, by Cass Gilbert. They were reinforced concrete buildings from 1902-08; but the example on the left is the Ford Motor Plant by Albert Kahn, designed in 1910 and completed in 1917. It uses the stripped-down, bear bones paraphernalia of classical architecture. It is still a classical building, but it is not a court house or major public building, it is an attempt to bring warehouses, factories into the mainstream of architecture because the goals of the McMillan Commission were to design all of the buildings in a city. The great culmination was the office tower; on your left you see the Empire State Building designed by Arthur Lewis Harmon, who was a pupil of Charles F. McKim.

The great bridges of the United States of this period were all designed by architects and engineers. The bridges going over the East River and the Harlem River and the Hudson River in New York City were all designed by architects and engineers; and here you have one of my favorites, which is the 59th Street Queensboro Bridge, designed by Henry Hornbusell, Architect, and Gustav Lindenhof, Engineer. And if you think engineers can do it alone, just look at the highway system, thousands and thousands of miles of roadways, thousands of bridges and I do not think you will find a significant structure along it. I think the problem resides with the architect because they do not participate, they have not wanted to participate and they can no longer participate. However, at this time these great bridges were conceived of as works of architecture, engineering, as well as artifacts of a greater urban complex; and I will show you shortly the slide of how it was proposed this bridge impacts with the street fabric of New York. The slide on the left is the addition, the extension of the colonnades of the University of Virginia by McKim, Mead and White, this particular extension having been designed by Stanford White. This period of architecture saw the first examples of systematic preservation of important artifacts. The known measured drawing of a colonial building was by Charles F. McKim, while he was in Richardson's office. This understanding of the architectural past enabled Stanford White to provide an extension to Jefferson's masterpiece which is so good that you can imagine Jefferson wanting to have his own signature on that building. You have to work hard to know it was not by Jefferson, and by one of America's greatest architects and superstars of his own time, a work of self-effacing modesty that should serve as an example to all of us. Our current preoccupation with preservation goes back also to this period.

As well as buildings and the greater environment, this generation of architects also designed fossilized artifacts. The tumblers and glasses you see on the right hand side were designed in 1900; and the irony of this is that all the artifacts so loved by the purest painters in the 20s in Europe, iconoclasts wanting to turn the world over, were in fact produced by a real conservative

bunch of American architects and designers. This was a period of great innovation, development of new artifacts, typewriters, telephones, automobiles, and so on. And here you have one of the early Underwood typewriters; and if you look at the moldings of the base you can see they grew clearly out of a plinth of a classical building and really when you drove your Ford car out of the Ford plant, you took an artifact out of a classical building; you parked it in a garage with a colonial house; and you went inside the house and your telephone probably stood on the Sheraton table together with your typewriter.

On the right is the plan of 1907 of New York City showing a proposed bridge connecting 59th Street with the borough of Queens across the way. Henry Hornbusell's bridge was built somewhat different from the one you see there but the one point of the slide is to show that this vision was all encompassing. He revered the city because the city is after all a classical notion. In the West, our notion of city goes back to Greece and Rome. The city was so important that the interface between the bridge and the motor vehicles and mass transportation vehicles that came across it was of fundamental importance. The bridge was aligned with the grid of the city. It was not allowed to smash through it. The structures you see in the foreground are part of the subway and streetcar terminals and the vehicles go around under that in order to get to the bridge. The 59th Street Bridge was planned as a boulevard running on the south side of Central Park, one of many great first efforts of this century for incorporating mass transportation in a broader sense into the fabric of the city and in our imaginations and the imaginations of the rest of the world. New York City is perhaps the universal symbol of modernity, perhaps today replaced by a Saturn rocket or lunar module or perhaps the space ship Columbia or Atlantis; but for the human habitat, the image of the 20th century taken from Fiske Kimball's book of 1928, taken from Mendelsson's book, *America*, is this image of city of towers, exploiting the new technology and suggesting the power of inventiveness of this new architecture of democracy, up to the 20th century.

Now what happened here? The productions of modernism; and we see on the left the works of two very important firms in Washington, D.C., and in New Haven, Connecticut, a piece of the interstate highway system. These buildings and this kind of roadwork generated a public reaction which is unique in the annals of architectural history and that is the resurgence in the 1960s of and a transformation of the preservation movement. Up to 1960, preservation had been concerned with cultural artifacts in the broadest sense of the word. This sometimes, but did not necessarily include works of artistic or architectural importance; houses like Mt. Vernon and Monticello were important. This was cultural preservation, but when the enormous impact of urban renewal and the interstate highway system as it impacted in the 1950s and 1960s on our cities was realized by the public, the reaction was almost instantaneous. And by 1967, the first piece of interstate highway system in the United States was stopped. That happened in New Haven, in the East Rock Connector. The notion that you stop buildings at all costs because what you are going to get is going to be worse than even third or fourth rate existing buildings, nothing like this has ever existed before in the history of ar-

chitecture; and it is a phenomenon which I think bears rigorous analysis, because it implies that our generation of architects is simply unable to produce artifacts which are acceptable to the general body of citizens. In 1968 Senator Lowell Weiker proposed what is called the "Weiker Amendment" that you couldn't knock down a unit of housing without replacing it. That effectively ended the intervention through urban renewal in the area of housing and in the United States. The East Rock Connector and the Weiker Amendment had tremendous grass-roots support; and I stress that because they did not have the support of the architecture profession. Historians at that time were the rare exception that backed this; it was really the people in the broader sense of the word that were offended by these buildings and artifacts like that bridge which is actually very competent design steel bridge. If you look at it in isolation it has tremendous power, like a conceptual sculpture, like a great Tony Smith, a tremendous scale, but here set within almost the heart of the downtown area of New Haven, it generated around it a large desert.

On the right you have a new development in Washington, D.C.—buildings that were there before plumped in front of the new development which has to curve and adjust behind it. A statement of no confidence in the ability of architecture to enhance its environment, because really, to be quite truthful, what is left because of its better veneer is not worth keeping. And on the right, a new United States Courthouse on Lafayette Square was blocked and this new development was put there and at the time this was thought to be a major breakthrough. But if you use (which modern architects do not) as a yardstick the quality of 3,000 years of architecture, you have to acknowledge that set between the federal houses on the left, and the Cass Gilbert building on the right, the brick entrance to the court house at the back has really nothing to do with the architecture that is there. The skill that Stanford White employed on Jefferson's University, which was so sorely needed in this wonderful square with the statue of Jackson in the middle, the forecourt of the White House, really deserved much better. And if that is the best we can do, God help us!

What I am suggesting is a two-fold proposition. One is that for the first time in the history of architecture society as a whole could not expect from its architects and builders competent background buildings. On the right, you have Wooster Square in Boston built in the 1830s or 40s. Nobody knows who the architect was. It was built by a developer for whatever motives developers have today. And this gentleman, together with those who developed the squares of 18th and 19th Century England or of Scotland, would be very surprised today if they were to come back and discover that their squares are part of our system of national monuments and represent a standard of architecture that is literally unobtainable today. In the field of office buildings, you have the Continental Illinois Bank, and a whole street of them going down perspective-wise the center of Chicago, the realization of Burnham's plan of 1908—buildings of great competence. The first one, the Continental Illinois Bank building, happens to be a masterpiece; but the others are very high rate competent background buildings. None of them was conceived of as a work of great architecture in and of itself, for in the hierarchy of buildings in the city they were but mundane background buildings whose task was to be com-



petent, to enhance the environment and to form the settings for the major monuments. Here, one block further down on La Salle Street, you have the vista focused on the only building that breaks the grid of Chicago, the Board of Trade building, at the time the only building that broke the height limitation of the plan for Chicago. This kind of competent background architecture is what we cannot do. The two buildings I showed you earlier, the FBI and the Smithsonian, certainly should have belonged to that category.

My second proposition is that society has always assumed that not only with competent background buildings readily available but great architecture, you had to work harder to get it, but it was always there. What we forget when we look at the great complex of St. Peter's by Bramante, Fontana, Della Porta, etc., is that what was demolished was the most ancient and venerable building in European Christendom, which was the old basilica of St. Peter's. Yet both Pope Julius and the Roman Catholic Church in large and the citizens of Rome expected from Bramante a building of even greater architectural power. We forget that St. Paul's Cathedral replaced the fabric of a Gothic building, a great Gothic cathedral; and who today would dream of even touching a corner of a great Gothic cathedral? Yet this building has shown in history that it was indeed a worthy replacement. And when it came to the Capitol, four presidents culminating in Lincoln backed the demolition of Bulfinch's dome and its replacement with an even greater dome by Thomas V. Walter with the added civic connotation attached to this dome which was to exemplify and to embody the unity of the Republic at a time of great stress. For us, the task of extending and rebuilding the west front of the Capitol is so enormous that ours is the first generation that has gained responsibility to add its own veneer to this building. The capitol is certainly our greatest and most important artifact of architecture and it has within its fabric something from every decade since it was built. We have decided to restore stone for stone on the west front, which Walter and every successful architect have alleged has been an insubstantial base for Walter's new dome. We have to recall that the Bulfinch dome did not even reach the height of the Capitol on the first drum; it was a very modest and a small affair. And the proposal to extend the west front out and to form a stronger and more powerful base is something that we said no we cannot do it, just leave what is there. And the fact that this stance should be proposed by the American Institute of Architecture is the most massive vote of no self-confidence by the architectural profession in its own members.

Now, I would propose that one of the reasons and perhaps, the main reason for this dilemma that confronts us, is that we mindlessly appropriated and misunderstood the avant-garde architecture of Europe in the 20s and 30s and mindlessly applied it to the problems of the United States in the 50s and 60s. We did this without thinking twice about the meaning of these architectural postulates. On the left, you have a proposal for housing by Walter Gropius, and on the right you have one of the great Unites d'Habitation of Le Corbusier at Nantes, clearly but a building block in his vision of a Ville Radiuse for the city of Nantes. Let us look at the Gropius plan or the Le Corbusier plan for its civic meaning, for the political messages that it tells us. Kelly Mor-



rierson has written at great length about this. The political power that underlies the Ville Radiuse or proposals like this by Gropius has totalitarian control over the life of its citizens. On the Ville Radiuse you have a collection of 12 or 15 towers in the center of the city, every one exactly the same; three different categories of housing for everybody around it; the government that controls every detail of its citizens' life. And you can see in the Gropius drawing that no one dares to walk on that grass; everybody is dressed the same; no one knows exactly where to walk; and the city disappears down to infinity, it has no beginning and no end. And all of the great principles of classical architecture, which are all derived by empathy from our own perception about ourselves, our bodies, are gone. Even the trees will not survive very long because the parking garage has to be underneath. As elements of landscape architecture, they are as lost as the people there; and the connection of this to the world at large is very carefully not delineated. The case is much more clearly made in Le Corbusier's building, which is set on this multilegged structure ready to walk down the hill and pulverize. But you know that for Le Corbusier himself, if he had to choose a place to live, it wouldn't be down here, it would be somewhere in the old part of Nantes where he had his office in an abandoned convent; and he always would be taking you to lunch to some of the nicest cafes along the *rivage* somewhere in the distance. The point I want to make is that the architecture of the International Style is not the mainstream architecture of Europe during this period. It represented but a minute fraction of a fraction of a percent of what was going on in France and Germany and Italy at the time. It was the world of an avant-garde who were committed to political ideas—explicit in these projects—which I believe to be unacceptable to the messy and complex democratic machinery that we see at the moment in the United States.

And you can see what happens. On the right you have Dayton, Ohio before it was redeveloped. Its river, probably polluted, you can see on the left hand side; on the right bank of the river, housing, probably slum housing, lots of tree-lined streets, probably the third or the fourth generation of immigrants live in those houses; two or three-storied frame buildings set along streets, the ribbon of its trees spaced behind them. The downtown of classical buildings is unable to cope with the problems of the 1950s. The new Dayton has these free-standing structures set on this great park that was residential in downtown Dayton. It is a great architectural mess. Each individual entrepreneur wants his own architect; each architect expresses himself quite differently; and the whole thing adds up to an anti-urban, anti-democratic complex of buildings. The highway is run through without any consideration for the architecture that is there or the problems of life in and around the city, quite unlike the "City Beautiful" planning of the first three decades of this century.

One of the problems that we face as a society is that our history of architecture hasn't been written. What we have at the moment is a wonderful exercise in propaganda; and I am convinced that the KGB censors have looked with great admiration at our architectural history covering the period in the United States and Europe from 1890 to 1940. Because in the United States

we believe that we had some architecture of the 1893 World's Fair which was terrible; we were saved by the second coming of Sullivan and Frank Lloyd Wright. After 1910, we don't really know much about what those two guys did because European architects discovered Wright; and then the real story of architecture happened in Europe. We die in the United States until 1930, when by the grace of God and Hitler, European architects came to the United States, bringing this great gospel of the International Style; and suddenly we discover we have an architectural array in Gropius' House in Lincoln, Massachusetts, the ITT campus by Mies van der Rohe, and the Student Housing and Center by Gropius at Harvard, leading on to the Harvard Bauhaus and the Renaissance of the American version of the International Style. In fact, that is absolute and utter nonsense. The real story is that the 1893 World's Fair was visited by millions of people from Europe and the United States. For the first time in its history, the United States became the leader of world architecture. An interesting case study of this is Charles Reilly, the dean of the Liverpool School of Architecture, who came to the United States and saw the work of McKim, Mead and White, and asked for copies of their working drawings. He went back to Liverpool, changed the curriculum, and started producing architects modeled after the American version. Here is the town of the great center for New Delhi in India by Sir Edwin Lutyens; Lutyens' whole emergence as a classical architect grew out of his American experience. For the first time, Europe, the colonies of England, looked to the United States for leadership. The buildings I showed you, starting with the National Art Gallery and ending with the Underwood typewriter and the Old Fashion Company's glasswear, are actually what was produced in the United States during this period; and this has not been documented by any historian. There are token recognitions of this in the work by Hitchcock and Scully, but nonetheless a lie is perpetuated. What I am talking about really is that we have ignored all of our architecture for a period of 50 or 60 years. It is an overwhelming fact that this is ignored. Doubly incomprehensible, because the great campuses of our universities were largely created during this period: the Gothic quadrangles of Princeton, Columbia, the quadrangles of the House of Harvard, all of our land-grant projects, the wonderful center you have at VPI, beautiful stone buildings forming a coherent grouping surrounded by this enormous mass of non-architecture which could belong to any place in the entire world, part of this great corpus of modernism which is certainly the worst architectural output in the history of mankind. Not only is the architecture ignored, but the intellectual substructure, the great city planning proposals and the 1893 World's Fair which inspired the McMillan Commission report, and the Renaissance of civic associations, citizens' associations to rebuild towns, and centers which culminated in the McMillan Commission plan.

The McMillan Commission plan was extended to regional planning by the great plan for Chicago by Daniel Burnham; and I want to point out that Washington, D.C. is a grid, which is civic, with a super macro grid of streets at 60 to 30 degrees. In Chicago you have the same thing, the civic center; the civic streets of Chicago are on an orthogonal grid, with a regional grid

of diagonals. If you look at the plan of Le Corbusier's Ville Radiuse, you have the civic center of his towers and airport on the orthogonal grid; his regional grid is diagonal. On the right, you have the park proposal for Greater New York in the late 1920s and 30s, part of the great 11 volume regional plan for New York. The very notion of comprehensive planning which modernism presented as its own invention, is in fact the creation, along with Lower Manhattan and the City Beautiful movement, of classical architects.

And, of course, modern architecture tells us it discovered technology: That is the third lie because in the Singer Tower of 1898 which you see being demolished here (1964-65), you have every major technological invention the 20th century used. It is a steel-frame building, it is a curtain wall construction. You can see the great metal wall of windows rising up between the corner piers of the scaffolding. You have electric lights. You have forced air systems of ventilation. You have prefabrication on the building site of stone, of metal components and of terracotta components. All of the innovations we associate with post-1950 buildings for which Mies van der Rohe would have had to use to build his proposals for glass towers in the 1920s, can be seen in the 19th century greenhouses, and so on. In addition to misinterpreting the 20th century, or to ignoring the 20th century, historians have ignored and then misinterpreted the 19th century as but the introduction to the International Style of the 1920s.

The one great truism of history is that in the end truth will come out. It doesn't matter what it takes, and it doesn't matter what governments, what consortiums of historians do; in the end truth will come out. And it seems to me that today we are to return architecture to its mainstream in the United States (I do not talk to the very different problems of Europe and the rest of the world). The United States is the heir to the great traditions of English and Roman law, democracy, and so on. It seems to me that the real challenge of our real past in architecture lies in trying to bring to the future the great sophistication and intelligence that was used by our peers in the past. Our yardstick cannot be the last twenty or thirty years of the International Style, but has to be the whole history of architecture.

I end with two slides of my own, the one on the right is part of a suite of offices in the Department of State, a series of waiting rooms for visiting heads of state, part of the offices of the Secretary of State, completed last year; and on the left, still in the works, a proposal for a Holocaust Memorial in Battery Park, a quadrifront Roman arch, four sided. The keystone of the arch has the scrolls of the law of the Torah, the frieze at the impost of the arch has on four sides the inscriptions, the dead of the Holocaust; it also recalls on the other three sides the dead soldiers of the Allied armies, victims of genocide and repression. The center of this has four pilasters and a dome; the pilasters have the cottage, the prayer for the dead, and above that six bronze candelabra of mourning which burn in perpetuity; and cut through the center, this great cone on top; the cone is divided in ten and in each panel you have one of the ten commandments. And instead of an oculus you have a great chimney cut through the center 60 ft. high; and as you look up through it you will recall the chimneys of Auschwitz and Dachau and Bergen-Belsen and the fate

of those Jewish Europeans who did not immigrate to the United States. And also recall, as a genuine architectural statement, that it is indeed the function of our public buildings to give meaning and significance to the institutions they house. Our institutions have a genealogy that is 3,000 years old, going back to the agora of Ancient Greece; and it is our responsibility as architects, as critics, and historians and citizens to see that the richness of this fabric stays part of the architecture of tomorrow.

# On Architecture

By Douglas Davis

It is bad enough to have to follow all these elegant presentations when you are not prepared, to precede yet another elegant presentation, and to try to fill the shoes of John Baldesarri. But, on top of all that, someone just said to me a few minutes ago, "How can you follow virtue?" And so I replied, "with vice."

Anyway, this talk is going to be a little bit like a historicist's pastiche. You are going to notice me putting it together as we talk. It resembles, finally, nothing other than Michael Graves' new Whitney Museum facade with a classical arch here, a baroque door there, and a Palladian window somewhere else. I apologize for that. I must also make another disclaimer about my patriotism. After the last talk, after Allan Greenberg's and particularly because I am going to disagree with them, you may think me not truly patriotic. Indeed, Allan wrapped himself—like my president and like Tom Wolfe—in the American flag, leaving us all barely any room to maneuver. If one speaks these days in favor of the much despised, maligned "Modern" movement, which has already been blamed here for everything from the Holocaust to the modern city and totalitarianism, art is suspect. Allan even blamed the writing of recent architectural history on the KGB. One is left in a disadvantaged position. I just want to assure you all that I'm not only red and white but blue. I feel

embarrassed bringing it up on my own, but if someone asks me later, "Why do you consider yourself patriotic?" I would love to answer that question. No one asked. The answer is . . . I am married to a woman (a Quiner) directly descended from the man who cast the deciding vote in 1776 for the Declaration of Independence!

Now I am about to make several impassioned defenses of the Modern Movement but before I do so, here is another disclaimer: by no means am I partial to the imbecilities erected in its name by a whole host of governments and capitalists who, in fact, are the real villains of the 20th century, not the prophets and inspired creators of the Early Modern Movement. Allan quite rightly attacked the wholesale leveling of vast areas of the city in order to construct highways and bridges, but clearly that is not to be blamed on the Modern Movement. It is the politicians and industrialists who profited from laying those highways, who deserve our censure. Were each of these bridges a delicate work of classical artistry, the fabric of our cities would have been destroyed in precisely the same manner.

I would like to align myself with the moderns. But when I say the "Moderns" I am talking about something beyond the practice of modern architecture. Those of you who know the literature of the 17th and 18th centuries are quite aware of the continuing debate between the ancients and the moderns. Claude Perrault engaged in that debate; so did Jonathan Swift and many others. It is on that ground that I identify myself with the moderns. In fact, one of the not-so-subtle lines of argument in this pastiche presentation is that you, yourselves, are moderns whether you agree with or believe it. To be "modern" in this sense, at least during the enlightenment, meant many things but most of all essentially it meant the recognition that we live in a new day that requires new solutions. Yes, we profit from basing our solutions and our actions upon the past but we must go on beyond what we already know. In those enlightenment debates, the moderns always tell the ancients: we are superior to you, because we know you. It is a premise that applies to politics, economics, medicine, and science as well as to art and architecture. In this sense, I am a modern. In this sense, I share, and so do you, in the massive shift that occurred during the Renaissance (no one knows exactly when men began to reject the idea that antiquity was divinely inspired) that classicism in effect had been ordained by God. We heard this morning—it sounded almost like a line from Swift, or Boileau, that invention is no longer needed, since God is our inventor. Now let me continue this rambling talk by touching briefly on the word "historicism," which has been lately applied to architects like Michael Graves, Robert Stern, Tom Beebe, T. Gordon Smith and others in a very negative way (I often object to their work, but not on that ground). "Historicism" in one sense has become a fashionable but pejorative end. But in the academic sense, historicism is the study of the past without prejudice as opposed to unquestioning acceptance. Eclecticism is obviously an outgrowth of historicism. Beneath historicism is the premise that all sociocultural phenomena are historically determined, that they are all, therefore, relative. I said before that no one knows when we changed our minds about the divinity of antiquity, but it might have been in Claude Perrault's famous study of the

proportions of Vitruvius. Someone else pointed out this morning empirical investigations in the 17th and 18th centuries prove that the proportions ordained by Vitruvius don't hold when you actually go back and measure the great classical works of Greece and Rome. Perrault revealed this truth in his translation of Vitruvius; it led him to the relativism of styles. It may have been a phrase like this that contributed to the historical shift I am trying to describe and the birth of historicism!

Beauty has no other foundation than the imagination which works in such a way that things are pleasing if they accord with the idea that each one of us has of their perfection. (1684)

Another turning point may have been Hegel, who is loosely referred to as the "Father of Art History" (I am sure that will turn many of you against Hegel). In his lectures in 1829 he argued that the classical period was only one moment in the history of art and architecture; that each work and each period and each individual must therefore be studied in terms of specific intentions and in specific historical conditions. It was a revolutionary position to take in 1829. Now, we completely accept it. We don't even think about it. Yet historicism is the precursor to eclecticism, in painting as well as architecture. By the end of the 19th century, we were in possession of more knowledge of the past—from many other cultures than Greece and Rome—than ever before. Dan Cameron said something today about history being instantaneous, or that is, instantly available. Those are not his exact words but he was describing the experience of looking at television and in sixty minutes watching the entire scope of human history zapped before your eyes. This is a very different position to be in than the position of the classicist, who holds that all cultural values are derived from natural law and that human nature is always the same: as Mr. Greenberg argued today, what was good enough for Athens should be good enough for New Haven.

The Early Modern Movement revolted against late 19th century eclecticism. The early Moderns attempted to create a new style. Among the names you never hear mentioned when people begin dumping on the Modern Movement are Hoffman, Wagner, McIntosh, and J.J. Ovd, the great Dutch architect whom I still believe is probably the most important of them all, in terms of housing. The early and later work of Corbusier, which also was not referred to today, has an altogether softer manner than the apartment buildings you saw. No doubt the first moderns erred but what is forgotten now is the enormity of the task they faced, the enormity of the destruction that followed World War I. It is also forgotten that the political sources of support for the Early Modern Movement was not the Communist Party, in most of the Northern and Western European nations, but the Social Democrats. We forget, finally, that the Social Democratic parties faced in the 20s a world-wide depression of extraordinary intensity. Their attempt to rebuild the cities physically and economically was driven by necessity. It should not be dismissed now by proto-Tom Wolfes as totalitarian instinct. Rather, architects like Ovd—and their sponsors—were motivated primarily by need.

Since we keep hearing proclamations *about* the Modern Movement, why

not hear from them? Here is an often misunderstood passage from Walter Gropius' 1919 Manifesto for the Bauhaus:

Let us create a new guild of craftsmen without the class distinctions [it is important to remember that line—"without the class distinctions"] which raise an arrogant barrier between craftsmen and artists. Together let us conceive and create the new building of the future which will embrace architecture and sculpture and painting in one unity and which will rise one day toward heaven from the hands of a million workers like the crystal symbol of a new faith.

This statement is treated with great scorn today. But I call your attention to the reference to workers, I call your attention to the overwhelming interest of the early modern architects in creating safe, sane, habitable housing at low cost. I ask you if you know any architects today who are equally committed to such objectives? Even mention "workers?" Have you heard anything like this today? The answer is "No" because the commitment is gone. Our architects are interested in their far more elitist missions. What I would like to call "Bunker" capitalism is the cause of the glass and block slab city that we all despise, not the Modern Movement described in these words.

It occurs to me to tell you of my visit this summer to a housing project in London built during the 50s, by the Labor Party. One hears over and over again the criticism of these drab, uniform projects. (A parenthetical point is that modern architecture must deal with quantitative problems of enormous quantity. I wish I could provide quick statistics about the vast difference between world population as compared to 1,000 or 2,000 years ago, but it really is extraordinary). Anyway, I actually visited one of these projects. Unlike Charles Jennings and Tom Wolfe, I spent some time, purely by chance, with people who live there. It is not very beautiful to look at on the outside, obviously, the buildings were raised in a great rush, no money was expended on details and refinement—certainly none on decoration. But I want to tell you that inside it is essentially clean, humane and livable. And that's how many millions live in projects like this in Europe, created in response to the destruction caused by both World Wars. Yet the roof is solid; the water runs hot and cold; the rooms are filled with picture-window light. Anyone who knows how "workers" lived in the 17th, 18th, and even the 19th century knows there has been an enormous change, not only in terms of housing, but also in terms of political rights, in access to education, to a means of escaping "class barriers."

Now the reaction against the Modern Movement began, as you all know, with Robert Venturi, *Complexity and Contradiction* (1966). Had I known that I could show slides here I would now run through some iconic early post-modern buildings but perhaps that's not necessary. It would be far more interesting to show you slides of the Late post-modern style, which is becoming as imperial, as arrogant, as overwhelming as the "Bunker" modern style ever was. I warn you that it is coming to get you—everywhere in America. I did a lot of research on this about three months ago for a piece that *Newsweek* will shortly publish, with visual evidence of the little Michael Graves-Philip Johnsons-Helmut Jahn rip-offs rising in shopping centers all over this



land. Here is something Philip said in 1976. "As for the term 'Post-Modernism,' what it does even for me is to legitimize my wanderings. What 'Post-Modernism' is really doing is legitimizing eclecticism which is, paradoxically, 'Pre-Modern' movement." The reason this quote is important is that it sums up a point I have been trying to make about the beginnings of the "Post-Modern" counter revolution. The historicist methodology opened history to plunder. It allowed architects to grab a doorknob here, a window there, an arch here, a column there, including them in the design of all sorts of buildings from house to corporate office towers. It has to be further emphasized that these raids occur without any particular ideological disposition. Alan Colquhoun recently confirmed this: "When we revive the past now we tend to express it in its most superficial manner. It is merely the pastness of the past that is revived." Most of all, I am arguing that this eclectic dipping into the past is not only entirely formal and stylistic, it is inevitable considering the state of our society, of our education, of our approach to architecture and art which is grounded in Hegel and Perrault. We have an enormously wide and superficial contact with the past, with many different cultures. Yes, it is superficial but it is real; it is where we stand. This contact conditions how we look at architecture. We can instantly recognize various forms and motifs from past cultures and styles; this recognition obviously, for good or for bad, gives us pleasure. *Appropriation* and *quotation* are inseparable from historicism, instantly defined. I myself am implicated; in the mid-70s my work began to deal with memory. I began to make drawings in Berlin that used fragments from the earliest days of printing with thin tracings of the hand of the original owner; my films—filmmaking is probably my most passionate concern right now—began to use actual quotations from earlier films, snatches of dialogue and images. I am using the past on the level of memory. At the same time, I am describing another way of using an eclectic, free-wheeling style. Let me read you this lovely passage from Umberto Eco's book, *Postscript to The Name of the Rose*:

The post modern reply to the modern consists of recognizing that the past, since it cannot really be destroyed because its destruction leads to silence, must be revisited, but with irony, not innocently. I think that the post modern attitude is that of a man who loves a very cultivated woman and knows he cannot say to her: "I love you madly." Because he knows that she knows and that she knows that he knows that these words have already been written by Barbara Cartland. Still there is a solution. He can say, as Barbara Cartland would put it, "I love you madly." At this point, having avoided false innocence; having said clearly it is no longer possible to speak innocently, he will nevertheless have said what he wanted to say to the woman that he loves her but he loves her in an age of lost innocence.

But this is hardly a quality that we can associate with the vulgar verbalism that characterizes the late post-modern style, which is rising to a position of dominance in all our major cities.

The corporate bunker is no longer the glass box. The corporate bunker is now a regressive historicist image. As this has happened, the rhetoric and the philosophy as stated by the post-modern architects has reared absolutism.

We have heard some examples of that here. But an equally vivid example is the recent exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art, which featured Leon Krier and Riccardo Bofill. One has to think about the distinction between MOMA and these men. Remember that MOMA introduced the "International Style" to the United States in 1932. Listen now to Krier. I am reading from recent statements quite similar to those nailed to the wall, in effect, at MOMA.

Although Modernism's ultimate goals are undeclared, it wants its own rejection of tradition, class, history, and upbringing to become the moral imperative of the whole society.

You heard the word "class"—right?

Its ultimate motivation is neither economic nor artistic but compulsive, neurotic, even vengeful.

Here is another, taken from a critique of industrialization:

... Industrialization of building must be considered a total failure. Its ulterior motive has never been to profess proletarianism of short term material comfort but instead the maximization of short term profits and the consolidation of economic and political monopolies. Industrialization has not brought any significant technical improvements in building. It has not reduced the cost of construction. It has not shortened the time of production. It has not created more jobs. . . [etc. etc.] A culture of building and architecture must be based on highly sophisticated manual tradition of construction and not on the formulation of specialist professional bodies.

One last reference is taken from an article by Krier about Nazi architecture. The title of the piece is: "Forward, Comrades. We Must Go Back." It is an attempt to argue that the beautiful classical architecture erected by Hitler and Albert Speer must be saved and preserved because classicism is divine (there we go again). Here is a sentence which I feel is quite wonderful. "The German cities were not destroyed by Allied bombs but by 30 years of modernization." Obviously Krier is at the red-hot center of what I detect to be growing fondness for symbols of authority in architecture. But I assure you that his rhetoric is being echoed by many of his colleagues in one way or another. I have noticed that Michael Graves' rhetoric—in his architecture, which I happen to admire—is beginning to sound very much like Krier.

This issue led me to organize an exhibition which will open in February at New York University's Gray's Gallery. Its title is "Modern Redux"; that is, modern again. We will show the work of 20-30 architects scattered around the world, each one of which maintains a link to the modern tradition in the larger sense. We propose a definition rather than being the simple "modern" that is behind the glassbox style, much as to be "modern" is to be evolutionary, now and before. "Modern" architecture is thus extremely complicated and diversified, in a stylistic sense. Indeed, the phenomenon is beyond style. Working on this exhibition has also led me to consider why the contemporary world is being rejected, in rhetoric if not in fact, over and over again, in statements like those we have heard today. Yes, why? Certainly the rejection

is not linked to shelter. Most of the vocal anti-modernists live in modern houses, not in huts. Most of them share the benefits of the most advanced methods and materials. Certainly we didn't regret "modernity" in medicine. Most of us are going to live much longer than our parents who, in turn, lived much longer than their parents. I don't expect to see Leon Krier refuse to permit a severely ill child to enter a highly "industrialized" hospital. Nor can we reject the contemporary world on the ground of education: we all know that universal education is a product of the 20th century. More people are literate, reading and writing books, sharing in dialogues like this, than ever before in history. Surely we aren't anti-modern because we loathe or despise or reject the computer because most of the new Ancients—the Wolfes, Steins, Jenckses—use computers. Certainly, no one is going to admit that he hates the modern world because of the women's movement—at least not publicly. Finally, it can't be the failure of the contemporary world to provide superior methods of consistency because all the post-modern buildings, on the inside, are modern. Philip Johnson has always contended that AT&T three inches inside is a "progressive" work of architecture, based on a grid, the same modern materials that infuse Pennzoil Plaza in Houston, an icon of late modern architectural style. We must therefore conclude that anti-modernism is a rhetorical posture, based on some antipathy that is quite deep, subliminal perhaps. Perhaps the neo-conservative brand of anti-modernism resents most of all an obvious social difference between the contemporary world and the world of 19th, 18th, or 17th century, and certainly Rome and Athens. We live in an age marked by an extraordinary pluralism, privatization, and differentiation in the culture. This formation has taken place faster in this country at this moment than any place else. I am sure you know what I mean. I am sure I don't have to defend my point at great length. Contemporary American culture is compounded from many different ethnic and class backgrounds. We have no single "public" taste. We express thousands, perhaps millions of tastes—and attitudes. For a classicist, for an elitist, this is a highly discordant, distressing situation. Alan Colquhoun contends—rightly—that "classicism" cannot possibly mean for this society what it meant in the 19th, 18th or 17th century. Then the number of educated people was small; education was predominantly classical. This is no longer the case. We are fed each day a multiplicity of histories.

Don't worry, I am moving to a conclusion, if awkwardly. Think of what has happened during this allegedly nostalgic conservative decade. The median age for first marriages is now nearing 30. There has been an enormous increase in single parent homes. There is also an enormous increase (I don't have the statistics here) in the number of couples who are living beyond the bonds of marriage. We have seen a quantum leap in the number of artists. The last time I checked with the Internal Revenue Service (for testimony I had to give to Congress in 1975) they told me that the number of people who called themselves artists on income tax returns is increasing faster than almost any other occupation. The rapidly growing economic independence of women is utterly astonishing to me, as is the number of blacks and Hispanic mayors and governors. The number of books purchased by individuals in this coun-

try has doubled, per capita, since the end of World War II. There are one-half billion visits to museums of all kinds in this country each year.

Getting back to the whole matter of sex and marriage: it is now technologically possible to be a single parent by choice. I am sure you all know that. Computers have replaced typewriters. White collar jobs are roughly 2:1 in preponderance over blue collar manual labor in this society and gaining. I don't have to talk about the rapidity with which imagery and information goes back and forth by telecommunication. There was nothing, absolutely nothing, like this even as recently as 10 years ago. All art and architecture is now at our fingertips through the medium of the video-disc and the video-cassette. No, that's not an overstatement: if it is, the Jean Paul Getty Foundation will soon prove me correct.

Therefore, the "aura" that Walter Benjamin wrote about in "The Industrialization of the Work of Art" has completely vanished. The distinction between the "original" and the "reproduction" is non-existent. This is a world, in other words, that would be inconceivable to Plato, Aristotle, Descartes, Swift, McKim, and White. Despite all we have been told, the time is ripe for invention. We do live in the age of the new man and the new woman. He and she do exist, in enormous numbers, more than anyone ever imagined possible before.

I could provide a whole list of new building types never considered by classicism. There is vertical living. There is the computer—which has given birth to a phenomenon largely called "the office of the future"—that means an office in which people never have to leave their terminals (how do you therefore design it to promote human contact?). Nursery schools; single-parent homes; libraries and museums linked by electronics. Now, I hope you understand that I am not arguing on behalf of hi-tech architecture. I believe I heard myself promising sympathy for historicism; further, I claimed that eclecticism is inevitable, considering our condition. The point is that invention can take many forms. It can utilize old forms; it can—and should—provide new shapes, new genres of construction that we have never seen before.

Historicism defined as the playful and inventive use of architectural precedent is not only inevitable but acceptable. Historicism seen as ideology, as the World of God—that is to say, revivalism—is not. Thank you.

# Frame of Mind: Interpreting Jasper Johns

By Marjorie Welsh

Leo Steinberg's pioneering essay on Jasper Johns<sup>1</sup> is exceptional for confessing the author's bewilderment, and for treating his own doubt as the subject of inquiry. Steinberg's difficulty in understanding Johns' stony-faced targets and shy numbers, he tells us, is largely defensive; his is no more and no less than the typical philistine reaction toward unknown art. But unlike most threatened viewers, he finds his own doubt exhilarating. For this art historian—whose expertise ranges from Borromini's San Carlo alla Quattro Fontana, written up as his Ph.D., to Picasso's revamping of Delacroix—comes to Johns armed with both an intrepid intellect and a cargo of styles at his disposal, yet finds himself routed. For once he has encountered something genuinely strange. For Steinberg to confess his bewilderment is, in effect, for him to declare Johns an original.

Beyond this, "Jasper Johns: The First Seven Years of His Art" is interesting for its groping description of the art. His phenomenological jottings carry Steinberg further than he might have gone relying on his favorite intellectual preconceptions. As a result, rather than a failure of nerve, the essay is exemplary in its intellectual receptivity—in its capacity to respect first aesthetic encounters.

Since 1962, when Steinberg wrote his essay, critics of an unusually wide range of intellectual assumptions have added their voices to the interpretation of Johns. It is fascinating that critics who would otherwise ideologically annihilate each other all want to lay claim to him. Discourse on Dan Flavin, for instance, is not so contentious or so spread in range. Even the writing on Willem de Kooning is relatively unanimous in explaining the meaning of that artist's painterly abstractions. But even a cursory survey of the literature reveals a strong urge by varied critics either to possess Johns or to convert him to their special brand of modernism, and if this phenomenon is not unique to Johns, it seems especially true of him. The complexity of the issues Johns raises, and the ambiguity with which he handles them, only fan critical conjecture about the meaning of his art and its place in art history.

A quarter century of discourse has produced much more insight and illumination than ultimate clarification of his art and, in the process, a considerable degree of intellectual projection. By now, the intentional object of thought and desire (in Brentano's terms) projected onto Johns looms quite large. Whereas once the "Flags" and "Maps" were dismissed as Neo-dada, now the stylistic Fountains of Youth Johns' art seems to promise are Impressionism, Symbolism, Cubism, and also a naive realism—styles that reflect critics own intellectual preoccupations as much as they explain Johns' art. More often than not, critics adopting one of these stylistic positions construe the rest not as legitimate alternatives but as fierce competition, with the idealists who interpret Johns' art as Symbolist largely ostracized by the "realists" who see his art derived from Impressionism or Cubism—both idealist and realist camps of critics signaling through their position on Johns their exclusive vision of art history. A survey of some of the major positions—and projections—will demonstrate this.

Most critics tacitly agree that while Johns' painting is cerebral, it is not strictly Conceptual, for one cannot imagine his "seminar on ideas" in art conducted without the sensuous art object. From this, a rough consensus among some critics arises. As difficult as Johns is to classify, if they had to choose Johns' essential stylistic affinity, Max Kozloff, writing early, and David Shapiro, writing late, would anchor Johns in Symbolism; however else they disagree, they basically concur on this. In his monograph written in 1967, Max Kozloff dubs Johns "a reverse Symbolist":

The *fin de siècle* sensibility postulated a coalescence of mind charged into matter. Between the Symbolist's sensing of objects in the outer world, and his awareness or knowledge that he senses, there is an ambiguity which no instrument is better to explore than art.<sup>2</sup>

At one point in his argument, Kozloff appeals to Albert Aurier, the critic who found a way of talking about Gauguin's and Van Gogh's drastic visual inventions. In appealing to Aurier while discussing Johns, whose art he characterizes as Symbolist, Synthetic, Decorative, and Ideological too, Kozloff has in mind not the visual heat of these painters but the peculiar imaginative leap from manifest pigment and brushwork to latent meaning that the symbol embodies if it is doing its job effectively:

... in this contextual mingling of sense data and mental construct, the real aims were impossible of fulfillment and art would always be striving to express the logically inexpressible.<sup>3</sup>

What is germane to Johns and what is Kozloff's projection? To winnow one from the other is to try to separate the most universal characteristic of Johns' art from the art itself. An example: if *Target with Four Faces* and *Tennyson* elude logic (although a logical formal reading emerges on scrutiny), *Fool's House* and *According to What* are intellectually straightforward paintings about practice and about artistic rhetoric. Hasn't Kozloff projected mystery onto fundamentally divergent kinds of mentality? Perhaps, but while he has let such distinctions slip by, Kozloff has caught the major one: that Johns' art is about complex ideas belied by simple-minded appearances. The spectrum of experience that obtains between surfaces and depths, between said and unsaid utterances, between the inert conventions of visual language and the creative meaning they body forth—this uneasy situation, so basic to Johns' vision, is the one Kozloff has deemed evidence of his affinity with Symbolist art.

Given his art historical training under Joshua Taylor at the University of Chicago, Kozloff's approach to Johns is not altogether surprising. Taylor writes on the emergence of Post-Impressionism,

To free the eye from traditional formal preconceptions was a notable step, but once the relationship between eye and mind was considered not fixed but subject to investigation, there was no reason to suppose that the more venturesome artists would be content with what they came to consider mindless perception, in which the eye never challenged the mind.<sup>4</sup>

Taylor's characterization of Post-Impressionism may be standard, but it also supplies Kozloff with an aesthetic disposition toward emphasizing the creative friction between intellect and sensation.

Proof of this love of intellectual strife may be found in Kozloff's review of Edgar Wind's *Art and Anarchy*, a book seen as contributing to our awareness of "the problem of our fluctuating consciousness of art." "If the French have been poetic and speculative," Kozloff further writes, "the Anglo-Germans are historical and psychological, and thus bring their readers infinitely closer to an awareness of the reciprocal paradoxes of their aesthetic experience."<sup>5</sup> Admirable here is Kozloff's attempt to preserve the antagonism of the cultural opposition between French and German viewpoints at full strength even as he acknowledges the German virtues of Wind. A true dialectician, Kozloff does not caricature the intellectual rivalry between these cultures. His advocacy of cultural drama is easy to miss, however, since he casts his own critical role so much more modestly.

Indeed, criticism's merit lies exactly in the fact that it is neither a work of art nor a response, but something much rarer—a *rendering* of the interaction between the two. Best, then, that it reconcile itself to virtual rather than actual meaning, the ambiguity of symbolic reference as opposed to the pidgin clarity of signs.<sup>6</sup>

If Kozloff's notion of criticism values the mingling of imaginative mind and the sense data of paint, is it any wonder that he respects a painter who performs that quintessentially critical function? Putting it another way, even though Kozloff bestows higher praise on Rauschenberg for being not only the more imaginative artist but also the best of the younger generation,<sup>7</sup> his high regard for Johns' "richly thought out"<sup>8</sup> art may well be founded in a feeling of personal rapport with the speculative cast of mind of this artist.

In his monograph on Johns, Kozloff brusquely dissociates himself from the "humanists" Leo Steinberg and David Sylvester. Penalized by moral critics for being merely evocative or associative, almost aimlessly interpretive,<sup>9</sup> Kozloff is not only willing to classify but to evaluate Johns, and in a low-key way he is penetrating in these matters. Moreover, he sets limiting conditions on his conviction: if he refuses to be doctrinaire about Symbolist commitment, neither does he blindly adopt Symbolism's tendencies towards mysticism; and however predisposed to mind, Kozloff is not bamboozled by the intellectual pretensions and unmitigated liberality of the take-it-or-leave-it play ethic that Conceptual artists claim, as an intellectual scuffle in the pages of *Artforum* would later reveal.<sup>10</sup>

Nowhere does David Shapiro, in his 1984 essay accompanying Johns' drawings<sup>11</sup> declare Johns a Symbolist, but Shapiro's own appeals to authority lean heavily on William Blake, Hölderlin, Novalis, and Johns' "great precursor" Albert Pinkham Ryder—Romantic visionaries who from a certain point of view might be said to presage Symbolist poetics. These, together with the great Symbolist Freud, comprise a curious list of artistic colleagues as subjective as any attached to Johns. But for this very reason, Shapiro's own investment in Johns is clear. The thought behind the surface suggests a link between Ryder and Johns; the philosophical tropism of Hölderlin's sensuous nature may be the associative connection with Johns. However causally remote, however historically far-fetched, Shapiro's wish to see Johns in league with the visionary poets and painters is not so far removed from Kozloff's basic stylistic analysis. In Shapiro's view, Johns' thought-paintings show an allegiance with Symbolist art both in their sentimental equivalences of the inner world of the psyche and also in their display of the mind of matter. Behind all this, Shapiro assumes that, far from shedding its Romantic origins, art-for-art's-sake is most valid if brought into being by the artist as a seer and prophet.

Schiller tried to convince Goethe of Hölderlin's worth, and failed, partially because Hölderlin's poetic excesses were unintelligible in terms of Goethe's own poetic goals. At the very least, the artist of true merit is singular, and Shapiro does not want this point lost on viewers who erroneously believe that Johns' visual commonplaces reduce him to an artistic drone. It may be too much to say that Shapiro believes, like Hölderlin, that God is in all actuality, but he writes as though he believes that at least it is possible and valid to regard all actuality transcendently—darkly, but transcendently: "In the wind, the flag is full of noise," Shapiro quotes Hölderlin.<sup>12</sup> His own reading of Johns recalls Paul de Man on the Romantics:

The violence of . . . turmoil is finally appeased by the ascending movement recorded in each of the texts, the movement by means of which



the poetic imagination tears itself away, as it were, from a terrestrial nature and moves towards this “other nature” mentioned in Rousseau, associated with the diaphanous, limpid and immaterial quality of light that dwells near to the skies.<sup>13</sup>

For Shapiro, Romantically driven art is absolutely meaningful. The late poems of Hölderlin—written when discouraged from writing a poetry that would ecstatically embrace Hellenism, and after the poet was even thwarted from teaching Greek, are lyrics, consequently, in which Achilles “has died and is lost to me”—lyrics filled with meaning precisely because they are fragmentary and syntactically ambiguous remnants of a life. If Shapiro dwells so much on this kind of poetry, it is evidently to assert a stylistic link between these poetic fragments and the modernist shards in Johns. It is furthermore through his syntactical gaps and cross-overs, Shapiro would maintain, that Johns expresses the *meaningfulness*, not *meaninglessness*, of certain ineffable domains.

Shapiro, whose own orphic poems are irrationally radiant, is evidently invested in the azure—whether as sought by Hölderlin or as invented by Mallarmé. On one hand, Shapiro projects this artistic goal onto Johns; on the other, he performs art in his criticism, with an aphoristic articulation made possible by the small library of official biographies on Johns published prior to Shapiro’s own study. In his monograph on Johns, peppered with references from Freud to Shklovsky, Shapiro proceeds, not merely to explicate Johns but to assimilate him to what he calls “a radical pluralism,”<sup>14</sup> on the assumption that since archivists of Johns have and will take care of that, there’s no need to repeat their efforts. “The function of poetry is to express articulated response to the Deity,”<sup>15</sup> said about Hölderlin, also applies to Shapiro’s view of Johns. In an art scene of simple-minded and shallow projects, few artists approach Johns’ highly articulate and articulated response. Shapiro may be exaggerating his case for Johns as a visionary poet among artists but, in my view, specific works by Johns are poetic in just the way Shapiro wishes the entire oeuvre to be.

Both Kozloff and Shapiro admire Johns’ art for its intellectual and spiritual strenuousness. To be provocative, a partisan of Johns might say that it is not that Johns is difficult; it is that other artists are too easy. Moreover, difficulty is—or used to be—a term of praise, with reference to art that would resist all facile engagement; whether or not a particular canvas advertises the agon of physical process, it reveals a metamorphosis of thought embedded in the product. The most significant art frustrates artistic expectations, and, if truly ground-breaking causes a radical conceptual renovation of our notion of art. In George Steiner’s understanding of the term, difficulty at its most ambitious is conceptual originality, and as such marks the greatest artist’s highest aspiration. It is the denial of difficulty we now see embraced by artists who have joined the entertainment industry. Critics undistracted by the marketplace, however, construe style as something entirely different from trends, or idiosyncratic manner for that matter; they admire Johns for his attempt to address theories of painting on the most conceptually ambitious level.

Not all difficulty is so worthy. Since mystification is often mistaken for mystery, perhaps it is appropriate to declare that, just as Heidegger was over-

protective of Hölderlin's "unsaid" utterances, so are art critics protective of Johns' difficulty. To rely on George Steiner once more, some of the difficulty installed by Johns may be tactical, a deliberate distancing designed to keep tourists or bureaucrats away. While we value such alienation, it may also intimidate any who would question the ideational premise of Johns' art. The difficulty that is intelligensia's appetite and the non-intellectual's phobia does not sit well with everybody. While to Shapiro difficulty simply means doing one's best, to Harold Rosenberg difficulty is misconceived if it is premised on ideas rather than feelings.

Rosenberg's criticism of Johns' art reflects this. Devoted to Baudelaire and Valéry, Harold Rosenberg is a late Romantic paradoxically distressed by Symbolist aesthetics. Compared to Kozloff, at any rate, Harold Rosenberg is decidedly resistant to Symbolism. Throughout his writing career he maintains that the essential transaction of art, no matter how intelligent, does not take place between sense data and mental construct but rather in the imaginative metamorphosis of feeling.

Given this, it is fascinating to read Rosenberg's two essays on Johns, one written for *Vogue* in 1964, the other written for *The New Yorker* in 1977, a year before the critic's death. It may come as a surprise to anyone rereading the early piece that this admitted crumudgeon toward usurpers of Abstract Expressionism is deeply absorbed in Johns' art and tentatively hopeful for his future. In the early essay, "Things the Mind Already Knows," Rosenberg gives a patient textual reading of Johns' work and does not think the artist too scholastic for all the richness of aesthetic discourse packed into his hermetic compositions. Independently of Kozloff (who also reviewed Johns in 1964), Rosenberg asserts that the stylistic point of reference for Johns' formative works lies in Symbolism, albeit a heavily qualified Symbolism:

In bringing the earlier [Abstract Expressionist] art to bear on his readymade symbols, Johns, however, expelled its metaphysical and psychological essence. Whereas the older artist, having inherited through Freud and Surrealism the Symbolist conception of art as part mirror image, part enigma, spoke of "getting into the canvas," Johns stepped resolutely back . . . . The adventurer or autobiographer in paint has been replaced by the strategist of ends and means.<sup>16</sup>

Drawn to the Talmudic mentality of Johns' art and its fine discriminations of meaning, even going as far as to say the "most joyous effects have been obtained by juggling the clichés of depth and flatness,"<sup>17</sup> Rosenberg nevertheless cannot fully endorse the artist. He cannot forgive Johns for choosing the readymade images he does, which is tantamount to "relocating of art within the mind of the public."

The article published by Rosenberg at the time of the Johns retrospective thirteen years later begins with an epigraph by Baudelaire that announces the critic's own aesthetic expectations and the source of his ultimate disillusionment with Johns.

What is pure art according to the modern idea? It is the creation of an evocative magic, containing at once the object and the subject, the world external to the artist and the artist himself.<sup>18</sup>

Relative to Abstract Expressionism, Rosenberg argues, Johns produces art “completely manageable by the artists. . . . No more romantic fumbblings, supported by declarations that ‘when I am in my painting, I’m not aware of what I’m doing.’ No more pretensions of invading the Unknown. No more self-expression.”<sup>19</sup> Rosenberg’s ambivalence toward this detachment from sentiment is palpable. On the one hand, he respects Johns’ critique of fraudulent feeling; on the other hand, he disavows Johns’ wish for removal of emotion from art. To a renewed admiration for the early flags, targets, and numbers, Rosenberg now adds praise for *Weeping Woman* for “arousing feeling through color.”<sup>20</sup> More surprising to those who believe Rosenberg wholly impervious to Johns, he responds to *Untitled*—a triptych of hatching, flagstones, and assembled casts of limbs—for evincing “an arbitrariness far exceeding that produced by Abstract Expressionist inwardness, since inwardness imposes necessities that tend toward an order.”<sup>21</sup> Just when one would expect Rosenberg to be most rigid, he produces a glorious insight into the ulterior purpose of a “strategy,” redeeming arbitrariness in just the way in which the art was effective for Kozloff and other partisans of Johns all along.

The 1977 article is by turns exasperating and poignant. As a loyal defender of radical Abstract Expressionism, Rosenberg put his entire faith in gesture and color as authentic bearers of feeling. From his point of view we might say that Johns is a lapsed Symbolist—where is Valéry’s rhythm curved through a feeling? For the same reason, Rosenberg discredits much else. His life-long disgust with art that compromises its difficulty by making itself accessible to mid-cult values (values his friend and cultural nemesis, Dwight Macdonald, cannibalizing Bible movies, promoted) helps explain why Rosenberg considers Johns to have betrayed his personal integrity because he works with public images. In doing this, Rosenberg willfully ignores the difference between public subject matter and the unofficial, philosophical content that is Johns’ concern.

Lawrence Alloway, adopting a semiotic interpretation of Johns’ so-called Pop art, fathoms this distinction completely, and refuses to assign things the mind already knows to impulses of the philistine.<sup>22</sup> Most critics, including Alloway, value Johns’ difficulty and his resistance to habitual experience. Steinberg, Kozloff, and Shapiro have, each in his own way, taken difficulty to mean the breaking down of public language—a tradition since the Symbolists and Cubists. If anything, Johns has been accused by critics of being hermetic, interested only in the close reading of signs; it is a tacit assumption of Johns’ (and of many modernist artists and critics) that taking any image at face value reveals rather the habit of obtuse and gross reading of signs common to popular literature and art but well outmoded by now. Poster-sized emotions and events that manipulated the public were Baroque art’s concession to secular communication of the sacred, but they could not be further from Johns’ project. That project, thanks to the legacy of art history, can presuppose an inherited visual literacy—if not total mastery—of visual, emotional, and intellectual meaning.

The contention over difficulty indicates that even among critics employing “difficulty” as an honorific, disagreement reigns. While some critics who be-

lieve art is nothing if it is not a product of strenuous and sensitive articulation, other critics contend this sort of difficulty may be considered an excess of imagination (if not a kind of obscuratism). And while some critics demand of art conceptual originality, others disparage any art “contaminated” by ideas. Difficulty, irony, doubt, negation, and other concepts fought over by ethical and aesthetic critics may be largely gone from the current discourse on Johns, but wherever encountered, these terms are sure to mark a source of intellectual tension among critics. Even the meaning of the seriousness of Johns’ brushwork is questioned. If the deliberateness of Johns’ brushwork is salutary for Kozloff, the same deliberately painted surface is for Rosenberg an index of aridity and proof of a lack of emotional core. Kozloff might respond that this dryness reflects Johns’ indication to us of his strong commitment to the speculative French branch of modernism, not the psychological German line of descent. Curiously, the battle between poetic and speculative, versus historical and psychological, impulses is a current obsession in the minds of critics closely associated with French formalism.

Until recently, most critics writing on Johns, including Michael Crichton, Richard Francis, and Roberta Bernstein—official biographers presumably advised closely by the artist—show Johns to be an unrepentant modernist addressing issues of representation, perception, and all that pertains to form. Of the “unofficial” writers, Barbara Rose and Rosalind Krauss similarly elevate the notions of space, surface, and medium—in tacit agreement with Roger Fry that in “classic” art, form expresses content. Although on actual examination, their criticism—Rose’s especially—is not so strictly formal as their ideological enemies assume, their early articles on Johns conceive his style along traditionally French lines.

Rose’s essential argument is that the best way to grasp the meaning of Johns’ art is to appreciate fully the implications of his rejection of both the abstraction and the expressionism in Abstract Expressionism. Turning away from this kind of painting leads Johns to bond with a very different modern style. However historically remote, the materialist touch and surface of Impressionism, contends Rose, are the ingredients crucial to Johns’ style now:

Moreover, the rich brushstrokes making up their surfaces were not the broad uneven arm swings of action painting, but identical units, methodically applied with equal pressure over the entire surface. Thus, not only the facture but the physical character of the surface, with its sensuous impasto, was reminiscent of mature Impressionism—the original source for the all-over style in painting.<sup>23</sup>

So for Rose, Johns’ manner of painting flags, targets, and numbers represents “the coalescing of two forms of realism: ‘the literalist’ realism of abstract art as well as that of representational art,” with Cézanne and the “philosophical realism” of Mondrian as necessary intermediaries.<sup>24</sup> Although in Rose’s scheme Duchamp makes a cameo appearance, it is a crucial one. What Johns learned from Duchamp, she notes, is never to repeat himself, and toward that end he changes the context of art, for by changing context he creates new meaning. Each new context reveals a different aspect or facet of Johns’ dominant

themes: mimesis, space, time and memory, and their complex interrelationships.<sup>25</sup>

Compared to John Rewald's notion of fugitive atmosphere and light, Rose's definition of Impressionism is decidedly of the earth. Her view brings to mind Roger Shattuck's scientific reading of late Monet. Rejecting the subjective "naive impressionism," Shattuck believes that

Monet approached the painting of *matter itself*, matter so thoroughly penetrated by his eye as to appear as field, as lines of force, dissolved into energy in a way comparable to Einstein's scientific insight that matter is convertible to energy.<sup>26</sup>

Aligning Johns with Impressionism seems forced, but by doing this Rose intends to show Johns' distance from the transcendent spirituality and personal emotion inspiring the Abstract Expressionists. In her view, Johns is anti-idealist, and certainly anti-romantic. Without saying so, she subscribes to Linda Nochlin's assertion that the pigment and surface of Realism finds its analogue in Impressionism and subsequent styles. If invested in the radical all-over composition made by the paint that Jackson Pollock flung across canvas, she also swears by the centrality of *matière* to the history of modern art. As for Johns, (*contra* Krauss), he does not rake "the analytic Cubist grid with all-over structure of late Monet,"<sup>27</sup> but through the literalist realism of paint is "the nature of representation dissected, analyzed."<sup>28</sup> In any event, Rose's own commitment to the lineage of Courbet may explain her need in recent articles to link Johns' hatched canvases comprised of rotated and reversed squares, to John Gibson's studies in perception rather than to the avant-garde structures of aural and visual serial composition by which all-over field painting is profoundly redefined. Unfortunately, in doing so, she nearly squanders her best contribution to the critical understanding of Johns. Still, in referring to Gibson's major theme, the relationship of memory to perception, Rose does reveal her susceptibility to the cognitive content behind perceptual facts.

At any rate, Rose believes that the key to Johns' style of painting is not Symbolist idealism but the realism informing the material sensation of Impressionism. Nothing short of the meaning of modernism is at stake here. For Rose, the metaphysics and technology of idealism is simply off limits, a throwback to the 19th-century system of values that modernist artists of the 20th century have shed—even if art critics have not.

In my view, Rose is the most straightforwardly analytical of all the critics, and in her own way, the least intellectually intimidated by received stylistic notions of Johns. Undistracted by associative resonance (the sensitive associations inspiring Shapiro to criticism that is brilliant and creative, if scattershot—answering art with art, so to speak), Rose goes straight for the essential topic or organizing principle behind Johns' art. Yet at the same time she is not immune to anxious justification of art she believes is great even if she is desperate to justify an embarrassing aspect of its origins. I detect such desperation in her revised analysis of Johns.<sup>29</sup> Explaining Johns' style, Rose contends, must take into account John's indebtedness to American *trompe l'oeil* realism. "This response derives not from Symbolist or Cubist aesthetics but from fundamen-

tal American attitudes towards illusion as a trick."<sup>30</sup> To understand Johns is to realize that he is

a provincial painter whose ideas regarding illusion were determined largely by limited experience with local sources. The impact of Duchamp and Wittgenstein on such a mind was to bring its potential for abstraction into line with modernist aesthetics.<sup>31</sup>

Rose calls Johns a naive realist. At once an audaciously candid appraisal of his autodidactic origins and a plea for Johns' admittance into the canon of modernism, this tag suggests that Rose is straining to find a way of redeeming Johns' figurative art by rationalizing *trompe l'oeil* as ultimately modernist. "The world is my representation," said Schopenhauer, in a statement that influenced Wittgenstein's picture theory of reality and which was the august precursor of his concern that language, while adequate for expressing fact, is nevertheless deficient for expressing ethical situations. Although illusion is only one of many calibrations of representation featured in Johns' nuanced and exhaustive scale of visual meaning, critics committed to abstraction are worried by representational art. They must therefore find a way of living with the illustration that Johns breaks down into formal elements and scuffs up with paint.

Rosalind Krauss is the author of a 1965 article<sup>32</sup> on which Kozloff based much of his book and which Rose felt impelled to refute, so it ought to be credited with initiating discourse on Johns in a major way. For her own part, Krauss roots Johns in Cubism, not for reasons of multiple perspective—the spatial consequence of Cézanne's rotating point of view that Johns is known to admire—but for flatness, the issue of non-illusionist realist space interpreted radically. But rather than dwell on her acceptance of Michael Fried's Greenbergian explanation of Johns' style, I want to draw attention to Krauss' provocative reassessment of Johns in 1976.<sup>33</sup> Remarkable here is Krauss' attempt to cope with a body of work that had drastically altered since she wrote on him previously.

Krauss observes that while the shifting relations between illusion and non-illusion are surely intrinsic to Johns' Flag series, later work shows a layering of other concerns: practice (*Fool's House*), the morphology of representation (*Decoy*), and so forth. Even so, she argues, no matter that he has broadened his subject, Johns' unwavering strategy has always been to distance an image from its source in life, and it is for this reason that his art has been essentially ironic. Starting with the hatched paintings, however, he dropped the ironic mode altogether, and from this point on his work has been about history.

In what sense does Krauss intend this? She seems to mean that in the hatched paintings *Weeping Woman* and *Scent*, references to Picasso's and Pollock's abstract notions of space are manifestly direct. "Picasso declared that the longing for depicting depth was to be the major problematic of a modern style."<sup>34</sup> Johns' hatching is "less a matter of surface contradictions and paradoxes, . . . [instead] seeming to bow to analytic procedures through which recent abstract painting has elaborated the rules and values of the picture surface."<sup>35</sup> Perhaps

Johns' hatching seems direct and sincere because the marks do not appropriate Picasso's space or ironically comment on it, but metamorphose it. From comment to metamorphosis of space—this is how Krauss effects the maneuver from irony to history, forcing parity of two incommensurate terms.

Once again, the apparent unanimity of opinion on Johns between these formalists is illusory. Rose rejects both the Symbolism advanced by Kozloff and the Cubism assumed by Krauss ("the notion that Johns' work of the late fifties is related to Cubism is as false as it is superficial").<sup>36</sup> She believes irony to be intrinsically historical, for a historical perspective is precisely that which is cognizant of its own apprehension. For Johns:

Irony establishes that his duplication or repetition of pre-existing techniques, images, and styles are *not* identical with their sources, from which they are irrevocably alienated by awareness. . . . Irony is not a tool of superficial ridicule for Johns, but an essential means to emphasize his awareness that history repeats itself. . . .<sup>37</sup>

As with his serial 0-9 numerals, each incorporating the previous one, art by Johns is as historical<sup>38</sup> as art by Abstract Expressionists who leave visual spoor of past processes. In another sense, as any artist's retrospective shows, all work can be said to be historical to the extent that it builds on experience accumulated throughout.

However devoted she may be to quarantining esthetics from ethics, Barbara Rose notes in passing the "difficulty" or "negation" by which Johns proves his "commitment to going against the grain instead of with the traffic . . . and the dialectical ethos of modernism . . . leading to the condition of permanent doubt."<sup>39</sup> Rose's special pleading notwithstanding, the idea of irony as an existential term for the path of most resistance is bound to be found wanting in Johns by critics for whom the ethical self is art's essential project. Krauss, for her part, in her recent article on Johns only mentions in passing the ironic legacy of Kierkegaard, as if to pay homage to this ethical notion of irony but ultimately discount it. In fact, she ignores the ethical implications of irony because it is irrelevant to her purpose. A glance in the direction of Kierkegaard suffices, for Krauss assumes an aesthetic rather than ethical meaning of irony: not the self-imposed task of living the difficult life in art, but Romantic irony's "rapid fluctuation of feeling" (in Wylie Sypher's phrase) is the source for Johns' kind of ambiguity. Not finite or restricted to a specific image, the irony is infinite, demanding constant critical vigilance. Rose calls irony a modernist theme; rejecting the implications of content, Krauss assigns to irony a formal role. For her, Johns manages well enough without critics imputing existential intention to him. Questioning the received meaning of images, Johns undermines the visual cliché by forsaking its intended sense, and breaking down, negating and reconstituting new meaning by playing with its formal elements.

Irony is a loaded term. Invoking irony, all too many critics conjure an image of the artist as philosophical, and, indeed, partisans of Johns are in danger of projecting onto him the rank of philosopher simply because his art is critical. A critical stance is not necessarily profound, but to my knowledge no critic

has cross-examined Johns' irony in detail to determine whether it holds up under scrutiny, without resorting to the easy attack: to dismiss aesthetic irony categorically, as being merely a tease. Irony is such a vague term because it has come to represent any of a variety of self-critical or qualified statements.<sup>40</sup> Nevertheless, our sense of modernism depends on this misreading.<sup>41</sup> Irony is a kind of aesthetic principle of simultaneous contrast employed to identify modern art's self-consciousness, its infinite inquiry into art's own intellectual and formal assumptions.

As for Krauss, I suspect that underlying her forced antithesis of irony and history is an obligation inherited from modernism. The ideology of modernism is on record as being liberated from the suffocating obligations of tradition and the contingency of history—our problem, says Nietzsche, is that of “remembering too well.” For Krauss, who sees herself devoted to the cause of modernism and applauds jettisoning the past, history is surely suspect. Unacceptable is the notion of history as a mere chronicle of events; plot—not story—marks the development of culture. Given her aversion to history, why does she suddenly espouse it? If Krauss proposes that with Johns history supersedes irony, perhaps it is the influence of Hayden White's tropological model of history that led her to do so. White finds the historian's task essentially ironic: for unless one is to be a mere compiler of documents, one must treat these primary sources as if they do not mean what they say.<sup>42</sup> Even so, the trope of irony is potentially superseded by other modes of awareness:

If it can be shown that irony is only one of a *number* of possible perspectives on history, each of which has its own good reason for existence on a poetic and moral level of awareness, the Ironic attitude will have to be deprived of its status as the *necessary* perspective from which to view the historical process.<sup>43</sup>

Krauss' attachment to White's ideas may not be the only explanation for her lurching from irony to history. Perhaps, too, by appealing to a historian who comprehends history from a tropological perspective, Krauss can arm herself against those who, like the Marxist historian Fredric Jameson, charge Structuralists (as Krauss claims to be) with “linguistic projection.” With White's spatial organization of temporal concerns backing her, Krauss feels free to appropriate temporal structures for Johns' spatial concerns. Moreover, she has shown that she can co-opt the term *history*—the key term utilized by the intellectual opposition—without relinquishing her basic formalist point of view. No one has a patent on that concept, she seems to say, not even those who claim exclusive ownership of the dialectical process.

Above all else, Krauss' shift from irony to history is symptomatic of a general trend now within the artistic community by which one sees a realignment of intellectual coordinates from those of space to time. Thanks to White, but also to Derrida and other literary theorists who urge that contingency be reintroduced into the intellectual models of history, Krauss and other art critics invent a framework for passing from spatial to temporal modes of thinking about art. Barbara Rose is also shifting her stance on Johns. Whereas in 1970 she mentioned memory only in her thematic list, now, in *Souvenir*, Rose's



monograph-in-progress on Johns, memory and time presumably will replace mimesis and space in her interpretative thematics.

Among the consequences of this ideological shift to history, conventional art history may again come back into critical favor, for after all, its discipline almost always includes explanation of causes as well as period history and ideology of the art object screened in the dark. The neo-marxist art writers Fred Orton and Charles Harrison make a plea for studying Johns' art as a product of post-war political climate and the social circle of the 1950s to compensate for the formal reading that has dominated criticism of Johns,<sup>44</sup> but they plea as if ignorant of the practices of conventional art history which, since Alois Riegel, has given us social milieu and period values along with stylistic analysis.

Art history also offers the inclusive approach Joseph Masheck practices. To him, history upholds a kind of an Eliotic sense, synonymous with that past which the present knows. His stylistic analyses often take the form of a presentation of an esthetic idea realized through time, reenacting the idea's creative potential, so to speak. Quick to mark the "greatness" of Johns' hatched paintings when they first appeared, Masheck wrote not an evolutionary account of an idea, but a pluralistic reconsideration of Johns that included the artist's connection to Duchamp, and even suggested a possible connection with Ad Reinhardt in the cross-format created by the paintings' internal boundaries.<sup>45</sup> Without discussing format's particular relevance for Johns, however, Masheck lets himself in for the accusation of theological projection. Thoroughly conversant with Reinhardt's spiritual proclivities,<sup>46</sup> Masheck could very easily have grounded this format of transcendence in the shared interest that Johns and Reinhardt sustain in "non-action" painting: the principle of passivity that remains "of" action even as it seems to deny it. Less likely allied to the Christian Passion than to the Zen way, and yoked to an avant-garde of permanent resistance, the hidden cross in Johns' hatchwork is, nevertheless, a vehicle for extending the passive resistance to "action painting." Rose is an anthologist of Reinhardt's writings, but it is noteworthy that Masheck, not Rose (forced by her ideology of realism to repress idealistic tendencies to Johns) seizes the opportunity to suggest this spiritual dimension.

In any event, now that critics are abandoning structures of space for structures of time, history is being invoked as the sacred term. But art history is only one of several historical modes now being invoked by art critics. From narrowly sociological to broadly tropological modes of thought, art criticism is avidly appropriating varied notions of history. As a consequence, we can expect to see territorial wars fought over time just as we have seen them fought over space. Critics have already begun to reinterpret artists' work in light of this intellectual competition, and Johns, crucial to our art chronicle, is bound to be subject to critical revision by critics representing each mode of historical consciousness.

Thanks to a relativist view of history, once idiosyncratic notions of Johns now seem less so. Shapiro's approaching Johns by way of Hölderlin's sense of active memory is less strange now that Narcissus is being kicked upstairs to be replaced by Mnenosyne. Donald Kuspit's short piece on eschatology

in Johns' recent images seems borne out by the literal depiction of skulls and other indices of Heideggerian mortality—that is to say, the principle of time-in-us. Interestingly enough, some critics' historical and psychological biases, once too idiosyncratic to apply, are more relevant now that Johns has shifted his aesthetic concerns. Especially since his "post-modern" phase, Johns' art is overtly historicizing in a way that both reflects current trends and retains stylistic integrity. Rather than mimicking the parade of styles and stylizations (as artists Komar and Melamid do), in quoting Leonardo or Barnett Newman, Johns proposes a meditation on technique, representation, and other obsessions preoccupying him from the start. Characteristically, his Duchampian mentality fits the historicizing fashion to its own aesthetic needs.

A retrospective look at the criticism on Johns reveals a major intellectual split at the start of his career that grows only more complicated with internal discord as time goes on. Speaking to the content of Johns' paintings, not their subject matter, some critics remark on the affinity between them and the thought-paintings created by Symbolists. (Whether the thought is essentially cognitive or spiritual remains open to dispute). Though there are occasional forays into each other's camps, the Symbolist critics whose sources lie in idealism and Romanticism are not on speaking terms with Impressionist and Cubist critics whose final appeal to authority is realism. Many critics consider Rosenberg an ideologue, but that's largely because critics descended from realism find his call for mystery anachronistic in the modern era; to this day, they will say that Rosenberg "got Abstract Expressionism all wrong."<sup>48</sup> Yet from the romantic point of view, of course, the realists are the ideologues, with their insistence on the fixed divinity of space and matter. The ideological war accompanying Abstract Expressionism has not disappeared; it is as entrenched as before, only subtler.

The reason the battle of ideas is subtler now in the criticism of Johns than in the contention over Pollock stems from the inherent complexity of Johns' response to the changing cultural situation around him. Put another way, it is easier to determine the style against which Johns initially reacted than any style with which he subsequently identifies, and while Abstract Expressionism may be the obvious starting point for his own thinking, art history is not exclusively his frame of reference thereafter. Art historical interpretation of Johns is not irrelevant, however. It is simply partial, and it is contingent on the specific phase of Johns' visual thinking (registering certain prevalent culture ideas—existentialism, formalism, gestalt perception, and post-modernism). Throughout his career, style of thought rather than of visual manner has governed the development of Johns' art.

As perverse as it may sound, in my view Kozloff *and* Rose form the indispensable core of Johnsean criticism; the idealist Kozloff penetrating the meaning of Johns and articulating it through the immanentist method of heightened perception, the realist Rose better at analysis in defense of modernist ideology. More than a matter of connoisseurship, the imaginative intellect with which Kozloff explains Johns exemplifies not knowledge, but profound understanding of the art. By the standards of Trotskyite individualism, Kozloff is too liberal for the good of culture. Yet on Johns, Kozloff is the exemplar of

responsible creative criticism: imaginative intellect with which Kozloff explains Johns exemplifies not knowledge, but profound understanding of the art. By the standards of Trotskyite individualism, Kozloff is too liberal for the good of culture. Yet on Johns, Kozloff is the exemplar of responsible creative criticism: imaginative yet relevant, experiential and alive to affect, and most of all, susceptible to the particularity of the specific art work before him. Rose, meanwhile, is the unique analyst among the critics studying Johns. She is the critic most in command of both the theoretical basis for style and the central position of style to art history. For intellectual penetration, no other critic has approached her analysis of the meaning of Johns' mark and the meaning of the formal organization of the hatched paintings. On the other hand, she is absolute in her advocacy of realism. As against the idealism of Kozloff, Rose is more conspicuously principled, but also more doctrinaire than he.

If to many critics, myself included, Johns seems among the very best to arrive after Pollock and de Kooning, this respect is well-founded. Critics track his progress because Johns is one of the few serious artists to emerge after Abstract Expressionism capable of, as Levi-Strauss puts it, "thinking with the medium." Whereas most artists merely vary their initial manner of painting, or change only to gentrify a once radical style originating elsewhere, Johns evinces genuinely tough development, each phase premised on drastically altered principles. This is the conceptual originality to which Steinberg first responded, and it is the ontological difficulty, as George Steiner might say, that distinguishes Johns from the majority of visual practitioners. Because theory, not pulchritude, guides the development of his profoundly aesthetic art, critics are drawn to him. Too important to ignore, even when his art does not conform to the "correct" style or ideology, Johns' painting is an art that irritates viewers—when it does not inspire them—to respond to the nature of the art object afresh.

The critical investment in Johns is immense. Perhaps no better evidence for this exists than the contention by critics and art historians over style, for to assign Johns a style is no less than to shore up a genealogy and proper line of descent through art history. And as Johns shifts the direction of his art, critical investment becomes, if anything, more pronounced, as the arbiters of culture react hysterically or try to rationalize the artistic change with their own intellectual preconceptions. Add to style, difficulty and irony, terms of intellectual currency whose worth and timeliness are reflected in all valiant critical discourse, and one sees proof that critics are brooding about Johns' commitment to modernist values, for it is unthinkable to critics that significant modernist art can be done without regard to them. Finally, critics are projecting even the metaphor of history onto Johns. Now that time is seen as the antidote to the malaise of space, there will be no stopping interpretations of Johns' art that exploit this thematic dimension.

Because Johns responds to issues, critics can interpret his art from several legitimate points of view, but they are also more likely to project onto his work cultural concerns of particular interest to themselves. Stylistic biases jump to the fore, as they do not in the fairly homogenous critical literature on de Kooning. To read art criticism about Jasper Johns is to witness a contest of

paradigms, the contest played out whenever critics are intent upon legislating interpretation of messy, complex events that will become history. The assumption of many critics is that only their paradigm is worthy; they rarely write criticism aware of the fact that one person's history is another's superstructure. But the nature of Johns' complex and shifting art renders that exclusive view absurd. Perspective on Johns is further complicated by our particular moment, when to reread early criticism of Johns is to witness an upheaval in meaning. John Cage was once asked why we should concern ourselves with history. His reply: "To thicken the plot."<sup>49</sup> Coming across this reverberant aphorism in Rosalind Krauss' early article, a reader is likely to feel that these words were prophetically meant for us, today.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup>Leo Steinberg, "Jasper Johns: The First Seven Years of His Art," *Other Criteria* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1972), pp. 17-54.

<sup>2</sup>Max Kozloff, *Jasper Johns* (New York: Harry A. Abrams, 1967), p. 38.

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 41.

<sup>4</sup>Joshua Taylor, *Learning to Look* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1957, 1981), p. 150.

<sup>5</sup>Jacket copy, quoted from Kozloff, *The Nation*, 197, No. 22, December 28, 1963, p. 462.

<sup>6</sup>Kozloff, *Renderings* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1968), p. 10.

<sup>7</sup>*Ibid.*, "Robert Rauschenberg," p. 212.

<sup>8</sup>*Ibid.*, "Jasper Johns," p. 206.

<sup>9</sup>Donald Kuspit, "A Phenomenological Approach to Artistic Intention," *Artforum*, Vol. 12, No. 5, January 1974, p. 50. Joseph Masheck, "Sit-in on Johns," *Studio International*, Vol. LXXVII, No. 916, November 1969, pp. 193-194.

<sup>10</sup>Kozloff, "The Trouble with Art-as-Idea," *Artforum*, Vol. 11, No. 1, pp. 33-37, September 1972. Also Kozloff in reply to Preston Heller and Andrew Menard, "Kozloff's Criticism in Absentia," *Artforum*, Vol. 11, No. 6, 1973, p. 36.

<sup>11</sup>David Shapiro, *Jasper Johns Drawings 1954-1984* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1984).

<sup>12</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 48.

<sup>13</sup>Paul de Man, "The Intentional Structure of the Romantic Image," p. 75, in *Romanticism and Consciousness*, edited by Harold Bloom, 1970, quoted in Richard Unger, *Hölderlin's Major Poetry: The Dialectics of Unity* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1975), p. 238.

<sup>14</sup>In conversation with the author.

<sup>15</sup>Unger, p. 217.

<sup>16</sup>Harold Rosenberg, "Jasper Johns: 'Things the Mind Already Knows,'" *The Anxious Object* (New York: The New American Library, 1966), pp. 142-143.

<sup>17</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 144.

<sup>18</sup>Rosenberg, "Twenty Years of Jasper Johns," *The New Yorker*, 53, December 26, 1977, p. 42.

<sup>19</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>20</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 45.

<sup>21</sup>*Ibid.*

- <sup>22</sup>Lawrence Alloway, *American Pop Art* (New York: Collier Books and Whitney Museum of American Art, 1974), pp. 52-75.
- <sup>23</sup>Barbara Rose, "The Graphic Work of Jasper Johns: Part I," *Artforum*, 8, No. 9, May 1970, p. 39.
- <sup>24</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 42.
- <sup>25</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 43.
- <sup>26</sup>Roger Shattuck, *The Innocent Eye* (New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 1984), p. 232.
- <sup>27</sup>Rose, "Graphic Work," p. 39.
- <sup>28</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 41.
- <sup>29</sup>Rose, "Jasper Johns: Pictures and Concepts," *Arts*, 52, No. 3, November 1977.
- <sup>30</sup>Rose, "Decoys and Doubles: Jasper Johns and the Rationalist Mind," *Arts*, 51, No. 9, May 1976, p. 72.
- <sup>31</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 73.
- <sup>32</sup>Rosalind Krauss, "Jasper Johns," *Lugano Review* 1, 1965, pp. 84-113.
- <sup>33</sup>Krauss, "Jasper Johns: The Functions of Irony," *October* 2, Summer 1976, pp. 91-99.
- <sup>34</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 98.
- <sup>35</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 95.
- <sup>36</sup>Rose, "Graphic Work," p. 39.
- <sup>37</sup>Rose, "Decoys," p. 69.
- <sup>38</sup>Rose, "Pictures," p. 159
- <sup>39</sup>Rose, "Decoys," p. 69.
- <sup>40</sup>Wayne C. Booth challenges Cleath Brooks' assumption that all poetry containing incongruities and qualifications is ironic. *A Rhetoric of Irony* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1974), p. 17.
- <sup>41</sup>Duchamp, says Octavio Paz, is profoundly ironic precisely because he is critical.
- <sup>42</sup>Hayden White, *Metahistory* (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 1980), p. 375.
- <sup>43</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 434.
- <sup>44</sup>Charles Harrison and Fred Orton, "Jasper Johns: Meaning What You See," *Art History*, 7, March 1984, pp. 76-101.
- <sup>45</sup>Joseph Masheck, "Coming to Terms with Later Johns," *Historical Present* (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1984), pp. 109-113.
- <sup>46</sup>Masheck, "Two Kinds of Monk: Reinhardt and Merton," *Historical Present*, pp. 91-96.
- <sup>47</sup>Donald Kuspit, "Personal Signs: Jasper Johns," *Art in America* 69, No. 6, Summer 1981, pp. 111-113.
- <sup>48</sup>Rose, in conversation with the author.
- <sup>49</sup>Krauss, "Jasper Johns," 1965, p. 86.

**THE PLURALIST ERA: AMERICAN ART, 1968-1981** by Corinne Robins, New York: Harper and Row, 1984.

Reviewed by Robert C. Morgan

Writing a book about the recent history of art can be a risky and controversial affair. It is almost always a cause for some reaction. Indeed, strong feelings about the art world of the 1970s are not suddenly abated by the emergence of a new decade, or, more correctly, because of a new tendency or *Zeitgeist*. Yet a serious scrutiny of any claims made in the course of research and methodology, including subjective poise, selectivity, and emphasis, is a necessary and challenging task.

A book about the art of the seventies, as perceived through the mainstream of the New York art world, should necessarily account for the fact that certain developments were inevitable, either as an outgrowth or a reaction to those of the sixties, and that these developments would inevitably be compiled, categorized, and interpreted by someone reasonably close to the vast array of activity during these years. Of the critics who represented this "era," Corinne Robins is as likely a candidate as any to have assumed the task of writing about it.

In examining her narrative of the people, places, and events associated with this highly transitional phase in recent art, referred to by some observers as "Pluralism," one might detect some rather misleading assumptions regarding the placement and importance of some of the tendencies discussed. This impeachment, however, may be read as nothing more than a subjective counter-interpretation to the already stated interpretations which the author has provided. Yet for Robins, the description of artists' works and events appears to take precedent over any explicit notion of interpretation. This neutral approach to historical subject matter could be easily mistaken for objective reportage. On the other hand, if history is to have any meaning for us, it will persist in its meaning not because of advanced technologies of storage and retrieval which has given "historical" information its aura of objectivity in recent years, but because there persists a determined aspect to it, a means for synthesizing what we know with what we think about what we know.

While ideas are not treatable the same way that a historian examines facts, both are subject to impingement and occasional distortions of belief. The way in which future historians will comprehend certain claims is not necessarily ours. This latter issue of re-interpretation is equally as inevitable as any first attempt to chronologize a territory previously known to us by way of memory, critical reviews, fragmentary discourse, or the works themselves.

One of the peculiar tasks of an *art* historian, which involves not only specialized research but a specialized methodology as well, in contrast to the mean of a general historian, is that some propensity for theoretical discus-

sion cannot be avoided in structuring one's claims about what one sees and how one may interpret them. While Robins has wisely inserted quotations from critical and some non-critical reviews as they relate to important aspects of an artist's work (including comments quoted from her own reviews), they do not reveal much in the way of a theoretical infrastructure about why certain works were once viewed more significantly than others. The absence of a penetrating theoretical discourse—a clearly determined historical stance—on the multivarious directions taken by this diverse assortment of styles and persuasions is perhaps the most serious fault with the concept of Pluralism, a fault which is unfortunately reflected in Robins' book.

Another problem is the avoidance of what might be termed "a sociology of art" in dealing with the art world entrepreneurship which helped influence the break-up of modernist theory and opened the ideological (and economic) threshold to a plethora of contesting viewpoints. The *business* of Pluralist art, a highly important aspect in the aesthetic assessments of the seventies, is simply not confronted directly. Nothing is mentioned about why some artists were claiming enormously inflated prices during a decade when galleries were opening and closing on a seasonal basis as a result of many complex factors, both internally and externally generated, often due to inadequate backing, retainer fees, and manipulations of arbitrary price structures which simply could not survive the competition. This is not an insignificant factor in coming to terms with the thriving of Pluralist art.

Another important issue not discussed is the rising art school enrollments at the outset of the seventies which resulted in literally thousands of new artists merging into the SoHo art community after every June graduation. Given the impact of the number of artists moving into the metropolitan area, this factor of higher art education and its resulting effect is not insignificant. Also, the fact that these enrollments began to fall drastically in college art departments toward the beginning of the eighties tells an important story about the impact of the economic recessions of the seventies upon high culture, to be sure; but it also alludes to a conflation of media strategies rampant in art world politics and the concomitant professional hype induced by the academic/art world complicity practiced in a select group of art institutions.

One of the most fascinating observations in regard to his era, which Robins neglects to consider, is that "American art"—that is, New York art—ceased to exist in isolation from some very strong European influences. These influences began to appear in the late sixties and continued to accelerate into the early eighties when—lo and behold!—figurative imagery suddenly returned and expressionism began to usurp abstract painting. To discuss the Pluralist era as if it were solely an American cause-and-effect relationship is like discussing video technology as if the Japanese were never involved. It is simply not an accurate assessment of the intercultural dynamics which have influenced the direction of American taste.

By avoiding the issue of cultural cross-pollination, Robins does not reconcile the facts that while New York (with the help of SoHo) had developed into a thriving marketplace for artists, dealers, realtors, and restaurateurs, it had virtually exhausted the possibility of generating a movement of power-

ful ideas—not “new” ideas, which are always abundant in New York, but truly powerful ideas! After Abstract Expressionism, Happenings, Color Field Painting, Pop Art, Minimalism, Earth Art and Conceptual Art, what do we find at the outset of the seventies but “Photo Realism”—hardly a movement worthy of monumental aesthetic proportions, but nevertheless a logical reaction to the seriousness and inventiveness of previous decades; that is, the decades prior to Pluralism. One might also question the duration of the Pluralist era, as stated by Robins, from 1968-1981. Was it, in fact, an era? Or perhaps more of an opening, a widening of the riverbed, a delta of modernism, in which new styles, configurations, and ideas were given allowance to expand and develop, to fracture and specialize, beyond the quartering of a reductive avant-garde situated in the art of the sixties?

In Chapter 1, Robins quotes art critic Kim Levin as saying: “The 1970s has not been just another decade. Something did happen, something so momentous that it was ignored in disbelief: modernism had gone out of style.” While one may sympathize with the notion that modernism as a critical system of belief was vanquished by 1970, does that mean it took the age of modernity that long to phase itself out as well?

Given the thematic structuring of Robins’ book, the chronological development of the various tendencies described is a bit obscured. This is not to suggest that recent history can easily be situated in terms of its linearity—a strictly hypothetical situation which doomed Modernity from its apogee, somewhere between La Belle Epoque and Picasso’s *Les Femmes d’Alger*—thus, credit must be given that Robins does not rationalize a succession of tendencies which, in fact, would prove opposite to the very openness espoused by Pluralism. Still, the fact that 1981 is designated as the end of an era remains questionable. Why 1981 as opposed to say, 1978—the year of two major exhibitions, “The Bad Painting” show at The New Museum and the “New Image Painting” exhibition at the Whitney Museum of American Art? These are mentioned in passing but their significance in directing a shift from late formalism to neo-expressionism is not fully explicated. Later, in the final paragraph of the book, after a discussion of the work of German conceptualist Joseph Beuys, Robins cites the German Expressionist exhibition at the Guggenheim Museum in 1981 as having an “enormous impact” on expressionist painting in New York; but the fact is that expressionist painting had already been well-grounded. If anything, the Guggenheim Exhibition seemed to neutralize the “revolutionary” aspect of the newer work by suggesting that it had all been done before. Robins goes on to say: “In its emphasis on true feeling and real emotion, it was at the very opposite pole from the easy openness of Pluralism—which, in fact, may be why Pluralism began to seem unsatisfactory to many people.” Is this to suggest that the art of the seventies avoided “true feeling and real emotion?” Still the biggest question about Robins’ thesis has to do with an accurate definition of Pluralism—particularly in that she persists in spelling it with a capital “P.” (Curiously, modernism is spelled with a small “m.”) In the chapter called “SoHo and the Seventies,” Robins makes two comments which allude to a definition. The first reads: “Pluralism, with its non-successive, non-heroic populist stance,



is, of course, the very opposite of modernism, and it seems to have arrived almost by default." And secondly: "Pluralism had a quasi-political character." Of the two statements, the second is the most provocative, yet it is also the most unclear.

In Chapter 3, titled "Art and Politics," one would hope to get some answers as to why Pluralism had a "quasi-political character." The content of this chapter does not really penetrate the political structure of the art world, but it does try to distinguish between artists' statements directed toward the politics of the culture-at-large and the mechanisms of the art world. Robins presents and chronicles some extremely vital issues—inequities to women, Black, and other minority artists—but fails to deliver much beyond identifying a few artists who fit these classifications and whose art doesn't fit neatly into other categories designated for the book. The discussions of these artists' works is largely devoted to formal descriptions—with the welcome exception of Nancy Spero whose feminist and humanist content transcends superficial discourse and reaches deep into the heart. The comments of the work of the brilliant sculptor Louise Bourgeois are somewhat annoying in that the Freudian content of her work is passed over much too hastily. Bourgeois was *painting* figurative expressionism decades before the current younger generation of neo-expressionists. Also, the psychological and expressive tendencies of her modular biomorphic sculpture are both powerful and incisive.

The issue of an artist's sex has not ceased to become an issue, and Robins devotes a good portion of this chapter to a detailed account of how women's organizations promoted this idea in the seventies. Even so, when an assessment of an artist's efforts is made solely on the basis of sex, it does tend to undermine the true significance of exceptional artists such as Spero and Bourgeois. To identify the feminist movement with Pluralism is highly problematic, yet the connections are not altogether coincidental, as Robins points out.

Over all, Pluralism is presented not as a political discourse, but a free-trade marketplace, a competitive arena where personalities and quasi-political maneuvering are the constituents. Such art world games are clearly within the purview of both men and women artists. Unquestionably, the male-dominated curatorial structure in major museums and galleries did avoid considering the aesthetic and socio-political content of some important women artists during the seventies by not giving them adequate representation in major exhibitions. This issue is also related to the hiring of women faculty in college art departments, particularly in the studio area, where women students often comprise the majority of undergraduates.

The problem of male dominance in these areas is fundamentally a psycho-cultural one. When this is transferred to an art world microcosm, however, it is best to speak of it in less general and more specific terms. Lack of representation of women artists is the result of specific "political" propensities enjoyed by a specific power structure which is then issued in the form of implicit sexual biases. To discuss the question of art and politics in the seventies would be to analyze this power structure and to disclose the specific motives which have led to its discriminatory policies.

Ironically, one of the major movements of womens' art during the seventies—namely, the feminist performance movement in California—is not even cited in the book. Given the recent documentation and chronologies of some of these events in books by Moira Roth (*The Amazing Decade*, Astro Artz, 1983) and Lucy R. Lippard (*Get the Message?*, Dutton, 1984), it is difficult to see this exclusion of information as an oversight. Once again, the kind of work discussed in Chapter 8, "Photography, Art, and Performance," emphasizes more formalist-oriented art, such as the bifurcated photographs of Eve Sonneman or the photographed installations of Sandy Skoglund, rather than artists whose work signifies more explicit political issues concerning the rights of women. In this category there are numerous artists as well as some very important individual works by women which could have been cited. Given the press coverage, both critical and sensational, of these performance events during the seventies, it is remarkable that such a small segment of the book would be devoted to these rather prominent intermedia activities. Tremendous leaps were made in both photography and video which brought art audiences to the attention of these media in a manner much differently than in previous decades. Robins mentions that the "Bad Painting" exhibition at The New Museum included the photographs of William Wegman, but does not seem willing to explore the ramifications of this choice beyond the reluctance of the show's curator to make categorical sense of it. The role of Conceptualists in bringing photography into the art gallery circuit is not an insignificant shift of priorities. The importance of a gallery, such as Marlborough, deciding to exhibit the work of Richard Avedon was an important seventies breakthrough. The decision of the Museum of Modern Art to show *color* photographs by William Eggleston is also important. Neither of these exhibitions is mentioned in the book.

There are some difficulties and inaccuracies related to the chapter on Conceptual Art which indicate a more journalistic attitude toward the genre rather than a penetrating retrospective overview. In keeping with the reportage of the period between 1968-1972, the hey-day of American Conceptualism, the coverage was often more surreptitious than ontologically engaging; the inability of most critics to understand the Conceptual movement as the most definitive break from Modernism—in fact, a viable alternative to Modernist aesthetics with its own set of criteria—was the great failure of American criticism during this period. The nonchalant defensiveness used to avoid these issues during the hey-day is unfortunately echoed in the neutral, non-committal manner of presentation. As for inaccuracies, Douglas Huebler was not born in 1942, but in 1924—again, hardly a petty distinction. Considering that Huebler was well into his forties when he shifted his thinking from constructivist sculpture to conceptual systems is not incidental, especially when one considers the major impact that this artist's work has had not only among visual artists but photographers as well.

John Baldessari's commitment as an educator and influence on a whole generation of so-called "post-Modernist" image-makers is another point that deserves more serious investigation. The notion of image-appropriation or "quotation" which has been a hallmark of mid-eighties, East Village art, in-

directly inspired by such artists as David Salle and Robert Longo, had its genesis somewhere in the conceptual image-systems (also appropriated) of John Baldessari. It was at the California Institute of the Arts where Baldessari began teaching in 1970, after leaving the University of California at San Diego, where the concept of a "Post-Studio" program in art really achieved its impact.

*The Xerox Book*, sponsored by Seth Siegel and Jack Wendler in 1968, printed in an edition of 1000, was *not* a work "which consisted of several artists' proposals," but a work of seven original artworks in a xerox format by seven artists who were each given 50 pages to execute their ideas. The British group, "Art and Language," from Coventry, England, did not initially publish Joseph Kosuth's essays, "Art After Philosophy, Parts I and II," but instead published his "Introduction by the American Editor" in the second volume of the journal *Art-Language* in 1970.

How Brice Marden's "minimal" paintings can be discussed without some reference to Barnett Newman is an omission difficult to grasp. The inclusion of a reference to Deborah Butterfield's marvelous "stick" horses in the middle of a discussion on the paintings of Susan Rothenberg would appear more a syntactical error than a simplistic analogy based solely on the revival of animal subject matter in making art. In terms of their intentions, the two artists appear on very divergent strata.

There are some interesting strengths about *The Pluralist Era*, one of which is the chapter titled "Earth Sculptures, Site Works, and Installations." In general, Robins' careful balance between the biographical and narrative descriptions of those works which she has chosen to write about is coherent, committed and reflective. In another chapter, there is an excellent discussion on the innovative painting installations of Sam Gilliam, a Washington, D.C. artist, whose contribution to the expanded context of painting paved the way for such artists as Judy Pfaff and a whole flock of "Decorative" artists. There is also a fine statement on another underrated painter, Milton Resnick, whose "purist" style evokes attention to the textural continuity and sensuality of surface. Robins does not, however, distinguish between Resnick's Purism and the earlier Swiss/French style of painting, invented by Le Corbusier and Ozenfant, which carries the same name.

*The Pluralist Era* is a problematic title. Although unstated, it suggests something of a passageway between the aesthetics of Modernism and post-Modernism (although on page 1, Robins suggests that Pluralism and post-Modernism are terms interchangeably used to signify the same thing). It is unclear whether Pluralism is an open-ended ideology or a non-ideology. If it declares itself a non-ideology then the burden of ideological association is entirely contingent upon the manipulations of the marketplace. Where there is no discussion of theoretical concerns, one might assume that Pluralism represents a system of reportage which simply transcribes a disparity of artists' styles as they come flooding into New York galleries and museums. Where there is no hegemony based on real critical significance, all art is subsumed to exist on the same level as if consciousness somehow was unimportant to the way we think and perceive.

Caught between the throes of the inscrutable formalist diatribes published

in *Artforum* through 1978 and the placating vengeance of journalistic tabloids in SoHo, Pluralist "criticism" seemed in lugubrious, if not dire straits. Although Robins identifies the presence of criticism in *The Pluralist Era*, she does not explore the role of criticism sufficiently nor does she adequately identify those critics who associated their names with Pluralism and in some cases have taken credit for the invention of the term. One might consider that the era—indeed, the entire concept—of Pluralism represented the fracture of criticism, occasionally offset by some dogmatic density to assure its constituents that they were on the right track. Modernism may have ended in 1968, but the formalist posture continued to thrive compulsively until the rejuvenation of an expressionist aesthetic forced it underground in the early 1980s.

In the closing passage of the book, Robins appropriately quotes a rather insightful comment made by the painter/photographer Chuck Close: "The seventies was a period nobody much liked, but the artists." What *The Pluralist Era* emphatically lacks is a contextual view of the work under discussion in relation to its support structure. At the time, this kind of discussion may have seemed superfluous and irrelevant; but in retrospect, it is not. If anything, Pluralism needs demystification, not more of the same rehashing of events as if, in themselves, they vindicated the basis of accepted beliefs about specific works. An alternative approach, at this juncture, might be to consider Pluralism as a convenient strategy for expanding the marketplace, through more adept publicity and advertising, thus contributing to the monstrous inflation of contemporary art.

# Contributors

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