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Art Criticism

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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.*

Art Criticism

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Transparencies

By Dan Cameron

I feel that I ought to begin by addressing the subject of our all having a subject to address. You see, I come before you as an authority on contemporary art, yet this is without my having laid claim to this office. Let us say that I maintain a two-pronged performance career, one aspect of which is critical, the other slightly more subjective. I used to perform art criticism and write about the aesthetics of crowd control, but this led to the inevitable crisis about the artistic possibilities of criticism—not to mention the critical possibilities of performance—so today I play the role of hybrid, a man with his thumb in 2 pies.

Allow me to insist that I am not, however, one of the so-called 'creative' school of art critics, those who use art-writing as a substitute for art-making; it's just that life and art both insist on compromises. The art world deliberately sets out to embrace mutually contradictory standards of the severe and the frivolous, of critical integrity and middle-brow pandering. My critical "piece" has thus been an effort to see how artists are bobbing in the ebb and flow of ideas, still rejecting the possibility of communal style lest the close proximity to another artist's work sour the spell of creative inspiration. I found, as one does after a short time, that my personal capacity for art-watching was practically endless. I also discovered that among the metracritical ironies of my situation was an unintended one.

In most critical writing, there is always a subtext which attempts to measure the distance between the world of ideas and the world of beauty. The purpose for this subtext is partly grounded in the nature of writing itself, which cannot be a physical thing, but cannot be pure sensation, either. In art-writing in particular, there is a labor-intensive activity which is based on viewing the lifeblood of creative people. One must be strict enough to insist on standards, yet flexible enough to always see the artist's reality. There is only one rule: unless there is very good evidence that a specific show is quite hopeless *you must see everything possible* (or very nearly so). Otherwise, the only tip to remember is that stylistic themes have a disheartening way of not self-disposing immediately after the fact.

The personalization of issues that is at the center of my writerly nature comes from a belief, or realization, that the pinpointing of artist and art at their exact historico-critical matrix, while an important and sobering mission, may be overrated in terms of its importance to the cause of contemporary art. Most advanced art made by American artists in the mid-80s does not directly address questions of historical precedent so much as it treats all preceding eons of art production as an aesthetic continent of its own, separated from ours by a vast gulf of intention, but easily enough visited on holidays. Many contemporary artists are even puzzled by their own output, so there is more room permitted for instinct. And yet, today's artists seem more keenly aware of their predecessors and colleagues than at any moment in recent memory, and many are brazenly interpreting the past with a splendid worrisome capacity for viewing all art as ancillary to their studio processes. A particular artist I know claims it helps to see history in reverse: we may suffer now from Schnabel, but take heart, for Picasso and Matisse are just around the next bend.

Awareness should not always imply commitment: few artists view history as an entity in need of preservation, since it expends much of its energy as a discipline on self-sustainment. Like the new reigning hero of the New York School, Barnett Newman, contemporary artists have discovered the pragmatic benefits of gesticulating half gamely from behind a wall of verist art-think. The post-modern painting is a shield of style; while jousting with colleagues,the American artist may choose to conceal his or her seriousness, but style will never surrender urbanity. Meanwhile, the critic's role in the age of artist personality cults continues to shift from that of referee to something in between a market analyst and a muckraker. It is left for us to determine the finite point where relentless self-questioning and shameless exhibitionism become the same thing. Nobody, particularly not artists or dealers, seems to need a spokesperson these days—everybody is maneuvering through the seas of nuanced jargon like the hard-boiled technocrats we claim to abhor. What's more, the question can be phrased, does anyone really need to know about Kenny Scharf other than that *someone* has been awaiting his work for a long time.

Our recurrent but unnamed subject seems to be the specific *disenfranchisement* of the voice of criticism, which must question its own legitimacy before going on to suspend disbelief about art. There is no way into criticism, as there is into a work of art. Yet by demanding legitimacy as performance, as writing-in-action, criticism finds a limited solace for its loss of authority. From its thwarted attempts to draw conclusions from observation, critical writing today wants merely to be allowed a share of levity to indulge in, a bouquet of thought presented on the occasion of art's rapture.

If we are questioning such a staple of convention as the critic, surely we can afford skepticism over a symposium topic, particularly one as loaded as historicism has become. It is, like post-modernism, neo-expressionism, graffiti or appropriation, one of those concepts that is spiked from its inception. Nobody wants it, particularly those who have earned it most. As a workaday critic, I frequently see its manifestation in a troubling stage: where it passes from the exhibition or periodical into the myriad studios of semi-skilled and/or desperate artists. When a topic becomes a trend, it no longer requires dissection as an idea at all, but rather as an example of the sociology of style. And yet, the issues persist: what attracts artists toward a mode of historicist inferences such as the quotations from modern German history in the canvases of Anselm Kiefer; the paradoxical alignment of radical and imperialist ideologies in the work of Komar and Melamid; the equation of modernist icon and late-industrial detritus in David Salle's paintings? Who, in the long run, is the more skeptical: the painter who uses popular history to fabaricate expressionism, or the one who uses academic history to parody it?

By positing the entity of history as something which can be embraced or encapsulated, historicism discourages our appreciation of the one quality that makes history such a profound area of study—its indigestibility. If historicist practice as we have come to use it is no more complex a pursuit than the knitting together of disparate sources, then it is patently useless to defend this activity as inherently critical in nature. Rather, it is equivalent to postmodernism by the numbers, a rote transcription of our pseudo-crisis in cultural identity. David Salle, a painter frequently accused of historicist leanings, might in fact be more accurately characterized as a neo-modernist, one whose work yearns for a modernist past when advanced art was both emotionally and intellectually complex. Rather than exploit the hidden nationalistic fervor found in much of the so-called 'transavantgarde,' Salle envisions the revised modernist pact as constantly remaining merely an increment ahead of the culture at large, so that the notion of a personal style which encompasses a pastiche of earlier official styles is, by its very description, safely within the realm of modernist procedure. Nothing which seeks to reconcile modernity and history can be deemed a contradiction of modernism.

The confusion is understandable if only because recent variations on the modernist formula suggest that revivalism by any other name is still avoidance of the present. The art world's machinery is moving at so fast a pace that unless an appropriated style is quite explicit about its ideological distinctness, it begs a qualitative comparison with the original, a comparison that could not help but be decided in its disfavor. Place a 1959 Rauschenberg alongside a 1982 Schnabel, and the point is clear: true passion never strikes twice in the same place. But put a 1968 Polke against a 1984 Salle, and it becomes equally apparent that artificiality is the only thing which cannot be imitated. Beginning with neo-expressionism, we've been hit with neo-surrealism and neo-conceptualism, and are on the brink of an age of neo-minimalism. The popular music world has been as strongly hit with revivals of psychadelia, disco and even punk. Are the artists who pervert these caregories with such great relish addressing, however obliquely, the acceleration of history; or are they inspired more unilaterally, by everything from the current art boom and the Age of Reagan to the early convulsions of a fin-de-siécle period bringing waves of sociocultural upheaval with it?

More likely, today's unavoidable neo-isms signal a radical departure from the received definitions of cultural history, and the artist's sense of his/her place there. The confusion of history with creativity predates modernism, of course, and perhaps reaches its apogee with the surrealists, who co-opted academicism to capsize the self-flattering demi-monde. By the time the New York School rolled around, history was being seen as that which ended just a season ago. With the craze for novelty and radicalism in the 60s, it is a bit puzzling in 1985 to look back and discover that most of the major artists twenty years ago are still considered major today. And once the forecast mentality of the Pop era began to turn institutionalized in the curriculae of the School of Visual Arts and California Institute of the Arts, the art world was readying to absorb a new generation whose grasp of history appeared to signal the last word in modern will: "Make it up."

Because of this link to American culture of the Great Society era, the moment of absolute historical self-consciousness (Pop) is forever linked with the moment when the global village was transformed by media from a concept into reality. Not uncoincidentally, this is also when our first generation of fulltime TV brats was beginning to enter adolescence. Thanks to high-speed editing and eclectic programming, television watching creates in its audience a euphoria of omniscience. Entering the age of hard-core reruns and Trivial Pursuit, we become all-too-aware that everything that has happened in the electronic age (and even slightly before) is eternally present. In an hour we can view bite-sized reports on the Vietnam War, the American Revolution, the McCarthy trials, the fall of Rome, the moonwalk, and man's descent from apes. Because there is an inherent glamour in viewing crucial events in far-off corners of the world, shown close-up and in living color, without understanding what has caused them. Because as a people we no longer cultivate distinctions between high and popular culture, the point being that history is currently subsumed as only so much prologema to now. Because a continual time-warp is endlessly useful in a society where information is the only true measure of power. Because, if the Talking Heads or Lily Tomlin do not find their way into cultural history with the ease of Brice Marden or John Baldessari, then the way in which we have come to view ourselves has become measurably inaccurate.

The biggest change in American culture since Pop is in a lost collective perception of our needs. The consumer-oriented civilization spurred on by our postwar economic boom emphasized status, self-gratification and youth with a clarity that also spoke loudly and clearly to the rest of the world. The true genius of Pop, then, was not that it recognized the beauty of popular culture, but that it revelled in the irreversible permanence of a throwaway society. Consciously or not, we are still reeling inwardly from the discovery that it is infinitely more difficult to preserve Giotto's murals than the styrofoam container from a single Big Mac. This and our collectively media derived sense of self and world have influenced artists to degrees undreamt of even ten years ago. Consider, then, how the texture of information in a media-dominated society is always uniform regardless of the identity it takes on: books start to resemble TV, which begins to resemble photojournalism which is dominated by computer graphics that look more and more like books. In what passes, then, as the American world-view, history is itself only another form of media, another transparency through which we gaze upon the reflection of our insatiable urge for satisfaction.

The four artists whose work I'd like to discuss have been singled out in part because of their differences. Sue Coe is a politically activist artist whose subjects characteristically portray racial or sexual injustice from the present or the very recent past. Kenny Scharf, who achieved fame three years ago with his pop-surreal canvases of the Jetsons mutated with the Flintstones, makes art which is arguably bereft of all sociopolitical concerns whatsoever. Peter Halley combines the vocabularies of Pop and abstract geometricism, evolving ponderously obtuse works that suggest emblems of late-industrial behaviorism. Finally, Sherrie Levine may well be the last conceivably notorious artist in Western civilization, having shocked aesthetes and onlookers alike with her appropriated watercolors and photographs of important modernist works of art.

Greed, a mixed media work painted by Sue Coe in 1984, suggests El Greco initially in its use of a fragmented and convoluted space divided by moundlike hills. The picture shows a black bear shuddering in the first throes of death. His assassins are heavily-armed weekend campers that surround him on three sides, filling his hide with what would seem to be a gratuitous amount of lead. A fourth, female camper, does not participate, but huddles to the lower right nursing a wound of his own. Witnessing the telltale containers for Coke, fries and a Big Mac, the viewer pieces together a probable narrative: these citizens were enjoying a junk food picnic in the privacy of their wilderness, when the suggestion came up that they should try and feed the wildlife, but the presence of a station wagon in the middle distance, draped with another fresh carcass, suggests still other variations. Had they used food to lure the bear out of the woods, making them in effect people who kill for the sheer ecstasy of the act? Violence is often the preferred means for eroticizing authority, and it frequently shows up in other examples of Coe's work as a form of cowardice, or a self-imposed ecological idiocy, as well as a moral stain. Such is the mechanism of apartheid, a central concern in Sue Coe's arsenal of subjects. We know that virtually all lifeforms attack only if provoked, and we know that South Africa will not be a white stronghold forever. Yet Coe works between the world we know is just and the world we force ourselves to experience.

Kenny Sharf's *Pikki taki Chop,* painted the same years as the Coe, seems to be everything that the latter is not. The main character, a red tree, stands on its roots just to the right of center. Dangling from its branches are two personnages: a gaping mask, and a triple-headed Big-Nose which clusters around itself like a bunch of grapes. The cartoon-deco chevrons, floating globes and attenuated worms suggest an edenic splendor. From the upper left, God watches a motley crew of animated non-organic forms, which glare malevolently at us. The atmosphere, a billowing 50s patter, is punctuated in spots by a strange green vapor, suggesting an uneasy calm. Sheer spectacle in this, a typical Scharf, is at such fever pitch that it becomes nearly impossible to isolate a unified narrative thread. Caught between bliss and ferocity, these characters do not interact; they emote across a void, just like the charged ions they are descended from. None possess gender in Scharf's paradise, and few are defined beyond the most basic physiognomy.

I am intrigued with the importance of eye-contact in both these works. Each Scharf denizen is fixated on a different aspect of the picture—the tree-creatures roll their eyes or gape unseeingly to the viewer's left. We are less engaged than put on our guard, especially with God blissed out on the sidelines. In *Greed,* Coe avoids the obvious device of having us look into the bear's gaze, but has locked its attention on the one assailant with his back to us. The sole figure to extend direct contact with the viewer—and it is an icily guilty bead—holds us at bay while he discards his pistol for a rifle. In both works the characters are remembered chiefly for their degree of psychological self-involvment. Sue Coe aggravates the spatial unity of her picture by incorporating an autonomous wave of crimson blood that washes in from the lower left, seeming to divide itself into the spatters that lace the painting's center. Like Scharf's Opart backgrounds, such a device swivels the action into an exaggerated frontal plane, an effect that is echoed by the actual junk-food refuse that litters the surface. A sickly moonlight permeates the scene, achieving a drama not unlike Scharf's unremitting incandescence.

Both Sue Coe and Kenny Scharf cultivate an immediate recognizability within their work, creating the sense that nothing in fact requires explanation. Scharf's earlier cosmology dwelt on the Jetsons, a space-age family of ideological message-bearers intent on convincing a generation of afterschoolchildren that America's high-technology future is no less than a gigantic playground: robots with a sense of humor, meals at the touch of a button, sky-cities connected by tubes. By contrast, when Coe paints a well-known countenance, it is usually that of a martyred civil-rights protestor, or it is the sovereign oppressed, bloated by their greed and malevolence. The outlines are nevertheless clear with both artists, the distrust of ambiguity most cute. Reading Coe on her work, one is not able to distinguish her aesthetic from Scharf's:

> For a long time now the representation of the world in art, with all of its pictorial and emotional detail, has been aiding and abetting a fantasy of social lies.
>
> All is not a thing but a communication. In that communication there is the artist but also the audience and so the need for language. This language is not exclusive to the artist and other artists, museums, dealers or collectors but rather one of society and should encompass all aspects and raise the value of it.
>
> It is an identification with folk and popular language. It is an attempt to search for forms to be popular in appeal and yet capable of the freedom and subtlety of great art. (From P.P.O.W. Gallery handout, 1985.)

Although she writes movingly of the need for folk roots, Coe's art tends toward a marked bookishness in its use of alternate genres, preferring to elicit comparison with 1960s protest art, or workers' unification or anti-war campaigns, which have covered virtually every city in Europe since the 1920s. Coe is deriving most pointedly from Otto Dix and George Grosz, whose collective work drove no less than Kandinsky to rail against these artists' attempts to "salvage art by forcing it into the service of daily living" as "the only artistic crisis of our dismal times." With Dix a dyed-in-the-wool 'objectivist,' and Grosz' fundamental alliance with Berlin Dadaism, neither could be dubbed a folk artist or even a popular artist in the late 20th century sense. Each was primarily interested in the practice and theory of *art engage,* in wider distribution of the image via graphic arts, and in the denouncement of hypocrisy in any form. Through her between-the-wars collaborators, Coe's imagery gains the weight of historical hindsight. This is perhaps most true of her widely-praised books of graphics in collaboration with the poet Holly Metz, *How to Commit Suicide in South Africa,* wherein the disturbing images are made more so by accompanying facts and figures. In fact, Sue Coe's voice of protest seems to ring in two directions at once: toward the vain satisfaction of stylistic independence, and at the lethal hatred man harbors for others of his species.

Scharf, in contrast, appears to make each canvas a treatise on oralism. Action-painted grounds play up the gratuitous proportions of some grinning cartoon-figure, whose mouth is wide open to reveal the smoldering skies of some primeval landscape. The painting is called *The Fun's Inside.* Fun in this context is the real world, which is used as an escape valve for the stylistic tournament that is art. Like many of Scharf's single figures, this outsized sprite has a sinister aspect that is borne out by the rolling but unseeing eyes. By implicitly citing Pollock as the perfect background for one of his own pictures, Scharf pretends to an absurd degree of bravado, but he is also making a critical point about the problematical inheritance of high modern culture, particularly in relation to the terrifying aspects of an animated subconscious. With Scharf's work, we become bent on describing our own passivity, just as the artist wishes to wear down viewer resistance with gleeful histrionics. Again, we find ourselves in the uncomfortable position of watching history the way we watch television: the unblinking eye always stares back, as its alertness is required for guarding the secret of permanent escapism. Also like television, Scharf's universe is seamless, aspiring to sabotage an institutionalized are network that shuns the direct use of popular culture for transcendental ends.

Peter Halley is an artist obsessed with the art world's notion of change. Since modernism, it might be postulated, artists have seen themselves as championing the notion of a 'natural' flow of ideas from one artistic group to the next. By adding much-needed fuel to the current debate over abstraction, Halley is also in a unique position to refute the romanticist indulgences of many revisionist painters, who exploit abstraction in the way academicians used to defend realism—that is, as a return to happier times, when art didn't challenge the taste of the so-called middle intelligentsia (as if there ever were such times). Halley mixes classic geometric abstraction with the confrontational edge of early Pop, creating elusive paintings that Baudrillard might refer to as 'doubles' of pictures, courting cheap taste while unravelling an internal debate about the role of nature in the creation of abstract imagery. By using stucco and day-glo coloring, Halley is also questioning the ideological underpinnings of neo-expressionism's over-zealous courting of the bourgeois 'masterpiece.' The viewer Halley appeals to is clearly one who yearns for an ahistorical determinism, one which flaunts its awareness of history as if this were an aesthete's curse, the penalty for dandification. That Halley's paintings succeed in part on the basis of being siumlacra of pictures means that he has successfully anticipated our art-codification process, and traced it back to a psychological network of protectionism, resistance to change, and the ever-present belief in abstraction's ability to convey an 'essence' of art's spiritual integrity.

Sherrie Levine appears to be working at the other extremes of art's belief systems. While her work immediately subverts certain formal categories that Halley takes for granted—scale and materiality, for example—Levine purposely conjures up the aura and mystique of great works of art. She even skirts the peculiar triumph-of-will strategies adopted by other appropriation artists, particularly Mike Bidlo and Philip Taaffe. Levine's pictures are not simulacra; they are the ultimate monochromes, the last gasp of conceptual 'taste.' And yet they are intimate, tastefully executed, like MOMA gift-shop trinkets. Levine has always stressed the personal aspects of her work, insisting that the paintings de-codify formulae of desire—one of her more famous quotes is, "I'm painting the paintings I want to see." If subversion lingers in Levine's art, it relates to a half-disguised sexual politics: all of her 'subjects' have been men. The book rests between the artist's mind and hand, and it is from the obsolescence of the book that the artwork is drawn.

Although in neither Levine's nor Halley's paintings does there exist anything that could be referred to as 'imagery,' there are signs and referents in abundance, virtually all relating to myths of creation in modernist prehistory. If Levine has her bookplates, Peter Halley has his electric circuitry diagrams and modern building plans. Manifest in Halley's aesthetic is the use of geometry in the opposite way than that intended by theorists of the Bauhaus—not to enrich our lives, but to order and contain them. Halley's geometry is thus objectified, insisting on the here and now of what the artist sees to be the human situation.

The artist divides his canvases into cells and conduits, blocks of artificial or day-glo light carved from darkness and linked by bands of color. These paintings dramatize a bipartite space: one which is dark and underground, the other serving as refuge. Linearity becomes a mental as well as material construct, connecting the separate organisms within a community. As noted by Boston ICA curator David Jocelit: "These paintings represent a world of physical isolation mitigated by the simulation of community through the electronic media: the videogame, the microchip, the office tower." Work that is this literal tends to embody a critique of modernist conventions that would assign no meaning to abstraction other than the void purity of art-as-art. A critic-theorist, Halley has focused in his published work upon the writings of Robert Smithson, which explore "America's fascination/repulsion with its shallow cultural roots, and its vulnerability to the impact of technological change." In his paintings, Halley is attempting to form a psycho-social portrait of the inner American, particularly as his/her existence is affected by seemingly environmental forces, a subject which is close to the heart of Smithson. As drily as this content may scan, it appears to strike a resonant chord in viewers who are interested in art's relation to modes of thought, viewers who distrust hedonism posing as revelation. Halley does not suggest that his geometry leads to an empirical system of equations and theorem; rather that a culture which subjectifies everything cannot resist ascribing psychological value to rectangles and straight lines. As stated previously, Halley probes the actual but not ideal, promoting meaning but skirting value.

Sherrie Levine's last exhibition to fall strictly within the parameters of appropriation was 1917, an installation of watercolors painted 'after' Malevich and Egon Schiele. Although she made no direct reference to the tradition of installation, it was clear that this 1984 show at Nature Morte was Levine's attempt to create an entire work out of several. Selecting two artists who had represented opposite stylistic extremes, Levine also elevated Schiele to a status which historians have not universally conferred upon him. In so doing, textbook connoisseurship and personal historic self-consciousness part ways with a vengeance. Certainly there was a specific motive for selecting originals that were created on or about the year of the Russian Revolution. Without incorporating any medium other than self-effacing watercolor, Levine has constructed a field of historical skepticism that is more palpable than a dozen manifestoes printed on gallery walls. The implicit feminist angle is no less devastating: not only are Levine's Maleviches fragile and far away, she has worked in an iconological surprise, for the imagery in *1917* consisted exclusively of masturbation and crosses. We struggle as viewers to dominate the psychic interval between the original original and the Levine original, but trap ourselves within a space between. For the last year or so, Levine has shifted her point of departure drastically; the simulated original has given way to the generic copy in a series of small abstract paintings on wood, either vertically striped or checkered, with each painting the same size and composition. Unsettling in their charm, Levine's recent paintings simultaneously recall Newman, Marden, Stella, Noland, Novros and even Palermo—all, like her appropriated sources, male painters. Hidden facets like these are perhaps what give Levine's work its resonance. With a nose for enigma, she has canvassed that obscure borderline where art vainly attempts to separate itself from that which would look like art, and mistaken for art, but is not art.

This factor can be said to link the four artists discussed today. Not all, perhaps, have freely embraced the potential of art in a society which sees history as something occasionally glimpsed on educational TV. But each might be described as an artist for whom the inconsistencies of contemporary Western culture appear as a challenge, not an adversary. Once we have quietly accepted the premise that the conditions of our world have changed us, and are continuing to change us, then we can once again resign ourselves to art's role as the forecast of that change. All four of the artists I've discussed are questioning the artwork's privileged nature, each has thoroughly rebuffed some of the strongest-held artistic biases of his or her time, and each has used the classic avant-garde strategy of manufactured notoriety to achieve some measure of distinction within a historical moment. I believe each has given us an art which might seem difficult to swallow and impossible to digest, but which will eventually be the standard against which their contemporaries will be judged. Disciple modernists at heart, we long to be stripped of our last and final illusion, which is that we needed to be rid of our illusions in the first place.

On Razing the Primitive Hut

By C.W. Westfall

Three premises underlie my lecture. The first is that current architecture is in some way related to the other visual arts. The second is a corollary: like the forms in the other visual arts, the forms of buildings have sources, and the kinds of inquiry used for uncovering those sources in one of the arts are appropriate for discovering them in the others as well.

These two premises entail a third: these forms have not only sources but also content. Identifying this content is the most interesting and difficult question before us here.

* *

Identifying and describing the content of works of art has been difficult ever since painters began making pictures that were less representational than nonrepresentational. This shift threatened the traditional role of the painter as a representer of a world existing out there, a role that since the important works of D'Alembert and Kant in the eighteenth century had been linked with an aesthetics encompassing the three visual arts as well as music and poetry, the quintet contained in the "modern system of the arts."[1] The shift was not meant to dismember that system. Even as the shift away from representation was occurring in one realm of the arts, the premise that the several visual arts were systematically connected as Vasari had said they were was being reaffirmed by practitioners of the several arts. That affirmation is common to such opposites as McKim, Mead and White and their fellow artists at the Boston Public Library and Mies van der Rohe at the Barcelona Pavilion. None of these people claimed that the painter, sculptor, and architect served different purposes or that these several arts lacked a common purpose. Their disagreement centered on what the purpose of these arts was.

The purpose of art would be revealed by the content of works of art with the major division concerning the kinds of content art might have. Was it art's purpose to represent something that existed in the world or to present something that could be brought into being only through art? Was art imitative as classical theory had taught or creative as modern theory proposed?

That question could be, and is, easily handled when the object of inquiry is one of the obviously representational arts such as painting or sculpture. Nineteenth-century historiography and architectural theory had little trouble in finding a content in buildings. The content a building was thought to contain, however, did not arise from aspects with the same concrete existence in a world independent of the building that a painting's content has independent of a painting. There is, or can be, a bowl of fruit in the world like the one in the painting, but is there an entity with a similar claim on existence for the content then being seen in buildings? Although that was not the question Geoffrey Scott was addressing, it was the one he answered when he pointed out that the several kinds of representation claimed for buildings were based on fallacious thinking.[2] In doing so, Scott also showed that architecture can be considered an art independent from the other arts. Buildings, he said, were equally independent of an external world to which they referred and from which they might derive a content. Buildings were composed of pure forms which produce pleasure in us, and producing that pleasure is an adequate reason for having them and for attending to them. Scott's aesthetics marked the end of attempts of those who thought in English to look for content in buildings.

This left the field open to those who thought in German. They developed elaborate methods for dealing with the content of obviously representational media, but their methods have achieved only limited currency when transposed into studies of buildings. In addition, their intent differed from that of Ruskin, Scott, and their peers in that they did not seek to affect current practice.[3]

* *

Two other ways of explicating the content of buildings, both deriving from nineteenth century concepts, have had more currency and success among architects and architectural historians. One examines function, the other style. I will speak first of function.

That a building's function provides its forms with a content is a notion invented to apply to buildings although, ironically, when applied to paintings (and sculpture), it provides more interesting answers. We may, for example, say that the function of a painting is to give pleasure, or to express emotion, or to "make a social commentary." Having said that much, we find ourselves quickly drawn into asking how does this particular painting do so? It makes little difference when the painting was made. The intent of Al Leslie in painting Dina Cheyette and of Piero della Francesco in painting Federigo da Montefeltro, Duke of Urbino is the same or can be taken to be the same—I am not addressing the question of success in reaching that intent and the same can be said for the intent of any nonrepresentational artist. Art history and art criticism are sufficiently adept in handling paintings, whether representational or so-called non-representational (or non-objective) to make them speak across time about issues that are independent of time. Any good painting seems to have the capacity to establish a personal contact between the painter and the viewer that allows the painting to be accepted as a representation of pleasure taken in visual form (although the painters discussed in this conference seem singularly uninterested in producing pleasurable works), of the expression of something, usually something with its origins in the emotions or in "intuition," and of man's place in the world of man. Seeing a painting as having the function of representing these things adds to our knowledge of paintings and of man. Thus, the answer to the question, What is the function of a painting or even of this painting? can lead to many complex, interesting, important, and pertinent ways of talking about a painting's content no matter when the painting was made.

When we pose the same question about a building, something less happens. When we ask, What is the function of the Palazzo Ducale in Urbino and of the AT&T Building? we generally stop at the answer, To house a duke and to accommodate a corporation and those who rent whatever additional space the corporation makes available. If we push on, we would discuss the spatial and ceremonial requirements of courtly life and the programmatic and egoistic desires of corporate enterprises. We answer the question in a way that produces a gloss on the buildings' functions because we have little or no conceptual apparatus to reach deeper or range more broadly.

As a result, we usually find it impossible to establish the same kind of personal contact between the viewer and the building that we do between a viewer and a painting. Our methods of interpretation allow us to find a richer and more immediate content in a painted representation of the Montefeltro Duke than in an architectural one. To ask, What is the content of Palazzo Ducale? should be able to lead to all kinds of interesting answers because those who built it knew very well what to say about themselves and they said these things in any number of ways, including architectural ways.[4] Historians have seldom asked these questions, and when they have, their conclusions have generally been of interest only to other historians. They more often ask questions that can take the form, What is the content of the AT&T Building? But because AT&T has only a meager and impoverished sense understanding of itself, whatever interest the answer has comes not from the building's representation of its builder but from some other source. If, for example, we wished to get to the person in the AT&T Building in the same way that Piero's Federigo was (and is) in the Palazzo Ducale, where would we go? The current practice of the famous and fashionable provides us no access to the people who commission buildings.

Having come up with nothing very interesting by thinking in this way about function as content, another route was pursued. It began with the premise that a building's content is purely formal (that is, it is a closed system of form making no reference to anything outside itself) and that its function should dictate its forms—to put it canonically, form follows function. Thus, the content of the building is the same as the name of its function, for example, palace or corporate office building. Under modernism, this connection of form and function became embedded in the notion that certain functional programs are satisfied by certain architectural types and that the content of the building is its representation of the type. This idea was given additional vigor by wrapping into it the notion that among the various visual arts, the content of the type is unique to architecture because architecture has certain unique characteristics. For Sullivan, these were in a building's ability to represent its organic nature as construction and as a vessel for a distinct function. For Mies, architecture began when one brick was placed on another, for Corb it had to do with light, and so on. Contained here is the idea that a building's functional type and constructional type is portrayed in its form. As a result, the content of that form is within the building, in its function and method of construction. That content's value is purely intrinsic within some system of functional types, or construction types, or a combination of those two, or it resides in something else that is isolated from any reference external to architecture. A building, therefore, lacks the capacity to represent something outside architecture.

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Style is the other nineteenth-century concept used for discussing content. Its popularity derives in part from its role in cementing the bond between the several arts in the "modern system of the arts," a role it can play because by definition style is what art objects have. Because all art objects of a given moment have a common style, it therefore follows that all art objects are systematically related to one another.

The concept of style accepts the notion that the forms depend somehow on the building's function, but it gives a greater emphasis to the forms and considers them to exist both because of and despite the building's function. When the style exists because of the building's function, we have a variation on function as content which need not be discussed further. When its style exists despite the building's function, this is because a building's style is thought to be largely free of material and other nonidealistic considerations. Because style is idea, it is superior to material, and therefore stylistic analysis can operate with relative indifference to the conditions that brought the building's forms into being. Because it is free in that manner, style can be taken to refer primarily to the formal properties that are unique to the works of an individual architect or to a particular moment.

When assessing a building's content as style, historians inquire into the forms' sources, which are two in number and idealist in character; preferably he finds that an architect drew on both. One is in the architect's artistic personality, the other in the *Zeitgeist*. In each, the source is said to be an influence, to use the most abused and thoughtlessly used word in the discipline. As an artistic genius or at least artistic personality, the architect himself is the source of the laws pertaining to what he does. Because he lives at a particular moment in a society, he is a vessel filled by the imperatives of the moment in which he lives and therefore cannot do other than he does. Either way, he stands outside all rules and laws binding on other people and in other times. When we say that the content of a building is its style, we mean that the building represents the translation into material of the idealist imperatives working on the architect.

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For more than two generations, for a building to be modern required that both its function and style extend from the models laid down by modernism's heroic founders. These men believed that their premises about architecture entailed revolution. Function and style were the efficient and material causes of buildings, and their final cause was in the concept of progress, an idea reduced to a famous slogan by LeCorbusier: "Architecture or Revolution. / Revolution can be avoided." The new architecture would represent both the intent to establish a new political order and the comsummation of the revolution that had begun with cataclysmic political events more than a century earlier.

The revolution's parentage in Rousseau's primitivism found its parallel in architecture through the heroic founders' adaptation of Laugier's primitive to the reinforced concrete modular space frame. Similarly, the Revolution's regicide as prelude to enthroning the people was repeated in modernism's murder of history, just as its politics has been replayed as the new architecture for the many, for the common man, has come to replace the monument as the consummate product of architecture. (Might I suggest that the urban renewal that tore the old out of our cities is the Terror revisited?) Once the functional programs of society's new building types had been united with the formal style of the new age and the means of constructing buildings with the new materials and technology had been made canonic, the content of all modern buildings would be the same as the content of the primitive hut, that is, physical nature subjected to the science of building under the direction of the free genius and headed in the direction of man perfected by society and uncorrupted by civilization. In architecture as in politics, the palm of victory has gone to bottom-up thinking which entails revolution and the abolition of all top-down systems.

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Historical knowledge has been the most tragic victim of the revolution. Modernists view history as a past top-heavy with monuments which could teach only what had been found appropriate from time to time, all of them times steeped in civilization corrupted primitive, innocent purity, all of them times predating the revolution and all of them therefore in a past unconnected to the present. The value in such knowledge was in being able to measure how far removed the present is from the past and therefore how privileged the present is. Any other lessons could only pollute the pure teaching of science and the poetry of the free, modern spirit.

(Once the past was dispensed with as guide and rudder for the present, something else had to assume the role. The bottom-up approach which sees the primitive as superior to the civilized also takes the untamed and unrationalized as superior to the thoughtful. Thus, current desires, attractions, and opinions came to provide the standards for interpreting what in the past might be valuable for the present and what in the present is valuable for the present. In politics we recognize this program's presence when opinion polls rather than principles define public policy. In current architectural activity, this program has its complement in the practice of having the client's personal desires rather than his knowledge of his place in a civil world dictate a building's program.)

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When European modernism ws imported to an America where architects had already begun to explore modernism on their own, the political content had been expunged. When embedded in American architectural education, practice, and architectural history, its only content was a formalism based on function and style. Alfred Barr's preface to the seminal book *The International Style* said it well: "It should be made clear that the aesthetic qualities of the Style (his upper case) are the principal concern of the authors of this book."[5] Those authors, Henry-Russell Hitchcock and Phillip Johnson, in concluding their American introduction to European modernism, spoke of architecture only as construction, function, and style: "We have, as the Egyptians had or the Chinese, as the Greeks and our own ancestors in the Middle Ages before us, a style which orders the visible manifestation of a certain close relationship between structure and function. Regardless of specific types of structure or of function, the style has a definable aesthetic. . . . We have an architecture still."[6]

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Our Modernism, they explained, is balanced between the extremes illustrated by the works of those "who have buried architecture, whether from a thwarted desire to continue the past or from an over-anxiety to modify and hurry the future."[7] This nugget of modernist historiography with the politics expunged tells us that the past is unconnected with the present and that a lust for revolution cannot hurry the unfolding of the imperatives working on architects and their times. What is, is, and ought to be because it is. For a generation this modernist historiography has been dominant in canonic textbooks and monographs. What they teach can be encompassed within four categories:

> 1: old buildings are responses to functions dictated by the needs of past times;
> 2: because all buildings have equal value as do all claims on one's attention or energies and because the only choices to be made between different buildings and claims reduces itself to value-free preferences, the sources for any building's forms can be in other buildings of any type;
> 3: the genius of the architect converts programmatic requirements and constructional means into architecture;
> 4: the forms of old buildings may be known totally when they are fitted within stylistic categories (Classical, Gothic, Renaissance, etc.) that embody the imperatives of a past *Zeitgeist* which made those forms inevitable for the "period" that used them and morally repungant and "insincere" when they reappeared as "revivals" in other "periods."

This historiography's analytical penetration is contained within the formula that gives the name of the building to designate its function, the place and date of construction as codes for the "influences" and "sources" relevant then and irrelevant now, and the name of the architect and the identification of the style to cover the imperatives operating there and then and standing for the efficient and material causes. That progress is the final cause remains implicit and unquestioned.

A similar historiography is used to validate a building as modern. Indeed, it is now the task of modernist historians to divide buildings into two categories, past and present. A building belongs to the past if it exerted no "influence" on a modern one, and it is modern if it has any one or more of three characteristics: it is free of the influence of buildings of the past, it is the work of a recent moment by an architect responsive to the imperatives of that moment, and its sources are in modernism's canonic models—primarily, now, Laugier's hut as rendered in Mies' five projects or Corb's Domino house, or the stripped rationalism of Boullee, Durand, or Schinkel, although the canon can shift. For example, it used to include Behrens' Turbine Factory. Once validated as modern, a building has the content the architect sought for it, that is, modernism. If excluded from modernism, its content is the opposite, that is, the past.

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But historians were brought up short when, a decade or so ago, at about the same time that it became fashionable for the paintings of the art establishment's darlings to represent something that had an existence independent from and prior to their presentation in the painting, famous and fashionable architects began designing buildings that foreswore the purity of modernism's formal abstraction and contained representations of earlier buildings lacking a parentage in modernism. What are we to make of these dislocated sources, or, put another way, what are we to make of this new, incoherent content?

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Let me suggest that "dislocated" and "incoherent" are words referring to an opposite of an absolute good and that the sources are dislocated and the content incoherent only in the sense that they do not come from the comfortable niches that modernist architecture and architectural history provided for them. Then let me add that the sources are coherent only within the absolute incoherence of modernism and are dislocated from a context that would make them useful for an architecture.

I will illustrate this in three ways. One is by suggesting that in formal terms, post-modernism is simply another form of modernism which stands to modernism as mannerism does to any classicism. (By classicism, I am not referring merely to a formal language and system of thought with its origins in Greek and Latin antiquity but to the qualities suggested in the discussion that follows and which are most familiar to us in the forms given them in antiquity.[8]) Mannerism does not automatically follow classicism, but when it appears, it reveals that architects wish to challenge an existing formal canon and stir up interest in the extremes which classicism ignores as it seeks a balance around a golden middle. Architects find in mannerism an indulgance for passions and satiation for senses which lie on the extremes and which classicism cannot control or satisfy in them. Mannerism provides this in one of two ways, both of which upset an intellectual architecture with one serving the senses. One way provokes the intellect with dislocated and incoherent forms, as for example in the works of Giulio Romano, in the early canonic works of modernism when seen in juxtaposition to the established practice of the time, and now in the works of Robert Venturi, Michael Graves, and Peter Eisenman. The other way appeals directly to the senses and ignores the intellect, a means impossible before modernism but seen in some of Mies' early projects, in Mendelsohn's expressionism, and now epitomized by the banal glitz produced by Cesar Pelli and the focus-defying vibrancy flowing from Helmut Jahn.

Either way, the result is a new "style" which becomes the building's content. It does so in the same way modernism did, that is, by representing in material the genius of an architect and the imperatives of his moment. This leads to the second illustration of post-moderism's incoherence. We are told that post-modernism has brought symbolic content back to architecture. The representational elements found in buildings symbolize something. This began when Robert Venturi found that every kind of thing from the august to the ordinary were "signs and symbols" of American life. Now Helmut Jahn tells us that at the Chicago Board of Trade addition, a hollow octogon standing for a trading pit "symbolizes" the Board in the same way Ceres atop Holabird and Root's original building does. In this instance, the place where an activity occurs rather than the purpose of the activity is considered capable of being rendered in symbolic form, a fallacy typical of a modernism steeped in functionalism. At his State of Illinois Center, an abstracted and truncated drum and cupola is said to "symbolize" the presence of state government in Chicago. Here, the requirements of architectural "style" have reduced the formal properties of the "symbol" to an unintelligibility requiring the gloss of the architect or of historians to become understandable by those for whom the secrets of the avant garde are a closed book, a strategy typical of those who consider themselves geniuses leading the people by staying well in front of them.[9]

The third way of illustrating post-modernism's incoherence is by analogy. Post-Modernists can be seen as Goths and Vandals who, like the modernist primitives who preceded them in putting civilization to the torch, act as if Hegel and Comte defined the end we are striving to reach and Darwin explained the means for doing so. The new barbarians would protest that no, they are actually imitating the Lombards and the Franks who merely pillaged rather than destroyed and who transformed their booty into buildings serving their legitimate purposes, that they are, in other words, historicists.

For this to be the case they would have to be able to distinguish between historicism and eclecticism. Recall that both groups, upon reaching Italy, encountered an architecture synchronized with Italian political and legal forms but anachronistic with respect to the invaders' customs and laws. The Goths and Vandals destroyed and marched on. They were unable to learn that what they encountered was superior to what they already knew, or perhaps they were simply unwilling to act on what they learned. Either way, they were like the modernists who cling to their belief in the noble aims modernism promulgated even though modernism has by now demonstrated the impossibility of its reaching those aims and the great danger in continuing to try. When confronted with the self-evident proposition that the city is superior to the tribal village, they rejected it with the same vehemence that apologists for modernism react to the now self-evident proposition that "The belief in unlimited technical progress and development has brought the most '*developed*' countries to the brink of physical and cultural exhaustion . . . . Industrialization has in the end only facilitated centralization of capital and of political power, whether private or public."[10]

The Lombards and Franks neglected or destroyed, but in architecture and in forms of political organization and in codes of law, that which they found useful they appropriated and merged with their customary ways. In place of destruction they planted a transformation of an established civilization, one of many transformations both before and after. They were able to understand that "A recollection of the past . . . remains academic and fruitless, if we do not study and adopt the universal and human principles upon which the classical city was based."[11]

The destructive barbarians have in common a lack of a sense of time as measured by a moment suspended between a past that endures and a future that extends the past and present. Modernists see each new building as a comment on an immediately preceding one, and so do post-modernists who add to their sources a longer reach into the past. Consequently, to know what is happening in architecture today one must know modernism not only in architecture but in architectural history as well, but he need not know the past except as that which must be avoided to be a modernist or might be exploited if his preference is for post-modernism. Either way, the architect must, in other words, place himself on the forward crest of a wave that flows with time, a wave that obliterates all that it crosses and a time measured by an architecture responsive to function narrowly defined and identified primarily as style, a time with only a present and a past with neither a presence nor a connection between them. To be successful, he must be ahead of the moment and use the present to destroy the past. This is historicism.

Those who transform architectural forms have a fundamentally different sense of time. They use an existing architecture to make new buildings that comment on the way things are both at their moment and at all times, not as they must be at their particular moment and at no other. In other words, they are not historicists but eclectics.

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Current architectural discourse fails to distinguish between the two terms. Eclectic comes from the Greek word meaning to select something for use. All architects do that.[12] When a modernist selects forms from elsewhere than accepted modernist sources he becomes a post-modernist. To call him an eclectic would be to taint him with the odor of nineteenth-century architects who did the same thing but who, in doing so, did not produce something in the modern style because there was no modern "style" yet. By calling him a historicist, one can suggest that "the past" or "history" is the source of the nonmodern pieces. The term offers the additional benefit of emphasizing the source rather than the decision to select, thereby honoring the conceptual apparatus of modernist architectural history which sees external imperatives (i.e., sources) rather than individual decisions based on thought and calculation (i.e., selections) as the efficient cause of events and designs.

As soon as we see that the term eclecticism suggests choice and the term historicism does not, we come face to face with the importance of interpreting the content of buildings. As Norris Kelly Smith has explained, eclecticism is a means of making coherent statements based on *recta ratio* or right reason which is the basis of architecture, as he reminds us and as every theorist from Vitruvius and Alberti to Francois Blondel had explained. Because, he continues, "architecture is peculiarly the art of established institutions, we should not find it surprising that the organizational modes or patterns that were favored by institutional leaders at any given time and place are discernibly related to the political stance or convictions of those same leaders (though not necessarily of the population at large)."

The founders of modernism agreed. As part of their program for revolution they sought at the same time to use architecture to forge new institutions and to persuade established institutions to adopt the new architecture. This was the program of historicism as that term is used in other realms of discourse.[13] But the revolutionary fervor eventually cooled, and, in this country, a modernism void of revolutionary content became the architectural style of established institutions. There was now no reason provided by a larger political program for investing buildings with the forms of modernism.

After modernism became mere style and mere practice, conditions wre ripe for a change. The change that became fashionable was based on a new reason, or, more properly, a non-reason, for selecting among available forms: If I like it I will use it, or, as Robert Venturi put it, "As an artist I frankly write about [and in design draw upon] what I like in architecture: complexity and contradiction."[14] When there is only preference and no reason, there is no connection with speech which is reason made communicable. There is, instead, only dislocation and incoherence. Architecture is no longer reasons made visible in architectural form.

Engaging in right reason and maintaining the habit of articulating reasons for actions are marks of a civilized people and person just as responding to imperatives left unquestioned, acting on impulse, an indulging in mere preferences reveal the presence of a different kind of people and person. The former must live in cities if they are to live well, while the latter can live just as well in huts as in cities but cannot build cities. Cities are more than accumulations of huts or, to put it another way, "Nowadays we mistakenly credit every large accumulation of buildings with the term city, whereas only the highest form of human work and order really deserves this expression."[15] Cities are different in kind from mere accumulations, no matter how large, because what began as a ring of tribal huts has been perfected (which is not the same thing as being made perfect) over time by the application of right reason to the questions that only cities allow men the hope of answering: how can the enduring principles of justice and the aspiration for virtue be applied to changing circumstance, and how can the architectural forms of the city assist in that application and represent the citizens' attention to that concern?

These are questions of little interest to the many but are the preoccupation of gentlemen, to use Leo Strauss' term. After the many captured the established institutions serving as the forum for asking those questions and acting on the best answers possible within prevailing circumstances, progress was declared to be the final cause, the idealist imperatives of a society's moment replaced the counsel of right reason as efficient cause, and the many failed to develop the habit of asking the questions that had preoccupied the gentlemen whom the many always distrust and often prosecute.

The bottom-up approach which sees the primitive as superior to the civilized, takes the untamed and unrationalized as superior to the thoughtful, and indulges in extremes while neglecting the golden middle came to predominate in politics, in city-building, and in architecture. Unfortunately, the many seem not to mind living in mere accumulations of the huts "required" by the idealist imperatives of the moment so long as the huts are authentic products of geniuses and offer satisfaction to the senses.

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Let me conclude by returning to the premises that underlie this conference. Is there any important or substantial connection between architecture and the other visual arts? The union of painting, sculpture, and architecture into a separate grouping dates to Vasari and was made canonic only in the eighteenth century, the same time that saw the rise of modernist notions about artistic genius which reached their perfection in the romanticism that flourished after people decided Romulus' primitive hut had more to teach about architecture than did the Palatine palace that enshrined it. The connection was unchallenged by those who made aesthetics a field of philosophical inquiry into the beautiful which they connected with pleasure rather than with morality and by those who invented the ideas covered by the concept of style and its concommitant history as the history of art.

Today, the concept of style is the principal bond uniting the three visual arts. We recognize that each of the three has a different distinguishing characteristic, and, following the now canonic notion that the three are united, we then seek a way to explain how those three characteristics can be embraced by the concept of style. If we had to argue *ex novo* for the unity of the arts, would we find that the concept of style, or any other concept, is able to cement the three into a common endeavor? The bond appears especially artificial when we define art as the representation of enduring human values intended to promote rational discourse about, and action based on, those values. None of the visual arts, inluding architecture, as practiced by the famous and fashionable, does that now, and art is too important to define simply as what artists do. Somewhere in our understanding of art there must be more about beauty and less about expression, more about a world we share in intellect and less about a world the artist invents in his passions, and more from man's career in thought than the recent, short span of criticism now providing the framework for discussing paintings. In present circumstances, it is clear that architecture can more easily return to its proper office of representing man's place in a world in which he seeks to live with justice and virtue by ignoring the other arts which seem not only uninterested in such matters but markedly antipathetic to them as well.

Several interesting consequences follow from thinking of the three arts as more different than similar, but doing more than mentioning a few of them is beyond the scope of my present purpose. Without the concept of style, there would be no justification for the current fashion of using tax money to supply public buildings with paintings and sculpture. Similarly, is it more than habit that draws paintings, sculpture, and buildings into the subject matter handled by the discipline of art history? Finally, that architecture is an art like the other arts still figures in some curricula in architecture schools. Perhaps architecture students would derive more benefit from a study of political history and theory than of art history or studio art.

The second premise—that the forms of buildings have sources and that the kinds of inquiry used for uncovering those sources in one of the arts are appropriate for discovering them in the others as well—falls the moment one dismisses the supposed connection between architecture and the other arts as being necessary. Replacing it is the necessity of finding methods for uncovering common purposes and, more importantly, common content, when it exists.

This then leaves the third premise: architectural forms have not only sources but also content. Because little of interest is to be learned by uncovering the "content" of function and of style, political content is left as the most important subject matter for architecture. The task of relearning the ways in which architecture is a representational art intended to promote discourse about enduring human values and to learn again that it uses enduring architectural forms in the service of enduring institutions remains as the most interesting and difficult task before us as architects, historians, or citizens of cities that aspire to be civilized.

To do so requires that we accept for architecture and city building the same kind of structured setting for pursuing important purposes that we do in other institutions we hold dear—for example, in the university. There, we aspire to establish a setting in which, among other things, professors teach in order that students may learn, in which professors attain their position by demonstrating their ability to do the work of a professor and students are invited to participate when they demonstrate their capacity to do the work of a student, where no one whose capacity qualifies him to participate is excluded and none is admitted unless he has the capacity, and where over time some who entered as students remain as professors. The incapacity of the university to fulfill this aspiration is not taken as a demonstration that the idea underlying the university is flawed and should therefore be discarded; on the contrary, this aspiration of the university is protected and its means of continuing to strive for its fulfillment are supplied because the university is recognized by those who value civility to be valuable and irreplaceable. Similarly, the occasional corrupt or inadequate judge does not lead us to discard the judiciary, and statistics demonstrating an increased variety of arrangements for cohabitation are not accepted as irrefutable proof that marriage should be abandoned.

Except among those whose passions allow the reins of reason to be sundered from judgment and therefore call for revolutionary new forms of learning, of discovering justice, and maintaining the smallest social unit, people acknowledge civilization as positive and know that the gentlemen on the top contribute more to it than do the many on the bottom—and, let it be hastily added, top and bottom refer to the capacity to contribute to the work of the city which is the workshop of civilization and not to privilege stemming from birth, wealth, position, or some other criterion that may be an accidental attribute of capacity but does not in itself necessarily produce the capacity or provide evidence that it exists.

An example: A house is a home for a family. We can think of its architectural model as that of the hut and depart as little as circumstances allow from what subsequent experience with that primitive model has added so that the hut remains unsullied by anything that would interfere with the form given it by the latest technological means and current imperatives of genius and moment using it as a means of embodying a freedom of expression, or we can think of the hut as the primitive model for a building which the continuous improvement and adaptation of eclectic gentlemen striving to use right reason to adapt it to varying circumstances transform into a type. The former leads to, and cannot go beyond, such things as "public housing" that brutalizes its residents, domino flats that now form a collar strangling every European city, and the custom built houses embodying the expression of architects that are scattered throughout the world's metropolitan regions, all three modern forms of the hut built by or within states immersed in "mass politics, planned economy or democratic centralization."[16] The latter allows for something better.

The latter approach offers the possibility for knowing the connection between past and present, allowing the past to teach, and letting the best of all times provide the type for the diluted lesser being built in some present time in some particular place. It asks that we think of Laugier's hut as the model council house and residence of Agamemnon that could be transformed into a megaron type and adapted to circumstnaces to produce, at the top, the Parthenon, the Maison Carree, the Richmond State House and the professor's pavilions at the University of Virginia, and, at the bottom, be distilled and diluted into the standard wooden American Greek Revival house and the hotels and student rooms within the colonnades and arcades at Mr. Jefferson's university. This entire range of buildings embodies both the type's roots in the hut and the perfection of the hut in the hands of those who drew on and learned from the example of their predecessors.

But there is more. The hut held a priest-king, and the other buildings held those who did some of the things priest-kings did and some things that were beyond their doing. Through a knowledge of history we have access to the thoughts, actions, and accumulated wisdom acquired over time through the experience of gods, priests, kings, philosophers, heads of families, legislators, and professors, and through a knowledge of the coordinated architectural history we can learn the diverse ways the type has been adapted to accommodate their activities. This historical knowledge allows us to be free of the contingencies of the moment which modernism takes as imperatives and allows us to draw on the accummulated experience and wisdom we inherit as we confront the present-day counterparts of the same questions of justice and virtuous conduct the gentlemen of the past confronted. In this way history makes man free. It allows him to fulfill his nature which is to aspire to know justice and to live virtuously. For he who knows himself, building and discussing are complementary activities, and the content of both activities is the same: what do we know now about the best form for those things that we know have always been things of value, that is, those things that have to do with the purpose of living like man?

What we want, then, is not an architecture that produces buildings identifiable as modern, as post-modern, or an any other "style" rooted in some particular time but an architecture that produces good buildings for human purposes, purposes that remain unchanged even as the circumstances in which those purposes present themselves change. A good building is one in which the architect does not say, as would an expressionist genius, "I am here," or "This is required for this place at this time" as a historicist must but would instead speak simply as a citizen by indicating, "I know both the old and the new of this place."

Notes

[1] Paul Oskar Kristeller, "The Modern System of the Arts," *Renaissance Thought II,* New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1965, pp. 163-227; esp. 202ff.

[2] In *The Architecture of Humanism* first published in 1914.

[3] See the early studies by Richard Krautheimer, for example in "Introduction to an 'Iconography of Medieval Architecture' " (first published 1942), *Studies in Early Christian, Medieval, and Renaissance Art,* ed. James S. Ackerman et al., New York: New York University Press, and London: University of London Press, 1969, pp. 115-150; and of Rudolf Wittkower, *Architectural Principles in the Age of Humanism* (first published 1949), 3rd ed., London: Tiranti, 1962. For attention to a temporal building type, George L. Hersey, *Pythagorean Palaces: Magic and Architecture in the Italian Renaissance,* Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1976; and *Architecture, Poetry, and Number in the Royal Palace at Caserta,* Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1983. For examples of attempts to find in modern architecture a content that is linked to what the author presents as modern metaphysics or thought or spirit according to the model Wittkower had provided in his study of Renaissance architecture, see Colin Rowe, "Chicago Frame," in *The Mathematics of the Ideal Villa and Other Essays* (first published 1956), Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1976, pp. 89-117; and William Jordy, "The Symbolic Essence of Modern European Architecture and Its Continuing Influence," *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians,* XXII (1963), 177-187. In contrast to the first three authors, the last two attempt to legitimate modern architecture and to affect current practice.

[4] For an exploration of this topic, see my "Chivalric Declaration: The Palazzo Ducale in Urbino as a Political Statement," in *Art and Architecture in the Service of Politics,* ed. Henry Millon and Linda Nochlin-Pommer, Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1978, pp. 20-45.

[5] In Henry-Russell Hitchcock and Phillip Johnson, *The International Style* (first published 1932), New York: Norton, 1966, preface, p. 13. The book's chapter on the *Siedlung* sneers at the "European . . . functionalists [who] build for some proletarian superman of the future" (p. 93) and suggests that in designing "modern community housing projects" (p. 89, n. 1), architects strike a "balance between evolving ideal houses for scientific living and providing comfortable houses for ordinary living." (p. 92)

[6] Hitchcock and Johnson, p. 95.

[7] Hitchcock and Johnson, p. 95.

[8] For the extremes of forms available within classicism, see the four drawings and brief comments of Leon Krier in "Building and Architecture," *Leon Krier: Houses, Palaces, Cities, Architectural Design Profile,* ed. Demetri Porphyrois, London: AD Editions, 1984, pp. 118-119.

[9] For this interpretation of the avant garde, see Jose Ortega y Gasset, "The Dehumanization of Art," (1948), in *The Dehumanization of Art and Other Writings on Art and Culture,* Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday Anchor Books, n.d., pp. 3-50.

[10] Krier, "Critique of Industrialization," in *Houses, etc.,* pp. 36-37; original emphasis.

[11] Krier, "Architectura Patriae," in *Houses, etc.,* pp. 101-102; p. 102.

[12] As Norris Kelly Smith has pointed out, "all Western architecture prior to the 20th century was 'eclectic,' being based upon a continual reworking of a small number of formal themes or ideas that were for the most part invented by the Egyptians—and mainly by one man, Imhotep." Review of Leland Roth, *McKim, Mead & White, Architects,* and Richard Guy Wilson, *McKim, Mead & White, Design Book Review,* Fall, 1984, 3-5, p. 4. Smith sets eclecticism apart from historicism and uses the latter term in the manner defined below. For his incorporation of the Gothic within the same tradition, see "Architectural Authenticity," *Prospecta 20: The Yale Architecture Journal,* 1983, pp. 215-219. Here I am suggesting that modernism is based on a different realm for making its selections.

[13] According to Maurice Mandelbaum, "Historicism," *Encyclopedia of Philosophy,* ed. Paul Edwards, New York: Macmillan & The Free Press, London: Collier Macmillan, 1967, vol. 4, p. 24b, it took on the distinct formulation I have in mind here during the second third of the present century to refer to a methodology based on "the belief that an adequate understanding of the nature of anything and an adequate assessment of its value are to be gained by considering it in terms of the place it occupied and the role it played within a process of development." Mandelbaum adds (ibid.) that "historicism involves a genetic model of explanation and an attempt to base all evaluation upon the nature of the historical process itself." Art history, as is well known, has been operating with that model since the middle of the nineteenth century. Important in my understanding of historicism have been Leo Strauss, *Natural Right and History,* Chicago and London: University of Chicago, 1953; the same, *The City and Man,* Charlottesville: University of Virginia, 1964; and Karl Popper, *The Poverty of Historicism,* 3rd ed., New York: Harper Torchbook, 1961.

[14] *Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture*, New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1966, p. 19.

[15] Krier, "Architectura Patriae," in*Houses, etc.,* pp. 101-102; p. 102.

[16] Krier, "Architectura Patriae," *Houses, etc.,* pp. 101-102; p. 102. Note the use of the word "or," not "and."

Art Criticism Studies and their Consequences for Art History

Introduction

By James H. Rubin

The three papers that follow were given at the State University of New York at Stony Brook in March 1986. (We regret that the fourth paper, given by Yve-Alain Bois of The Johns Hopkins University, is not available for publication.) The occasion was the Art Department's second annual conference addressing issues of art history, criticism, and theory. The Art Department offers a Master's program it believes is unique for its interdisciplinary approach to art history and for its integration of art history with the study of the history of criticism and theory. The annual conferences are part of that program and are aimed at exploring and at calling attention to its innovative aspects.

In 1985, Donald Kuspit organized a conference around the question of post-modernism and the possibilities of a post-modernist criticism. This year, I was the person to set the theme for the conference, so naturally, since

I am a historian rather than a critic, its emphasis was less contemporary, at least less obviously and directly so. This year's focus was to be on how the study of the history of art has been affected by the study of the history of art criticism. At present, and as never before, both art history and art criticism are concerned with the intellectual and historical, including the political and ideological, content of art. It is not clear whether this recent trend is a carry-over from art criticism into art history or vice-versa: it seems more likely, rather, that both areas have been touched by developments in sister fields such as history and literature. In any case, art criticism has been at its center. In the contemporary realm, it has exemplified the new breadth of historical and philosophical approaches that are emerging in the study of the art of both the past and the present. And in the study of the past, art criticism written during the past has become an essential source for our understanding of the content of the art about which it was written. The degree and the way in which reinterpretation of the past relying on such sources effects our view of the present was one theme of the conference.

The author of a recent book claiming to reorient art history in a more up-to-date direction has written: "It is a sad fact: art history lags behind the study of the other arts. Whether this unfortunate state of affairs is to be attributed to the lethargy of the custodians of art, too caught up in adminstration and the preparation of exhibitions and catalogues to channel their remaining energies into analytic writing, and too preoccupied with the archive to think long and hard about what painting actually is, or to the peculiar history of the institutions devoted in this century to the study of art, a history which from the beginning has tended to isolate that study from the other humanities, or to some less elaborate reason, such as the plain stasis, conservatism and inertia fostered by the sociology of the profession of art history, I cannot say. Nor can I determine to what degree, if at all, this state of inertia may be nudged toward growth and change by the appearance of a book criticizing the prevailing stasis from the outside." (Norman Bryson, *Vision and Painting: The Logic of the Gaze,* New Haven and London, 1983, preface.)

I am not sure we should entirely accept this writer's attack. For one thing, it may be a mistake to judge one discipline in terms derived from another. The traditions of the medium of art are distinct from those of other forms of expression and cannot be adequately judged by alien criteria. However even if the general thrust of the attack is accepted—and we must admit that art history is a deeply conservative field—it is not true that there is such a lack of critical and analytic writings as this writer tries to make it seem. The following papers will prove my point, for their authors are each in the forefront of the new art history. And they will demonstrate a further point: that the study of art criticism is one of the elements that places them in the position of leadership they have already attained. For each of the participants, the study of art criticism—defined broadly as critical writing about contemporary art—is an essential ingredient to the scholarly enterprise, either as a primary topic of historical investigation or as a resource central to an interpretation of artistic activity. In the work of each, there is a dialogue between historical material and recent critical concerns.

In organizing this conference, I tried to offer a variety of approaches within the given theme, and I also wanted to find people working in different chronological fields so we could see how the concerns of those different fields are both similar and distinct. I proposed that each speaker present a paper that would deal with the theme of "Art Criticism Studies and their Consequences for Art History" by exemplifying his own work in this realm and then by attempting to articulate the consequences for his methodology of his use of art criticism. Now, of course, it is not always possible to get someone to do something to order, nor does it make sense for a speaker to avoid things he is deeply involved in in order to follow the prescription to the letter. However, I do think that simply because of the nature of the work of our participants, it was a fairly unified conference.

This is Not a Sign; Some Remarks on Art and Semiotics

By David Summers

This paper is very much work in progress and is introductory to a book only half written, a book that will certainly change in important ways as it is worked out, so that the actual introduction to the book will certainly be very different from this paper. I think it will be helpful right at the beginning to explain what questions I am trying to answer and how I came to be trying to answer them.

When I was a graduate student I took seminars on Precolumbian art with George Kubler. Just twenty years ago one of these seminars went to Mexico, to Teotihuacan, which gave me a real taste of the utterly unfamiliar traditions of Precolumbian art, their spaces and scales, their native materials and colors, and from time to time, partly in order not to forget what had been difficult to learn, I taught courses in Precolumbian art. Although I did not become a scholar of Precolumbian art, I became sufficiently familiar with it to begin to see, or think I could see, how very different from Western art it is. This awareness resulted in two suspicions. First, I began to suspect that I really didn't understand Western art very well, and at the same time I began to mistrust the tools I had been given to talk about art altogether.

I became convinced that the language of formal analysis, that principal strategy by which we try to transform images meaningfully into words, was deeply implicated in the history and values of Western art and Western intellectual endeavor in general. This is inevitably true, of course, but in my opinion the fit between Western art—especially modern Western art—and formal analysis is so close and necessary that its application to other traditions of art actually serves to obscure rather than to clarify them. And so I began to work at the project of devising ways of describing both Western and non-Western art. I realize the difficulties and even the contradictions of such an enterprise, which is also inevitably deeply implicated in the history and values of Western intellectual endeavor. But since the two prongs of this project—the examination of the presuppositions of the Western discussion of art and the analysis of non-Western art—continued to take me in interesting and cogent directions, and since I consider the formulation of such language highly important, I have persisted and devoted several years now to this attempt.

I shall begin to set up the problems I will be addressing by considering an essay by Clifford Geertz, "Art as a Cultural System," published ten years ago.[1] It is an essay with which I am very much in sympathy, and it is one that points the history of art in many useful and beneficial directions. I believe, however, that its ideas can be clarified in ways that will make it easier to achieve some of the results Geertz advocates. Geertz emphatically and to my mind correctly rejects any universal aesthetic definition of art, arguing instead that art is conventional (although he seems to avoid that word), a coordinated activity of performer (or artist) and audience. The artist in all places and times presupposes certain innate capacities of audiences, but there is no "sense of beauty" by which the purely formal dimensions of things might be grasped, and what innate capacities there may be (which he regards as physiological and sensory) are brought into specific existence by cultural circumstances. This does not mean, he says, that we should not be concerned with the formal aspects of art, which he calls "harmony and prosody, composition and syntax," but we should not imagine that exposing the structure of a work of art and accounting for its impact are the same thing. Geertz cites Nelson Goodman's rejection of "the absurd and awkward myth of the insularity of aesthetic experience," the notion that the "mechanics" of art generate its meaning. Such an idea "cannot produce a science of signs or anything else: only an empty virtuosity of verbal analysis."[2]

I believe such reproofs have cut deeply in the history of art, with important and mostly positive consequences. But the same arguments also raise problems for the history of art. What Goodman calls the "mechanics" of art and Geertz the "harmony, prosody, composition and syntax" of works of art are what we call—or used to call—form. Geertz is in effect rejecting formalism as we define it in the history of art, advocating a kind of contextualism as an alternative. If we combine such an argument with Gombrich's notion of physiognomic fallacy then the whole enterprise of meaningfully making inferences from works of art becomes problematical to say the least. The formal structure of works of art can only be explained in terms of the circumstances in which they were made.

What goes out the window with such arguments is not just formalist art history but the everyday, practical, pedagogical, expositional lingua franca of the history of art, formal analysis. Although such analysis might continue to have heuristic value, its old authority is clearly undercut by the argument that we can only make inferences from form to context and not from forms themselves.

As it happens, I found a very good example of the kind of formal analysis I am talking about in a recent New York Review of Books, in a review by Francis Haskell.[3] In an interpretation of Degas' Bellelli family portrait he argued that "mother and daughters seem hardly aware of each other's existence, but the *tight interlocking* forms of the composition bind them together into an almost self-contained group—almost but not quite, for Giulia appears to acknowledge the presence of her father." This gaze between father and daughter is, however, "decisively, if poignantly, intercepted by the *strong, unyielding verticals* of the furniture, which effectively *cut off* the baron from any genuine relationship with his family." Here what Panofsky would have called "expressional," pre-iconographic responses to the apparent states of mind of the painting's subjects are put together with a characterization of the formal "mechanics" of the painting, which have the expressive value of the "tight," the "interlocking," the "self-contained," the "unyielding," the "intercepted," and the "isolated," formal expressive values that, it is presumed, state the significance of the work insofar as it is pictorial, and from this we might draw conclusions about Degas, the Bellelli family, the family in the 19th century, or 19th-century Italy, or Europe. I am not sure that such analysis is an empty virtuosity of verbal meaning, even if it may not take our historical investigations everywhere we would like them to go. Even in such a workday, practical example as this, however, the procedure of analysis has certain implications that are worth examining for a moment.

Formal analysis is used as if it were independent of any tradition to the art of which it might be applied, as if it were a kind of metalanguage. It involves an act of abstraction and is presumed to deal with forms deeper and more essential than the forms of things, that is, deeper than the recognizable forms of subject matter. When we talk about "verticals" and "composition" we are at the very least setting things up for further inferences to be drawn in the terms of whatever it is that is felt to undergird formal analysis in general, usually some theory of perception merging into a theory of expression. The assumption is that such inference is justified by the universality of structures of perception. Because these structures are shared, artists are able to express meaning and we are able to have it expressed to us.

It is easy to reject such assumptions out of hand as hermeneutically hopeless, since we now believe that structures of perception are themselves culturally determined, as Geertz also believes. There is consequently, as we have already seen, heavy support to be had for such a rejection. If we cannot presume that form is a kind of universal language, then art must be, as Svetlana Alpers has argued, citing Geertz, ''locally specific.'' From such a point of view may be developed projects like Alpers' own *Art of Describing* in which some locally specific art—in this case, Northern Renaissance and Baroque art—achieves what is called ''special discourse.''[4] Again, I would not want to gainsay such projects, which are obviously valuable and illuminating. To my mind, however, they raise the serious problem of making it very hard to talk about the ways in which art in different cultures is similar. If it was wrong in the old days of art history to presume that all art is essentially visual and aesthetic in the same way we had come to understand our own art to be, that all art is essentially ''formal'' and may therefore be addressed ''formally,'' it is an implication of the new art history that what we call art in various cultures shares no definable characteristics, that it is therefore only differences and not similarities that should matter and indeed are even *able* to matter.

Let us consider the example of bilateral symmetry, a kind of formal organization to be seen in many kinds of art. If art ''is part and parcel of a cultural system'' in Geertz's words, how can we account for its practical ubiquity? Again, I don't want to argue that art is *not* integral with cultural systems, but I would like to urge the question of whether or not art is simply plastic to historical circumstances and, if it is not, what is it about art that resists the pressure? We may consider two symmetrical paintings, the *Tlalocan* from Teotihuacan and the Ghent altarpiece. They were made nearly a millennium apart on continents each unaware of the other's existence. I have argued elsewhere, however, that they are related at the level of the significance of their formal structure itself, and such arguments might be extended to many images from widely scattered cultures.[5] If bilateral symmetry in both of these paintings is merely a convention of representation, how is it to be explained that this same convention arose in late medieval Europe and the Classic Valley of Mexico, as well as in so many other times and places? Is symmetry incidental to the meaning of these images, and if it is not, and if the way in which it is integral to meaning is arguably comparable in these two unrelated images, how can that be explained? To me these are fundmentally important and difficult questions, to which I shall try to indicate some answers in the rest of this paper.

It seems to me that we are only faced with the alternative of an autonomous aesthetic formalism on the one hand, or a radical conventionalism on the other, in which the meaning of art is explained entirely in terms of circumstances, if we assume that what we call ''formal'' about art is in fact simply aesthetic. It is hard not to think that because the notions of form and of the aesthetic are siblings, perhaps even Siamese siblings, in our philosophical tradition. In order to make what I mean clearer we may again take up the example of bilateral symmetry. This simple formal relation *may* be regarded as an aesthetic one in the simple sense that people find it pleasing or unpleasing, and it may be regarded as an expressive one in that it lends, say, stability to the images it organizes. But if bilateral symmetry may be seen in these ways there is no reason to assume that the actual relation resulted from something like our experience of it unless we further assume that art is essentially aesthetic or expressive. We do not have to make such an assumption. To get ahead of myself a little, I will argue that symmetry is not *primarily* aesthetic or expressive, but that it is the result of the significance of operations within the conditions of the possibility of making images altogether and that it is from the exigencies of those conditions that the practical universality of symmetry arises.

In order to proceed it will be necessary to suspend the idea that form is fundamentally visual or aesthetic. This is a principle to which I shall return several times—that just because we *see* works of art we are not justified in saying that they are therefore essentially visual. The driving of that initial wedge raises the possibility that what we call form may have a number of dimensions—in fact *must* have a number of dimensions—and that it may consequently point interpretation in a number of directions. I hope it is clear in what follows that I am not advocating a return to old fashioned formalism and that I am simply trying to outline an interpretive problem about the relation between the experience of works of art and the determination of their meaning. At the same time, I do not want to duck the implication that I would like to talk about works of art "in themselves" to some degree in order to be able to discuss that about them which is not conventional, or radically defined by specific historical and social context. I would like to be able to say finally not that *art* is shaped by circumstances but that symmetry—and other relations as well, symmetry is only the example I am using—is shaped to circumstances, which is to say that meaning must always be brought in relation to, and realized in terms of, certain structures of presentation.

To pursue this question I have raised I will now shift to a related broader theme, to what are called "conceptual images." It is in fact an easy step from the example of bilateral symmetry to conceptual images because conceptual images are often symmetrical and always planar and are also extremely widespread. Association of symmetry with the idea of the conceptual places symmetry and planarity in a very broad interpretive framework that I wish to examine before finally addressing the question of the status of images as signs, that is, by finally addressing the advertised topic of this paper.

The category of conceptual images is an extremely broad one. A number of art historians and others have divided the art of the world into two categories, one of which is usually conceptual and the other of which is usually something like optical. E.H. Gombrich ends his *Meditations on a Hobby Horse* with the characterization of the art of the world as a "vast sea of conceptual images" interrupted only by a few islands of naturalism, by far the most important of which are the classical and neoclassical phases of Western art and certain Far Eastern art.[6] Conceptual images in fact play a crucial part throughout Gombrich's writing, and it will be useful to review the idea before proceeding to the closer examination of the uses he has made of it.

The upper register of the *Tlalocan*—the example cited earlier—is a spendid instance of a conceptual image developed in planar order. But this capacious category of conceptual images can embrace relatively naturalistic images as well as such "abstract" ones. What all these images have in common, for all the differences between them—is salient planarity, frontality and axiality, to which certain other characteristics are allied. The proportions of conceptual images are usually not descriptive and their contours are uniform lines. Figures are often large-headed, which is explained by the relative importance of the head among the parts of the body. In general, conceptual images state relations of hierarchy in terms of planar organization (left-right, higher-lower, back-front, for example). Consistently with such ends they display all their identifying parts, so that foreshortening is excluded. They are thus images the structure of which is unrelated to the viewer and they are consequently free of such optical features as modelling and perspective. Conceptual images do not take their name from their formal characteristics, however, they rather take it from their presumed origin. Conceptual images are explained as images made not in response to immediate perception, but rather in response to a mental concept variously associated with memory and with the power of the mind to abstract, to name, to form *genera* and definitions. It is perhaps not too much of a simplification to say that conceptual images are thought to be imitated from inner images resulting from experience and memory as opposed to images imitated from the immediate data of sense. The question of whether or not we have mental images corresponding to conceptual images seems seldom to be asked.

The notion of the *con*ceptual, in other words, has always been paired and contrasted with the notion of the *per*ceptual. It has not always been paired in the same way, the differences largely depending on deeper attitudes toward representation. Those inclined toward a simple notion of imitation prefer the perceptual, regarding the conceptual as conventional and removed from the living mainsprings of art. Those of a more idealizing stripe consider the perceptual close to "mere sensation," taking their place in the long critical tradition stretching back to Plato and Aristotle (according to which both the intellectual and the abstract are higher than the sensory), praising the conceptual as higher and more spiritual. Kantians and neo-Kantians see the conceptual as closer to the formative and truly creative principles of art in the human mind. One way or the other, the opposition conceptual-perceptual has provided a basic armature for the synchronic division of all art, from Worringer's *Abstraction and Empathy* to Enrico Castelnuovo and Carlo Ginzburg's dialectic of periphery and center.[7] It has also provided a basic framework for the diachronic ordering of sequences of images.

Generally speaking art historical formalism and abstraction in art grew up together, and we may find arguments defending modernism in which historical interpretation is implicit in that it divides modernism from the past and at the same time provides standards according to which the art of the past may be regarded as precedents for modern art. Apollinaire and Leger, both close to the beginnings of Cubism, explained and defended the new art as conceptual rather than perceptual, and later the psychologist G.H. Luquet praised the art of children and primitives for what he called its "intellectual realism," opposing it to the visual realism of Western adult mimesis.[8] This modernist scheme, according to which the conceptual is primary has, I believe, become the standard one, simultaneously justifying primitivism and constructive or expressive abstraction as both *higher* and deeper than imitation. For those who continued to defend imitation, the conceptual was associated with the conventional, which in a mostly Romantic tradition was associated at once with the non-natural and the unoriginal.Either position implied a view of history according to which the conceptual is earlier. It might be literally earlier, primitive in a negative sense, awaiting progress, sophistication and advances in technology, or it might be metaphorically "earlier," more primordial, so that we might consider the art of children and primitive people better than our own over sophisticated art. Either view provides a simple scheme for the discernment of artistic progress, and for the most general accounts of art historical development. Thus, for example, Greek sculpture has been said to have developed from conceptual to optical in changing from archaic to classic.[9] A similar generalization might be made about the development from Romanesque to Gothic, or from medieval art in general to Renaissance art in general. The same scheme might be used to describe devolution as well, as in provincialism. Thus the transition from classical to early medieval art might be described as a decline from perceptual to conceptual. Either way, the movement is always from mental to sensate or vice versa, and as styles change, movement is from one level of mental activity to another. Whichever way the polarity is made to run, the conceptual/optical contrast provides a psychological basis for the explanation of art, which, precisely in being psychological or perceptual, provides a universal and unified principle for the continuous development of images.

A variant of these schemes, in which sensory images are given positively sub-mimetic and primordial significance is provided by Max Verworn (before 1908) and Karl Bühler (before 1918), who saw art as having declined from the perceptual to the conceptual. Both writers were very positively disposed toward Palaeolithic art—which is *not* conceptual—respectively praising it as "physioplastic" and "concrete," as art that so to speak recapitulated the immediate physical transcription of things by the eye. Both Verworn and Bühler saw Neolithic art as a devolution from Palaeolithic. Verworn called Neolithic art "ideoplastic," Bühler called it "schematic," and both saw it as symptomatic of a dire transformation in the human spirit. Neolithic images (for our purposes, conceptual images) are mental and not perceptual, concerned with unchanging truth rather than appearance, and thus helped to usher in, and to embody and monumentalize, millennia of metaphysical fictions and social oppression justified by these fictions. Both Verworn and Bühler saw Palaeolithic art as the promise of a simpler and better post-metaphysical humanity. Bühler envisioned a possible time of "paradisean clarity and innocence," when mankind lived according to the reality of concrete images, a preconceptual, more purely visual stage of human consciousness in which the obvious practical purposes of nature and life were seen and accepted, as by children at the mental age before they ask why? To ask this question, he says, is to look for invariants and transcendents, to identify concepts with spirits and causes, to begin the long collective discussion of the putative natures of spirits and causes, of their imaginary hierarchies and interrelations. It is in short to begin the whole vast history of human civilization, a tragic and even miserable history based on the fundamental error of regarding abstractions as real. On such a view we are still living in the twilight of Neolithic art.[10]

It is also possible to think of the opposition of conceptual and optical as a dialectic within perception itself. This is the path taken by Heinrich Schaefer, who calls conceptual images *vorstellig*. According to Schaefer such images are so widespread because they arise from the structure of apprehension itself. Faced with the incessant play of contours and foreshortenings in the forms surrounding us, we abandon purely visual evidence for a kind of tactile verification of the surfaces and edges of things. This tactile verification occurs in much the same way that an understanding of space is gained through experience according to Berkeley. The argument has the effect of equating the conceptual and the haptic, to use Riegl's well known term. That is to say, it identifies the stable image found by repeated experience with the image produced by the tactile verification of the shapes of things. It also provides an explanation of why it is that conceptual images are characteristically defined by uniform contours. The artist's hand tracing the fullest contours of forms is in effect the same hand that verifies the shapes of things. According to such a view we must proceed from the sense we make of things back to sensation, back to the incessant play of contours and foreshortenings. For Schaefer as later for Gombrich, it was the Greeks who first set about to do this. When drawing no longer traces the fullest defining contours of forms when forms are foreshortened, or when contour is broken, we have moved toward the optic.[11] This is also a way of saying that foreshortening and broken contour are systematically related to one another, and conversely that frontal presentation and uniform contour are systematically related and related to conceptuality.

These arguments bring us to E.H. Gombrich, who makes the conceptual component of the dialectic of perception cultural rather than simply psychological. That is, Gombrich seeks the principle of stability in perception not so much in experience as in the mediated experience of previous representations, the familiar "schemata" of *Art and Illusion*. By virtue of their presumed primordiality, conceptual images belong to the realm of what Gombrich calls "making." Whether we understand the formula "making comes before matching" to mean that the initial statement of images has a different origin than the subsequent approximation of appearance or that any representation must be preceded by another representation, it is evident that the idea of conceptual images is central to its understanding. In *Art and Illusion*—and since *Art and Illusion*—Gombrich has been concerned more with matching, less with making. This concern has affected the definition of conceptual images. As noted, in *Art and Illusion,* conceptual images serve as initial schemata, the indispensable beginnings from which matching proceeds in successive steps. Although it is still necessary to account for their origin, and to have a chapter in the book on the "power of Pygmalion," the notion of conceptual images undergoes a fundamental change. They become what Gombrich calls "relational models," or better, all images become relational models, of which the old conceptual images are the simpler, optical images the more complex.[12] This simplicity and complexity are relativized by arguing that they are determined by the uses to which images are put in the societies that make them. If I understand this argument correctly, it has the effect of making all conceptual images proto-naturalistic; this is of course what they are in traditions that turn to naturalism (which most have not) but it puts the question of the origin of images—not to mention the relation of these origins to the project of naturalism itself—out of the function of images at the same time that their definition in terms of function seems to open new paths of investigation. And it points in very different directions from those indicated by Gombrich himself in his *Meditations on a Hobby Horse,* to which we shall return after a brief but long historical detour.

The whole discussion I have traced is based on the assumption that conceptual images correspond in essential ways to mental images, and that the differences of conceptual images from naturalistic images is attributable to the distance of their models in the mind from images provided by sensation. I believe it is important to stress that we are concerned with images throughout, that both the image provided by sensation and the image in the mind *are* images, the further assumption being that the image provided by sensation is an image of an actual thing. From the ancient beginnings of this question it has been evident that our sensation is *not* what we sense, and the relation between sensation and what we sense has usually been described as that of an image to that of which it is an image. Plato already observed in the *Cratylus* that an image could not be that of which it is an image, otherwise it would not be an image, but some sort of double, or, absurdly, the thing itself.[13] In Aristotle's *De interpretatione,* which defined discussion for a very long time, it is not clear whether sensations are icons of things or indexes of them, although Aristotle generally writes of "forms." Forms are apprehended by the soul by means of sensation, and these forms are most like *visual* sensation. It is not the thing itself, Aristotle says, but rather the form—*eidos* (a thing seen, also a shape or form)—of the thing, which is in the soul.[14] Aristotle often speaks of these immediate forms of things as "phantasms," things in the light which are then in our *phantasia,* our first capacity to apprehend and to make up images, and so we might rephrase his words to say that it is not the thing but rather an image of the thing that is in our soul. Aristotle argued that this form-image was shared by everyone with properly functioning organs of sense. That is, everyone had the same experience of things, even if various groups named things differently. In a fairly straightforward sense, then, the form-image was iconic, and it was therefore natural rather than conventional in a way that language was not.

At this point it is crucially important to stress that the debate about images and imitation has always centered not so much on the relation of man-made image to reality as upon its relation to the image made by things *in* human sense. If the metaphor of painting was used first to characterize the activities of sensation, once sensation as such was defined, it was only possible for actual painting to refer to the putative painting in sensation, since that was the foundation of all our knowledge. We could not have access to the thing painted unless it was assumed that the image in sensation was an adequate representation of what was "outside."

Aristotle seems to have assumed that the image-form in sensation is an adequate representation, a sufficient icon. But this assumption put a vast burden on the notion of form. If what we apprehend about things *is* form, then form must somehow contain everything we can know about what we sense (or it must be able to trigger our potentiality to understand it). It is easy to see then how form came to be understood not just as shape but as higher essence or substance. In fact the relation between visual form and higher intelligible form quickly came to be inverted. That is, what came to be understood as having been grasped through form was regarded as true form, higher than the sensory and specifically visual forms through which it was first apprehended. Again, this raised serious problems for the question of imitation. Which image should be imitated? The form-image made by nature in sense or a higher abstract form made in the mind? In a long and generally Platonic tradition the answer was very obvious. According to these ideas it was assumed that we *could* imitate the sunsets, flowers and vistas of the world, just as we could imitiate those other creatures immediate to sense, the sirens, centaurs and hippogryphs that come to us in our dreams and daydreams, but neither was regarded as a very important or even defensible thing to do. The higher realm of mental form, in fact, came to constitute a more real nature above the realm of sensation, a rational world that could function as a guarantee against the flux of sensation, and against the flux of the interpenetration of reality and phantasy in the stream of our consciousness.

Aristotle wrote that the human mind simply has the capacity to make one thing out of many.[15] He meant by this that with experience we form *genera*. He at least once wrote as if painted images are more like these genera than they are like any particular thing, that they are in effect images of a higher mental form.[16] This would imply that mental forms are images, or could be, and also that these images are relatively wordlike, that is, comparable to the more abstract level of language. This is not even to consider the again vastly influential and perfectly compatible Platonic variant of these ideas according to which the inner image may participate in the higher, invisible, innate, intelligible, "forgotten" form in the soul. All these ideas certainly helped color the notion of conceptual images, and gave it an authoritative backdrop.

To summarize, we might say that the relation of a mimetic image to its object has not two terms but three when we have an explicit idea of sensation. There is a third term, and a three-legged problem, the thing, the image of the thing in sense or mind, and the image proper, the actual imitation, the painting or sculpture.

I have developed this subargument by talking about some of the first arguments in a long series partly to make the point that the basic issues haven't changed very much since Aristotle left them, at least in the discussion of art. The distinction between lower and higher mental "forms" has justified the distinction between realism and classicism within an overarching framework of naturalism for a very long time. But for our purposes it is sufficient to point out that it also underlies the distinction between optical and conceptual images. And the more important point is that this division still implies that images can only be explained and justified by reference to one or another kind of image in the mind. This habit of thought unquestionably undergirds the great overgenerality of the idea of conceptual images, which can be expanded to include any and all non-naturalistic images. The idea of conceptual images thus becomes a corollary of the Western mimetic tradition. I would now like to begin to conclude by indicating a way out of this alternative, and in order to do that I will turn once again to E.H. Gombrich's *Meditations on a Hobby Horse.*

I mentioned before that since *Art and Illusion* Gombrich has been mostly concerned with the question of what he calls matching, and in this earlier essay he was more concerned with making and with the question of the psychological origin of images. At the beginning of *Meditations on a Hobby Horse* Gombrich makes a distinction between images and representations.[17] A photograph of a horse is an image of a horse, but a hobby horse—by which he means a simple straight stick—is a representation. Gombrich is still concerned with conceptual images, a term he uses often in the essay, and remains in the tradition sketched earlier in regarding this question as an access to the question of the origin of images. But in these arguments Gombrich also changes the previous discussion of conceptual images in fundamental ways.

In the first place, conceptual images are completely separated from higher mental images. The hobby horse is neither the image in sensation, nor is it the image in the mind, the "concept." Its relation is rather to the third term of the triad we have discussed, namely the thing represented. The relation between the hobby horse and the horse is one of substitution, and this substitution is determined by what Gombrich calls "function." In a certain sense, it is a relation of identity under certain conditions. If I need a horse then a stick will do in circumstances in which a stick is able to function as a horse. In those circumstances it *is* a horse, and this kind of substitution bypasses the sort of difference from its object that is implicit in the idea of images taken altogether. It is for this reason that some of the most minimal images may be the most magically real for those who make and use them; they simply are what they represent in the context of use by which they are defined. Representations therefore belong—unlike conceptual images—to what might be called an external realm of use. They fulfill desires, which are according to Gombrich either innate or induced. Desires are innate when they arise from some biological or psychological need, the need to see faces, for example, and they are induced when they arise from social need. Children are more likely to pretend to ride horses and therefore to invent horse substitutes in cultures in which horsemen are looked up to.

I would like to concentrate for a moment on this notion of function, keeping to Gombrich's simple example, and skirting the complex questions of social function which Gombrich himself only mentions briefly in passing. So far function has been described as if it were only the projection of a need; but clearly it is more than that. There must also be a certain fit between what is needed and what comes to hand to fill the need. Not every object could be "ridden" in the manner of a hobby horse, and if a number of things might serve as "horses" each would do so in a way that would articulate "horse" in a certain way. Only a certain kind of thing, in other words, might substitute for a horse, or might be *made* into a substitute for one. This point is as important as it is simple. In the first place, it means that the substitution, although it may take many forms, cannot be arbitrary in the way that naming is. Also, if the substitution is dependent for its meaning upon context and use, the way in which it is distinguished differs utterly from the way in which the words of a language must be differentiated in order to function. The hobby horse thus not only is not an icon of a horse, it is also not a symbol of a horse. It is not an arbitrary substitute for a horse since it must be like a horse or be able to be like a horse. It is able to "take the place" of a horse, to "stand for" it in certain circumstances. The hobby horse is thus what might be called a *real metaphor,* by which I mean to refer to the metaphor underlying metaphor, which is a spatial one. A metaphor is a transfer, a carrying over, a replacement of something by something else that is in some way like it. In a context the stick *is* a horse, but the way in which it is like a horse is bound to the size and scale of real space, or play and ritual. Such spatial being-like may suggest actual likeness, so that the stick may be made actually to resemble a horse, by giving it a head, say, or ears, but its primary metaphoricity cannot be reduced to iconicity.

Let us take another example. Say the chieftain of our tribe has died and we lament his absence, which is to say that we desire his presence. If we erect a stone, the volume of the stone can stand for his presence, the uprightness we have given it may stand in contrast to the horizontality of his death and in "memory" of his uprightness in life. The permanent stone may stand for his impermanent flesh. All of this may be said—which is to say that the definition of a monument may be given—without any reference to iconicity at all. This brings me around at long last to the first title of my paper, THIS IS NOT A SIGN. What I mean by this is that, although images may become signs, and some images are more sign-like than others, conceptual images are not signs in the first instance. They are not icons, indexes or symbols, and if we take the spoken or written word as the paradigm of signs, then they are not in the first instance signs taken altogether. I believe that the ease with which we accept the definition of images as signs is probably encouraged by the very old habit of thinking about images as being determined by prior mental images. When we separate images—and here it must be insisted that I am sticking to my simple examples—from mental images, then we can place them in the realm of real space in which I believe their peculiar meaning operates and in which the absolute difference between works of art and language becomes evident.

The argument so far has hinged on the notion of real metaphor, the actual replacement of one thing by another, the making of one thing to stand for another and be like it. The real spatiality of all this language must be stressed. The term "actual replacement" implies that the matter is at hand, the result of action or the susceptibility to action, and "the making of one thing to stand for another" also implies that substitution is the consequence of human action and invention. I would want to insist that what I have called real metaphor is always integral with human action, that the real spatial extent which is the realm of human action is also the peculiar realm of the significance of art, or perhaps better, that the realm of such significance is the realm of art.

In making this argument I have in mind an article by Umberto Eco in which he sets out to explain what he thinks C.S. Pierce meant by the term "final interpretant."[18] Eco argues that for Pierce the "object" to which a sign refers is not a thing but rather the praxis appropriate to that sign, thus allowing Pierce to achieve a "pragmatical" rather than an "ontological" realism. Some interpretants are "emotional" or "energetic," and do not so much demand interpretation as they produce changes in behavior and habit. "This means that after having received a series of signs and having variously interpreted them, our way of acting within a world is either transitorily or permanently changed. This new attitude, this pragmatic issue, is the final interpretant. At this point the unlimited semiosis stops (and this stopping is not final in a chronological sense, since our daily life is interwoven with those habit mutations). The exchange of signs produces modifications of the experience. The missing link between semiosis and physical reality as practical action has been found. The theory of interpretants is not an idealistic one." The dialectic between semiosis and practice, Eco argues, makes it possible to account both for the synchronic structure of sign systems and for the diachronic destructuralization and restructuralization of those systems. This is not to say that what we do is not immediately caught up in a new sign system, it is rather to say that a vast area of meaning is stated in the extralinguistic terms of praxis; and that while we enact the meaning of signs we also change the reality we talk about so that it must be talked about differently. It means too that change is not simply to be described as a vast, seamlessly knit permutation of signs.

Change is lumpier and stringier than that, its unfolding everywhere mingled with final interpretants. The conclusion of the practical syllogism is not the stated determination to act but rather the act itself.

All the arguments I have pursued converge toward a broad area of human practical experience. The distinction between semiosis and praxis points toward a vast realm of action able both literally to realize language and to demand the transformation of language. At a similarly concrete level there is a fit between the human desire to make certain images and the potential of what is at hand to be or become substitutes for those things. I would argue that the universality of what we call conceptual images arises not from the universal possession of mental images—it might again be asked whether anyone has ever really had a spontaneous conceptual image, or whether only children or primitive, archaic or decadent people have these flat ideas—but rather that they arise from the operations and manipulations—and from the significance of the operations and manipulations—by means of which human needs are accommodated to things in the world at hand, with all the fragile historical necessity of human action.

The universality of conceptual images arises, then, not just from the projection of human desires, but from the necessity that the real metaphors fulfilling these desires be realized in the realm of human action and effort, effort corresponding to the resistance of what comes to hand, a resistance that in itself demands the adaptation of metaphor to function. In making, the world is found to be a set of relations, into accommodation with which images must be brought. On the basis of such arguments we may make the transition from the metaphoricity of the simplest images to more complex conceptual images and to the planar order to be seen in so much of the art of the world, giving added substance to Meyer Schapiro's statement that such art "is built on an intuitive sense of the vital values of space as experienced in the real world."[19] It is certainly on the basis of such values that the peculiar decorum of planar images is worked out, on the basis of size, orientation, up-down, back-front and left-right. These fundamental and fundamentally significant relations are not simply projected and are not simply part of the universal apparatus of perception. Rather they had to be found and invented.

What have I accomplished with all this? I have tried to question in a different way the idea that images are icons and especially that they may be icons justified by correspondence to mental images. In doing this I have also tried to criticize the presuppositions about images that make us speak about them as if they were iconic even when they are not naturalistic. I have also argued that the basis for the similarities among images in many cultures is to be found in the real space of human action. In pursuing these arguments I have kept to very simple examples; I have only been able to suggest a solution to the problem of planar order (of which bilateral symmetry is a principle) and I have not even raised the problem of what I call virtual images, that is, of images containing their own space. But in principle the same arguments could be extended to embrace the endlessly complex and specific activities of the great variety of human cultures. And if these arguments are convincing, then we may build from the formal specificity of images both to a relatively small number of structures evident in many styles and to the endless variety of use and ritual for which the works have been made, an endless variety approachable through the real spatial structure of the works themselves. If we give up the idea that iconicity is central to images, rather than a possible element of them, then the modes of their presentation, their "style," ceases to be incidental to them and becomes the statement of their sharable significance, toward the definition of which we may point art historical interpretation.

Footnotes

[1] C. Geertz, "Art as a Cultural System," *Modern Language Notes,* 91, 1976, pp. 1473-1499.

[2] Ibid., pp. 1497-8; N. Goodman, *Languages of Art,* Indianapolis, 1985, p. 260.

[3] F. Haskell, "What's in a Portrait," *New York Review of Books,* XXXIII, No. 5, March 27, 1986, p. 7.

[4] S. Alpers, *The Art of Describing. Dutch Art of the Seventeenth Century,* Chicago-London, 1983, p. 8.

[5] D. Summers, "The 'Visual Arts' and the Problem of Art Historical Description," *Art Journal,* 42, 1982, pp. 301-310.

[6] E.H. Gombrich, *Meditations on a Hobby Horse and other Essays on the Theory of Art,* London, 1963, p. 9.

[7] W. Worringer, *Abstraction and Empathy. A Contribution to the Theory of Style,* tr. M. Bullock, Cleveland and New York, 1968, p. 15 (first published in 1908). ". . . the urge to abstraction stands at the beginning of every art and in the case of certain peoples at a high level of culture remains the dominant tendency, whereas/or the Greeks and other occidental peoples, for example, it slowly recedes, making way for the urge to empathy." Here abstract, "conceptual" form is raised a power, but the opposition is still the same. E. Castelnuovo and C. Ginzburg, "Centro e periferia," *Storia dell'arte italiana,* I, Turin, 1979, pp. 285-352, illustrate a nineteenth-century relief sculpture which is characterized as "un prodotto contadino." It is in every sense "conceptual" and follows formulae that "remain almost immutable through the centuries, to the point that some of them seem to return directly to the Neolithic period." In this case the opposition is between the sophistication of the center (which largely takes the form of naturalism) and the straightforwardness of the art of the periphery.

[8] R. Krauss, "No more play," in *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and other Modernist Myths,* Cambridge, Mass.-London, p. 52-53.

[9] E.H. Gombrich, "Art History and Psychology in Vienna Fifty Years Ago," *Art Journal,* 44, 1984, pp. 162-164, briefly traces the history of the notion of the "conceptual image." His account begins with Emmanuel Löwy, who in his *Rendering of Nature in Early Greek Art* of 1900 took up Ernst Brücke's "memory image" (*Gedächtsnisbild*) and used it to anchor the beginnings of the art historical development he was tracing. Löwy suggested that "memory images" could not only explain the character of early Greek art, but that, in general, "wherever we are able to trace the development of art on a large scale there is a movement from the 'psychological' toward the 'physiological,' toward the image on the retina, the objectively recorded slice of nature." Thus generalized, memory images came to figure in Julius von Schlosser's history of medieval art, and H.R. Hahnloser, following the advice of Ernst Kris, changed the term from *Gedächtnisbild* to *Gedankenbild,* from "memory image" to "conceptual image."

[10] See M. Verworn, *Zur Psychologie der Primitiven Kunst,* in *Naturwissenschaftlichen*

Wochenschrift, 44, 1907 (Jena, 1908, p. 19). Physioplastic images are based on "the immediate image of the object" (*das reine Erinnerungsbild des Gegenstandes*); ideoplastic images are linked to abstraction and association and are either fantastic or show what is known rather than what is seen; their presentation is related to listing. The *Vorstellungsleben* of Paleolithic man consisted only in the play (which Verworn considered the origin of art) of immediate images of sense experience. The Palaeolithic hunter "sought nothing behind things. He knew no metaphysics." K. Bühler, *The Development of the Child. A Summary of Modern Psychological theory,* New York, 1930, p. 106-125; 146-157 (first published in 1918 as *Die geistige Entwicklung des Kindes*) also treats conceptual images as prime agents of "false consciousness."

[11] H. Schaefer, *Principles of Egyptian Art,* ed. E. Brunner-Traut, tr. J. Bains, Oxford, 1974, p. 90-91. Under the guidance of Meyer Schapiro, M. Bunim, *Space in Medieval Painting and the Forerunners of Perspective,* New York, 1940, p. 5, makes the opposition "conceptual/optical," rooted in the conflict "between the real and the apparent in vision." The validity of alternatives to perspective construction (which is non-conceptual) was urged by developments in modern art. Cezanne's skewing of point of view in single paintings, more programmatically pursued by the Cubists, raised these questions.

[12] E.H. Gombrich, *Art and Illusion. A Study in the Psychology of Pictorial Representation,* Princeton, 1969, pp. 87-90.

[13] Plato, *Cratylus,* 432-433 (*Cratylus, Parmenides, Greater Hippias, Lesser Hippias,* tr. H.N. Fowler, London-New York, 1926, pp. 162-167).

[14] Aristotle, *De interpretatione,* 16a (*The Categories. On Interpretation. Prior Analytics,* tr. H.P. Cook and H. Tredennick, Cambridge, Mass.-London, 1967, p. 115). Aristotle writes that spoken words are symbols of affections (*pathemata*) of the soul and that, although written and spoken languages differ, these *pathemata* are the same for all men. For the principle that "the stone is not in the soul, only the form," see Aristotle, *De anima,* 431b-432a (*On the Soul. Parva naturalia. On breath,* tr. W.S. Hett, Cambridge, Mass.-London, 1975, pp. 180-181).

[15] For the power of the soul to make one out of many images, Aristotle, *Metaphysics,* 980b-981a (*The Metaphysics,* tr. H.Tredennick, Cambridge, Mass.-London, 1980, I, pp. 4-5); and *De anima,* 434a9-10.

[16] Aristotle, *Politics,* 1281b (*The Politics,*tr. H. Rackham, London-New York, 1932, pp. 222-223).

[17] Gombrich, *Meditations on a Hobby Horse,* pp. 1-3.

[18] U. Eco, "Peirce's notion of Interpretant," *Modern Language Notes,* 91, 1976, pp. 1457-1472.

[19] M. Schapiro, "On Some Problems in the Semiotics of Visual Art: Field and Vehicle in Image-signs," *Semiotica,* I, 1969, pp. 223-242; also in *Simiolus,* 6, 1972-3, pp. 9-19.

The Critique of Enlightenment in Eighteenth-Century Art

By Thomas Crow

The tie between eighteenth-century painting and Enlightenment thought is central to the dominant accounts of the period, accounts that stress variously the official efforts to reassert the primacy of history painting, the didactic critical program of a *philosophe* like Diderot, or the painterly empiricism of artists such as Chardin, Greuze, or Joseph Vernet.[1] Whether or not the painting in question is found adequate to its rational and moralising criteria, the view of the Enlightenment inscribed in these accounts is invariably an affirmative one. Few writers on art indeed would think to challenge the heroic narrative that is implicit in the term itself.

In the larger fields of history and philosophy, another and harsher view of the Enlightenment has been argued with increasing frequency. The critique of enlightenment (to generalise the term beyond the eighteenth century) sees the processes of secularisation and rationalisation that constitute our received notion of modernity as belonging to a new order of mythology. The human subject at the center of this modern myth, transparent to itself by virtue of reason, has been dethroned and consigned to the category of temporary and contingent ideological constructions. The great emancipation of civil society and its material economy from the constraints of superstition, dogma, and ritual has been rewritten as the invention of new and more efficient forms of control over individual lives.

This critique of enlightenment probably begins most forcefully in Nietzsche[2]; It was taken up and adapted to a pessimistic Left position by Horkheimer and Adorno[3], and continues with the recent writings of Gilles Deleuze[4], Jean-Francois Lyotard[5], and Michel Foucault[6] among others. To follow Foucault, whose work encompasses the historical period under discussion here, the story of escape from older forms of domination is written as one of re-submission to more pervasive forms of discipline that advertise themselves as humane, compassionate, and liberating. Discourses and institutions have come to occupy and control more and more the intimate actions and feelings of the individual body. The disciplines of penal reform, psychiatry, hygiene, meant the colonization and supervision of whole dimensions of life heretofore out of the sight of political power. The enlightened society becomes inevitably the disciplinary society.

Central to Foucault's thought is attention to the processes of *enclosure,* that is, the physical and legal separation of persons such that new and falsely uniform identities are enforced on the human body: the madman, the patient, the criminal, the deviant are historical products of specific discursive disciplines. At the same time, the lives of ''ordinary'' persons, defined as those not inscribed within these disciplines, are ringed round and reordered by their network of supervision and boundary control.

It would not be difficult to apply this negative construction of enlightenment to the history of painting. In precisely the period covered by Foucault's *Surveiller et punir,* the later seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, ambitious artistic practice is removed from various heterogeneous functions, often hidden physic allocations, and undeveloped enabling discourses and positioned within a single space. I am using the term space in a figurative sense, though in time it would have its most dramatic manifestation in the Salon exhibitions in the Louvre.[7] Initially, however, this space took less material form: it presented itself as a new form of knowledge, a way for the first time of setting up painting as an object of knowledge and making it somehow transparent to itself.

We are talking now about a period in which the term ''art'' still designated one of many technical and craft skills.[8] The practice of painting had only recently won for itself some share in the intellectual prestige possessed by literature, but that new status was still unstable and open to challenge. All this is of course tied to the shifting fortunes of the French Royal Academy of Painting and Sculpture. In order to create and maintain its distinction from the old and still-powerful guild, it first attempted to annex the visual arts to the literary ones, particularly to poetic drama, so that the theories of the stage and the dramatic text would essentially become those of the picture. Previous, largely Italian, theories that had argued for that link were now embodied in a permanent institution backed by a culturally ambitious state power.[9]

One can thus move easily from Foucault's model of enclosure or confinement to his equation between knowledge and power: there is a demarcation and exposure of a previously heterogeneous and unsupervised practice; that coming to knowledge then allows the systematic intervention of political authority. As is well known, the Academy grew rich and confident as it was deployed in the embellishment of Louis XIV's centralising regime. But the opening to knowledge came first, the mapping and codifying, the imposition of clear hierarchies, central tenets to which concrete examples could be referred in tests of validity. That transformation, of course, appeared under the sign of emancipation: the claim that the guild had illegitimately enclosed a noble pursuit within demeaning and inhibiting self-interest.

This was made plain in Roland Fréart de Chambray's *Idée de la perfection de la peinture* of 1662.[10]. This was arguably the first work of pictorial aesthetics published in French, and it comes from someone close to Poussin and to the academic leadership. In his introduction he describes this emancipation in terms that we would immediately understand, those of the democratic franchise. The most promising aspect of painting in France, he says, is that the common man takes an interest in it and freely offers his opinion. In this is the promise of a return to the days of Apelles, who would place his pictures on the street and hide behind them in order to overhear the comments of passersby.[11]

Where Chambray sees failure is in the artists' refusal to submit to this scrutiny, to the opening up of art to the light of the public space. As a result modern painting cannot match the achievements of the ancients. Instead of striving like them for "la belle gloire et l'immòrtalité de leur nom pour principale recompense de leurs ouvrages," French artists, by contrast,

> ne regardent que l'utilité present. C'est pourquoi ils tiennent une route bien différente, et tachent autant qu'il leur est possible d'arriver au but qu'ils se sont uniquement proposé. Pour cet effect , ils ont introduit par leur cabale, je ne sais quelle peinture libertine, et entièrement degagée de toutes les sujetions qui rendaient cet art autrefois si admirable et si difficile . . .[12]

The language of the last sentence is enough, however, to indicate the disciplinary drift of Chambray's argument. In fact his test of freedom in discussion of and access to art is how closely the examples of Raphael and Poussin have been adhered to. The democratisation of art's audience will be the most efficient means of enforcing a unified standard of seriousness and significant form in the arts. The essentials of the alter, polemical Poussiniste position are evident here. The ideal model is one that is seen to provide the greatest cognitive clarity, one that yields maximum transparency to the subject matter and to the rational intelligence of the artist. In the Academic orthodoxy of the 60s and 70s, those aspects of painting that could not be subsumed under a literary/theatrical model were more or less ignored. André Félibien, the intellectual put in charge of formulating the Academy's doctrine, came up with precise instructions concerning *composition,* the mental ordering of the subject, but refused to establish rules that would govern *ordonnance,* that is, the strictly visual arrangemeant of forms and figures on the canvas. An artist's ability in painterly practice was "un don tout particulier de la nature," honed in the studio and not in the lecture hall or textbook.[13]

Around 1700, however, a strong theoretical effort was made to give painting its autonomous, and primarily visual, rationale. And its author was not initially an academician, but rather a critic and theoretician whose main support came from influential private collectors: Roger de Piles.[14] The last years of the seventeenth century, in fact, witnessed an increasing accommodation between art theory and aristocratic values alien to the new public sphere. The prestige and intellectual lucidity with which the Academy had invested painting began to stimulate a whole new style of informed and systematic collecting, something that had barely existed among the French elite before this time.[15] That prestige and knowledge proved tremendously useful to this new kind of *amateur,* but both the democratic and disciplinary implications of previous academic theory were not. Certainly aristocratic culture in this period was about escape from discipline, specifically the discipline of the Versailles court and the absolutist regime. The style and sensibility of the ideal aristocrat in the later seventeenth century was resistant to any standard of lucidity and transparency in expression. As the qualities of *honneteté* were codified and refined in this period, the exceptional man was distinguished from the mass by his artfully indirect and formalized style of expression and self-presentation.[16] It would be surprising if these values did not find their way into discussion of painting, and it was de Piles who gave them their most persuasive formulation.

He was concerned, as Chambray and Félibien had not been, to define the proper effects of painting in terms other than those applied to literature: criteria of quality are displaced from subject matter to something else—something supportive of narrative but not identical with it. For him, the kinds of cognition that they had evoked by the term "truth," fidelity to natural appearances and the rhetoric of the "passions," are not directly accessible or even welcome in a picture. Nature as observed is inevitably lacking in the persuasive sense of rightness and completeness that a successful painting must provide. The natural-seemingness of the work of art is another matter, one achieved not by transparency to the world but by the internal consistency of its artifice.[17]

He shores up this belief by an analogy between the composition of a picture and the structure of vision.[18] The field of vision, he argues, is not the angular, geometric field of perspective construction, but rather circular or oval in shape with perceptual acuity sloping off in all directions. The corollary in pictorial composition is a central field patterned after the distortion of a convex mirror or the shape of a "grappe de raisin." Human vision will seek to impose its natural pattern on any scene, real or fictional, put in its way. Painting, however, will achieve its greatest effect of rightness and completeness if the mind need not work to re-order what it sees, but finds that order already present. This is something rarely encountered in nature; it is almost entirely an effect of art. It allows the narrative of the picture to penetrate most directly to the sensibility of the viewer; it can take him unaware, impose an immediate unified concentration, and move him to that state of "enthousiasme" that de Piles saw as art's greatest reward.[19]

De Piles's criticism is based on a retrospective reading and putting into order of the great art of the past, such that the principle behind its achieved autonomy is identified and used as a guide to new projects. The "grappe de raisin," following Du Fresnoy, he ascribed to Titian, but the highest development of an autonomous painting he naturally saw in Rubens. He had examples at hand in the duc de Richelieu collection, and several of these clearly manifest the guiding principles of his criticism. They answer his demand for a highly artificial use of color and light such that more peripheral objects function as a background for continuous ones nearer the center of the pictorial field, but are never detachable as background in any distinct figure-ground relationship. In a picture like the "Rape of the Sabine Women," de Piles sees the exaggerated aerial perspective, in which peripheral foreground figures are almost entirely drained of strong light and hue, as providing a necessary rest, "repos," for vision, that is, the necessary internal frame by which visual communication is facilitated.[20] "Facilité" is an important word for him; it appears in his celebration of what might seem as unrestful a picture as Rubens ever painted; the Munich "Fall of the Damned," also then in the Richelieu collection. The "granda fracas" of bodies is available to the gaze "avec autant de facilité et de repos, que s'il n'y en avait qu'une seule."[21]

De Pile's ideal viewer quickly suspends direct attention to the subject matter of the latter picture, despite Rubens' incomparable success in bringing the Day of Judgment to horrifying life. "Les ignorants," he says, will feel themselves witnessing the real torments of the damned souls, but "les savants" will quickly find any imagination of terror transformed into a positive, ecstatic pleasure in the aesthetic "effet du Tout-ensemble" created by the artist. Theirs is a mode of cognition that is truly pictorial, in that attraction to and pleasure in the object are largely separable from its intimidating textual referent.[22]

De Piles was looking back over the history of art with an eye to providing an inner logic of the visual that would justify the novel concept of painting as an elevated and centralised practice. He was as committed as the older academicians to a stystematic and unified standard. But in the seriousness of his effort to construct a persuasive argument for the autonomy of painting as a mode of experience, he reversed the balance of their theory, drawing on values that were not those the discursive space of ordinary cognition and understanding. The displacement of the moral or instructive referent has the potential to block that transparency to power that had so quickly overtaken history painting in the Academy's early years. It preserves the integrity of the picture as a space of *fiction,* neither window nor mirror nor map, its mimetic structure loosened from the restrictive geometry built into the framing edge.

De Piles' biography is in keeping with this ambivalent stance, affirming and at the same time resisting the transparency of art to knowlege and discourse. In 1699, under the patronage of Hardouin-Mansart, he was in fact made the Academy's chief theoretician, but he never seems to have achieved any great influence among the membership.[23] During the last years of his life, during the completion of of his summa, the *Cours de peinture par principes,* he was a pensioner of Pierre Crozat.[24] Thus he was linked to the same alternative academy—part private, part public—that had incubated Watteau. Our question at this point is whether de Piles' suspended position was in any way as productive for art criticism as it had been for the painter. Did it make a difference for the subsequent practices of both writers and artists?

* * * * *

One sign that it did comes nearly a half-century later and from inside the Academy. It appears in texts either written or animated by Charles-Nicolas Cochin and offered in defense of Francois Boucher. Boucher was of course from 1750 forward the favored artist of Pompadour, and Cochin owed his eventual executive authority over official art in France to the protection of her and her family.[25] Cochin's defense of the painter is thus a loyal one to be sure. But it also involves another, more principled position: resistance to the re-imposition of the disciplinary order of Le Brun and Félibien. The call for this return to order was now coming from outside the academic hierarchy, not from inside it, and its expression lacked the tact that had charactierised its earlier manifestations.[26]

Its best known voice is La Font de Saint-Yenne, the first man to make a public identity for himself as an unofficial, journalistic critic of art.[27] Writing in 1754, La Font made Boucher into a symbol for all that was decadent and corrupt in French painting,the artist against whom he rallied a (largely imaginary) public in defense of the verities of seventeenth-century classicism.[28] His principal target was a pair of large pendant canvases, allegories on the rising and setting of the sun, done for Pompadour and shown in the Salon of the previous year. His report on the exhibition takes the form of a mock-letter to a provincial correspondant, and he puts the most severe condemnations in the mouth of his friend:

> Vous n'aimex ni son coloris, ni sa composition, ni son gout de dessin, ni ses pensées. Vous portez meme l'excès de votre antipathie jusques à dire qu'il a énervé les progrès de notre école par son fard séduisant, par la teinte de ses chairs qui ne sont point celles de la nature . . .

La Font, or his authorial voice, will not go that far (though he certainly has given form to the thought); his criticisms are more specific to the pictures. For example, he observes that "quoique la mer paraisse agitée, on y voit toutes les divinités dans un repos parfait et assez peu vraisemblables." He objects to the attribute of the lyre which a nayad hands to Apollo in the *Rising,* one inappropriate to his manifestation as Helios:

> Si le peintre eut été plus versé dans l'histoire poétique, il aurait su que lorsque l'on donnait des noms différents á la meme divinité, c'était ordinairement pour designer ses diverses fonctions. . . . . Un peu plus de lecture lui eut épargné cette faute dans l'historique de son sujet.

A more serious error for La Font, and one he finds more difficult to excuse, is the indifference of the attendant figures, which leads him to believe that they were included only to fill the voids in the composition.

He concludes by dismissing any notion that Boucher's "poésie" might invalidate these bookish complaints. The standard repertoire of *galant* mythology is not "poésie" in painting; such painting would, unlike Boucher's, manifest "un feu divin, une flame qui échauffe le génie du peintre, qui lui fait concevoir ses sujets d'une maniére grande, neuve, ingénieuse, quelquefois sublime . . ." While displaying all this, however, the artist must take take care not to offend the morals of well-brought-up young girls: shaking a finger at the abundant nudity in Boucher's two canvases, he declares, "Bein des personnes du sexe, qui en ont encore la modestie, ont jugé à propos de n'y point mener leurs filles." This moralising over children and indecent pictures in fact comes directly out of Rousseau's polemically philistine first discourse of 1750.[29] It is the voice of discipline again, the Platonic severity of one side of the Enlightenment. La Font is calling for a separation of art from the life of the senses, and it leads him to stress a new, middle-class definition of *honneteté*: "Leurs indécences seront surement applaudies et admirées par les libertins, mais elles auront toujours le mépris des honnetes gens."

La Font's evocations of genius and sublimity are not dissimilar to de Pile's rhapsodies, but one wonders how easy it would be for the artist to maintain his divine fire of inspiration while worrying over the tender sensibilities of children. The language seems somewhat automatic and raises the question as to who, in the 1750s, truly had the right to use it. Cochin would make a better case for his priority. On the subject of Boucher's 1753 pictures, he produced a lengthy published reply to La Font and some other critics. His defense is whole-hearted:

> Je ne crois pas vous ayiez jamais vu de ce maitre, ni d'aucun autre, deux tableaux remplis de plus de graces et d'agréments. C'est une richesse de génie admirable, soit pour composition poétique, soit pour l'agencement pittoresque. Joignez à cela une magnificence et un brillant de couleur dans les draperies, qui charment les yeux, sans détruire en aucune manière l'harmonie générale de ses tableaux.[30]

For Cochin, the presence of these overall unities is the sign of the artist's ability to recreate and give persuasive order to an imaginary world. And their reappears in his criticism much of the same kind of terminology that de Piles had used to evoke, if not to explain, the fundmentally formal unity of the picture: *effet, repos,* the seduction of the *non-fini,* the imbeddedness of form and drawing in color.

This achieved unity is doubly important to Cochin in that it allows the artist to provide arresting and unexpected details that are in keeping with the painting's internal system, if not with strict narrative construction: why, he asks, would a critic deprive us of the female figure supporting Thetis in the *Setting:*

> Entre toutes les beautes qui se trouvent réunies dans cette figure. l'effet de lumière en est le plus piquant; elle ne recoit qu'une lumière echappée sur le visage, ce qui y produit de la vigueur dans les ombres, tandis que le reste de la figure dans l'ombre reflétée est peinte sans noir avec une intelligence et une fraicheur de couleur qui est admirable. En général il faut convenir que M. Boucher excelle dans l'art de traiter les chairs dans les ombres douces.[31]

These were concerns close Cochin's heart; they were the reasons for his high estimation of Guercino among the masters of the past (again, there is a refutation of a unitary standard of perfection established by Raphael). Guercino, says Cochin, offers to contemporary artists "la magie des tons d'ombres" along with "le moelleux du pinceau, et un certaine incertitude dans de tracé des contours, lorsqu'on les regarde de près, qui, de distance, n'empeche point la décision des formes."[32] Cochin could have used the same words to descrie the "magie" of Boucher's style and in fact goes on to do just that.[33]

The first question to be asked of Cochin's defense of Boucher concerns its cogency as criticism: does the revival of de Piles' criteria fit their object in this instance. In the *Rising* and *Setting* of 1753, we can certainly see the circular, convex-mirror compositional structure. It is there too at the beginning of his career. In his first securely dated picture, the *Venus seeking Arms from Vulcan for Aeneas* of 1732, the poses of the figures all conform to the "grappe de raisin" arrangement; the fall-off in intensity of hue and contrast is marked and serves to underscore the integrity of the central oval; the pliant circulation of form is picked up in the handling, in the characteristically broad, flowing touch used to delineate detail.

Right from the start, all the elements of Boucher's mature style are in place. The impact of this particular picture was strong and immediate. Natoire, for example, reproduced Boucher's composition in his Academy reception piece of 1734 (the same year of Boucher's own entry).[34] The same arrangements reappear in his major canvases throughout his career: the *rape of Eurpoa,,* done for the state competition of 1747, and, a decade later, the large *Venus at Vulcan's Forge,* display the same basic logic of picture-making. P.-J. Mariette, a knowledgeable art-world insider, wrote in his mid-century biography of the painter that the origins of his style remained mysterious. His contemporaries too saw Boucher's manner as having emerged fully formed.[35]

The works that we know from the 1720s are attractive, but do not prepare one for the extraordinary will-to-style that appears in the following decade and continues until the end of his life. He was very briefly a student of the dominant history painter of the period, Lemoyne; who worked in a quite different style, but that relationship may not have lasted more than a few months. He had a belated two-year trip to Italy beginning in 1728, but his activities during that period remain obscure and no painting can securely dated to that period.[36] His earlier paintings are mostly a pastiche of North Italian styles: Castiglione and Sebastiano Ricci come to mind. At the same time, he was working hard at his engraving, employed in the Jean de Jullienne group then completing the monumental sets of prints after Watteau. But even those few picture that employ Watteau-like motifs filter them through an Italianate lens.

Jullienne's project came of course out of the old Crozat circle, where Venetian artists and connoisseurs had been frequent guests.[37] And this was where de Piles' color-oriented criticism had also found its ultimate home. That criticism drew on Venetian painting as it drew on Rubens, and more than that, made that painting into the basis of a *system.* Boucher's extraoradinarily consistent output represents painting as system, and bears all the marks of his own well thought-out synthesis between both the theoretical ideas and the practical examples available in his youthful milieu.

The convex-mirror structure is in keeping with the general lack of mass in Boucher's objects and figures. It joins them in a a relatively weightless center and provides his compositions with their principal source of coherence. The substance of his painted worlds—mist, water, cloud—mimics the fluidity of his brush. That, and the suppression of any hard obstacles in the foreground corners of his compositions, have been interpreted as a programmatic opening of access to the erotic imagination.[38] That is inarguably the case in his *galant* subjects, but the meaning of the structure goes beyond that particular kind of appropriateness. It appears as well in his religious pictures, as in *The Light of the World* of 1750, done for Pompadour's private devotional altar (this was the painting that established the tie between artist and patroness) and the *sleeping Christ Child,* shown in the Salon of 1759.

Joseph de la Porte, a practiced critic and journalist close to the Pompadour family, applied this vividly de Piles-descended reading to the latter picture in his review of the exhibition:[39]

> La disposition des tetes des cherubins est d'autant plus intelligente qu'elle est moins commune que dans l'usage ordinaire de ce secours allegorique. Ell fournit à l'effet harmonieux de tout le tableau. C'est particulièrement cette harmonie de tons, que nous avons remarquée. Elle se trouve dans toutes les ouvragfes de ce meme peintre avec une finess et une certaine sagacité que nous ne rencontrons pas aillieurs.

De la Porte sums up his feelings by calling it "un chef-d'oeuvre de cette science magique de la peinture," and seeking to "pénétrer les causes," finds an impromptu experiement at hand. Stepping back, the critic finds that the Boucher shares a rank with two large landscapes by Joseph Vernet. (One should remember that Vernet was regarded by eighteenth-century observers as providing an almost miraculously accurate account of nature.[40]) Though the little Boucher canvas had seemed "moelleux et agréable" when viewed alone,

> en eloignant à une certaine distance, d'ou l'oeil put rassembler plusierus objets, nous l'avons vu, au milieu de deux grandes vues de monsieur Vernet, se soutenir et conserver une espèce de fermeté de couleurs . . . sans rien perdre pour cela des agréments de la douceur . . . Nous avons conclu qu'apparamment, le peintre avait saisi cette participation de tons que dans la nature nous appercevons entre tous les objets, mais dont l'oeil ne peut ni mesurer les grades ni apprécier les termes. . . .

And de la Porte goes on to conclude that paintings, such as Boucher's, in which tonal gradations seem artificially slight can provide a truer rendering of the world than a vigorously modelled illusionism. What he finds in the *Sleeping Christ* is "un ensemble sur lequel la vue s'étend partout sans se briser en aucun endroit. Nous avons soupconné que c'était là précisément l'exacte imitation de la nature."

This comparison with Vernet was evidently so persuasive a defense of Boucher that it was repeated in the 1765 Salon review of the official *Mercure de France,* one written by de la Porte's associate, the abbé de la Garde.[41] For viewers, however, who did not feel similarly responsive, Boucher's *Sleeping Christ* had another message. An anonymous critic wrote that "la Vièrge ne parait pas imposer silence au Saint Jean; au contraire, elle semble interdire aux spectateurs la liberté de dire leurs sentiments sur l'effet de ce tableau."[42] That remark tallies with repeated complaints that Boucher failed to treat the Salon and its public with any seriousness, refusing to display his work or submitting only indifferent pictures.[43]

Boucher, and Cochin with him, do indeed resist the public sphere. Their common practical and theoretical assertion of the autonomy thesis runs against the grain of the demands for cognitive transparency and discipline that were the very terms by which the existence of an enlightened public were articulated. In a later essay, Cochin would make one of the most interesting cases against the hegemony of the new public of discourse. It takes the form of a letter of advice to a young painter just off to Rome.[44] The days are over, he laments, when an artist could be an individual and follow a special gift for one aspect of art at the expense of others. Critics enforce an equal attention to all areas of the craft, forcing painters into a uniform, bland, and watered-down style, inhibiting invention, experiment, and tests of difficulty. Citing an example, he advises the student not to spend much time studying the denser compositions of the Carracci, with their highly foreshortened figures; these have been declared incomprehensible to laymen, forbidden by public discourse.

What Cochin is drawing from his de Piles-like vision of painting, and form Boucher, is some guarantee of a continuity of practice, something he sees as foreclosed by the monotony of a single standard. He is not advocating a simple eclecticism, but looking for another kind of unity, one that is visual in character and specific to painting. Within the larger *tout-ensemble,* there was room for experiment, for a creative sifting through the art of the past in search of sources of renewal, of overlooked achievements and chance discoveries. His *Lettres à un jeune artiste peintre* are full of this; his opponents, the advocates of purely public, rationally intelligable criteria, were generally taking no such care.

This was Cochin's principal argument with them, and to that extent he was right. The opening of art to a space of transparency and knowledge was a necessary precondition to both the idea of a resistant autonomy of painting and to a practice that might enact it. But in this instance, as in many later ones, the internal substance that makes the autonomy of the art object more than an empty definition is borrowed from outside that space: from *resistance* to its organising power.

Boucher has recently been likened to Diderot's fictional creation the *neveu de Rameau,* that is, to the most vivid literary counter-voice to the rational and improving mission of the *philosophes.*[45] The latter of course owed his living to his ability to flatter and entertain in the households of the rich. In 1768, Gabriel de Saint-Aubin is supposed to have written these lines on the painter:

> Si Boucher dans ses doux pastiches
> S'abstient des plus mails accords,
> C'est par pitié pour les genes riches,
> Et par amour pour leur trésors.[46]

It would make sense, in this light, to present Boucher as the counter-Enlightenment painter *par excellence.* But it should be recalled that the *neveu de Rameau, lui* in the dialogue, was the loving creation of the Enlightenment thinker *par excellence.* Diderot makes *moi,* the voice of reason, relatively weak and ineffectual in the face of the unbridled materialism advocated by *lui.* It never required the reactionary stance of a Nietzsche for the critique of enlightenment to find a voice: the critique first emerges from the heart of the phenomenon itself.

The theory of a De Piles and the practice of a Boucher add up to an early, persuasive manifestation of the autonomy thesis in visual aesthetics, that is, the idea that the work of art reaches its maximum degree of authenticity to the extent that it dramatises the material possibilities and limitations of its unique medium. This is of course a concept central to twentieth-century accounts of pictorial modernism. Its most powerful formulation has come from the American critic Clement Greenberg.[47] Though he and others begin their histories with Manet and the 1860s, Greenberg has insistently tied his fundamental tenets of self-reflection and self-definition in modernist painting to the Enlightenment aesthetics of Immanuel Kant.[48] That link is just as firmly made by Greenberg's latter-day antagonists, the advocates of so-called post-modernism in the visual arts, who tie their rejection of formal purism to the critique of enlightenment discussed at the outset of this essay.[49] Modernist theory and practice constitute for them an arid, falsely totalising teleology, the constraints of the picture plane and the framing edge having been transformed from an enabling to an imprisoning discipline. Their arguments for the end of modernism (defined as the extension of modernisation as a historical process into the conduct of the visual arts) posit the contemporary visibity of the marginal, atavistic, and previously disenfranchised as signalling that end. But those making such arguments should question how that visibility has come about, now and in the past. During the eighteenth century, in the time of Diderot, it was possible to argue for the autonomy of painting only by drawing on interests and values hostile to those of a tutelary and disciplinary rationalism. Thus an attack on the inwardness and self-sufficiency of high modernist painting misses its mark if it fails to recognise the two-sidedness of that autonomy at its moment of origin: it was founded in discipline but grounded in resistance. Looking at the issue historically, one can ask to what extent has the autonomous object repeatedly functioned—as it did in Greenberg's very aristocratic form of nostalgia[50]—as a refuge from domination.

Notes:

[1] A definitive bibliography would be impossible here. The unsurpassed account of the didactic official programs of patraonage in the later eighteenth-century remains Jean Locquin, *La Peinture d'histore en France de 1747 à 1785,* Paris, 1912; the most thorough effort to trace the intellectual sources and affinities of Diderot's criticism is Else Marie Bukdahl, *Diderot, Critique d'Art,* trans. J. Pilosz, Copenhagen, 1981, II, pp. 17-160; on the possible links between Chardin and empiricism, see Michael Baxandall, *Patterns of Intention,* London, 1985, pp. 74-104; on Greuze and Vernet in the context of contemporary English and French aesthetics, see Michael Fried, *Absorption and Theatricality: Painting and Beholder in the Age of Diderot,* Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1980.

[2] It is present at the very beginning of Nietzsche's writings; see his remarks on "Socratism" in *The Birth of Tragedy,* 1872, sections 12-18; of this later work, *The Genealogy of Morals,* 1887, has become a central text in this critique.

[3] See Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialektik des Aufklarung,* Frankfurt am Main, 1969; original edition, New York, 1944.

[4] Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *L'Anti-Oedipe,* Paris, 1972, was the anti-rationalist manifesto of the 1970s.

[5] See Jean-Francois Lyotard, *La Condition postmoderne: rapport sur le savaoir,* Paris, 1979.

[6] This position is most strongly argued in the later work: see *Surveiller et punir; Naissance de la prison,* Paris, 1975; *La Volonté de savoir,* Paris, 1976; also the interviews and lectures collected in *Power/Knowledge,* ed. Colin Gordon, London, 1980.

[7] For a history of the Salon exhibitions as a public space, see Thomas Crow, *Painters and Public Life in Eighteenth-Century Paris,* New Haven and London, 1985.

[8] For the best account of the Academy's efforts to distinguish painting and sculpture from the other manual "arts," see Louis Olivier, *"Curieux," Amateurs, and Connoisseurs: Laymen and the Fine Arts in the Ancien Regime,* unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, The Johns Hopkins University, 1976, pp. 67-71. On the early Academy, see Ludovic Vitet, *L'Académie* royale de peinture et de sculpture, étude historique, Paris, 1861.

[9] See A. Fontaine, *Les Doctrines d'art en France. Peintres, Amateurs, Critiques, de Poussin à Diderot,* Paris, 1909, pp. 41-98. On the theoretical links between literature and painting in the Renaissance and Baroque periods, the basic study is R.W. Lee, "Ut Pictura Poesis: The Humanistic Theory of Painting," *The Art Bulletin,* XXII, (1940), pp. 197-269. On the relationship between discursive theories of art and the demands of power, see Norman Bryson, *Word and Image: French Painting of the Old Regime,* Cambridge, 1981, pp. 29-57.

[10] Fréart de Chambray, Roland, *Idée* de la perfection de la peinture, Paris, 1662.

[11] Fréart de Chambray, 1662, preface, unpaginated.

[12] Fréart de Chambray, 1662, preface, unpaginated.

[13] André Félibien, *Entretiens sur les vies et sur les ouvrages des plus excellents peintres anciens et moderns,* Trévoux, 1725, (first published between 1666 and 1685), V, p. 319; see also Thomas Puttfarken, *Roger de Piles' Theory of Art,* New Haven and London, 1985, p. 29.

[14] On de Piles' biography and for a comprehensive account of his writings, see Bernard Teyssèdre, *Roger de Piles et les débats* sur le coloris au siè*cle de Louis XIV,* Paris, 1957; an insightful recent study of his aesthetics is Puttfarken, 1985.

[15] On elite collecting, see Olivier, 1976, pp. 59-61.

[16] On the cult of *honneteté,* see M. Magendie, *La Politesse mondaine et les théories de l'honneteté au XVIIe siècle de 1600 à 1660,* 2 vols., Paris, 1925.

[17] See Roger de Piles, *Cours de peinture par principes* Paris, 1708, p. 307; Puttfarken, 1985, pp. 63-71, has stressed this feature of his criticism.

[18] See de Piles, *Cours,* 1708, pp. 381-3; also de Piles, *Conversations sur la connoissance de la peinture,* Paris, 1677, pp. 233-4.

[19] See de Piles *Cours,* 1708, pp. 70-1; for a detailed interpretation of de Piles' conception of *enthousiasme,* see Puttfarken, 1985, pp. 115-24.

[20] See de Piles, *conversations,* 1677, pp. 119-24; on de Piles and the Richelieu collection, including texts of his descriptions of the pictures, see Teyssèdre, "Une collection francaise du Rubens au XVIIe siècle: Le Cabinet du duc de Richelieu décrit par Roger de Piles (1676-1681)," *Gazette des Beaux-Arts,* series 6, LXII, (1963), pp. 241-99.

[21] De Piles, *Dissertation sur les ouvrages des plus fameux peintres,* Paris, 1681, p. 94.

[22] See de Piles, *Dissertation,* 1681, p. 89. On the idea of painterly resistance to the discursive, see Bryson, 1981, pp. 58-88 and passim.

[23] On these events, see Teyssèdre, *Roger de Piles,* pp. 458-67; also Olivier, 1976, pp. 91-3.

[24] See Teyssèdre, *Roger de Piles,* p. 519. On Crozat, see M. Stuffman, "Les Tableaux de la collection de Pierre Crozat," *Gazette des Beaux-Arts,* series 6, LXXII, (1968), pp. 1-144.

[25] On the administration of the Lenormand family over official art production, see Alden Rand Gordon, *The Marquis de Marigny: A Study in Royal Patronage,* unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Harvard University, 1978.

[26] A good recent introduction to unofficial Salon criticism in the eighteenth century is Richard Wrigley, "Censorship and Anonymity in Eighteenth-Century French Art Criticism," *Oxford Art Journal,* VI, (1983), pp. 17-28.

[27] See Crow, 1985, pp. 119-26.

[28] La Font de Saint-Yenne, *Sentimens sur quelques ouvrages de peinture, sculpture et gravure,* n.p., 1754, pp. 34-43.

[29] See Jean-Jacques Rousseau, "Si le Rétablissement des sciences et des arts à contribué à épurer les moeurs," in *Du Contrat Social,* Paris, 1962, p. 19.

[30] [Charles-Nicolas Cochin], *Lettre d'un amateur en ré*ponse aux critiques qui ont paru sur l'exposition des tableaux, n.p., n.d., Cabinet des Estampes, B.N., Collection Deloynes, no., 61, p. 3.

[31] [Cochin], *Lettre d'un amateur.*

[32] [Cochin], *Lettres* à un jeune artiste peintre, n.p., n.d., pp. 28-9.

[33] [Cochin], *Lettres,* pp. 31-2.

[34] See Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, *Francois Boucher, 1703-1770,* 1986, p. 135.

[35] See P.-J. Mariette, *Abécé*dario, ed. P. de Chennevières and A. de Montaiglon, Paris, (1851-3), I, p. 165; on Boucher's early life, see Pierre Rosenberg, "The Mysterious Beginnings of the Young Boucher," and Alastair Lain, "Boucher: The Search for an Idiom," in Metropolitan Museum, 1986, pp. 41-72.

[36] See Rosenberg, 1986, pp. 44-5.

[37] See Francis Haskell, *Patrons and Painters,* New Haven and London, 1980, pp. 284-5, 341. On the prints after Watteau, the definitive source is E. Dacier, A. Vuaflart, and J. Hérold, *Jean de Jullienne et les graveurs de Watteau au XVIIIe siècle Paris,* Paris, 1921-9.

[38] See Bryson, 1981, pp. 91-9.

[39] "Observations sur l'exposition de peintures, sculptures et gravures du Salon du Louvre, tirées de l'*Observateur littéraire,* 1759, Deloynes no. 1259, pp. 834-7.

[40] See, for example, *Lettre à l'auteur sur l'expositoin de cette année*, Extrait des Observations sur la physique et les arts, Paris, 1757, Deloynes no. 83, p. 17.

[41] *Mercure de France,* (October 1765), p. 154.

[42] *Lettre critique à un ami sur les ouvrages de MM. de l'Académie exposés au Salon du Louvre,* 1759, Deloynes no. 90, p. 22.

[43] See, for example, "Lettre sur l'exposition des peintures, sculptures et gravures du Salon du Louvre de 1759," *Journal encyclopédique,* (1759), Deloynes no. 1258, p. 777; "Exposition des peintures, sculptures et gravures," *L'Avant-Coureur,* (August 1763), Deloynes no. 1286, pp. 275-6.

[44] *Lettres,* pp. 52-3.

[45] See Georges Brunel, "Boucher, Neveu de Rameau," in Marie-Catherine Sahut and Nathalie Volle, *Diderot et l'Art de Boucher à David,* Hotel de la Monnaie, Paris, 1985-6, pp. 101-9. De la Porte of course figures as a character in the dialogue, a fellow parasite to Rameau: Denis Diderot, *Le Neveu de Rameau,* Paris, 1967, pp. 117ff.

[46] See Alexandre Ananoff and Daniel Wildenstein, *Francois Boucher,* Lausanne and Paris, 1976, I, document 991.

[47] See especially "Avant-Garde and Kitsch" (1939) and "Towards a Newer Laocoon" (1940), in F. Frascina ed., *Pollock and After: The Critical Debate,* London, 1985, pp. 21-46; also T.J. Clark, "Clement Greenberg's Theory of Art," in Frascina, 1985, pp. 47-64.

[48] See "Modernist Painting," *Arts Yearbook,* no. 4, 1961, pp. 103: "The essence of modernism lies, as I see it, in the use of the characteristic methods of a discipline to criticize the discipline itself, not in order to subvert it, but in order to entrench it more firmly in its area of competence. Kant used logic to establish the limits of logic, and while he withdrew much from its old jurisdiction, logic was left all the more secure in what remained to it. . . . A more rational justification had begun to be demanded in every formal social activity, and Kantian self-criticism, which had arisen in philosophy in answer to this demand in the first place, was called on eventually to meet and interpret it in areas that lay far from philosophy."

[49] See Crow, "Modernism and Mass Culture in the Visual Arts," in Frascina, 1985, p. 237 and passim, pp. 233-61.

[50] See Greenberg, 1939, pp. 32-3: ". . . it's Athene whom we want: formal culture with its infinity of aspects, its luxuriance, its large comprehension."

On Criticism Handling History

By Richard Shiff

For the moment, consider the discourse of art history as if readily differentiated from the discourse of art criticism. Criticism thus becomes an object of historical study or a bit of evidence for the historian. In recent years, art historians studying the modern period have put art criticism to use in at least two ways that seem obvious enough. First, they have relied on critical writings in order to document or authenticate certain modes of interpretation. These interpretations, derived from criticism produced during the period under study, are viewed as privileged in the sense of being contextually bound to the art in question. Historians read statements by "critics"—from journalists to literary figures to theorists and academic philosophers—for what they might reveal of attitudes held by artists, whether directly or indirectly. Often critic and artist are the same person as in the case of Paul Gauguin in the 1890s. At other times, critic and artist are closely associated, as in the case of Manet and Mallarmé. And often an artist's theoretical writings amount to a kind of self-criticism since they so clearly reflect on his own work (so with Matisse around 1908, or Frank Stella quite recently). Second, art historians have come to use art criticism as a guide to ideological concerns, perhaps noting what the critical discourse excludes from consideration even more than what it fixes on. Why, for example, does the more intellectually ambitious criticism of the first decades of the twentieth century tend to ignore thematic concerns, political charges, and the humor and satire that so often lie just under the surface of art that pretends to high seriousness? We find the modernist masters complicitous in this avoidance of aspects of their own thinly veiled expression. References to immediate social and political concerns, and even to petty personal disputes and anxieties, all work their way into the ephemeral journalistic commentaries. But why do they not bear strongly upon the more speculative and evaluative critical discourses? I do not intend to pursue this question here, but wish merely to indicate its propriety.

We have, then, at least two familiar uses of the critical discourse—to indicate what is openly a concern, and to indicate what seems to be suppressed. We can choose to interpret the critical discourse as a self-motivated text having its own internal dialectic, or we can motivate individual statements by concerning ourselves with their authors, their manner of publication, and the social context in which they are generated. There is also a third use to be made of criticism: we can consider it as revealing a mode of writing—actually more of a mode of handling, manipulating, or even *creating* reality—that we associate with art on the one hand and with history on the other hand. What I am seeking to focus on, a kind of handling, is not easy to grasp. We will have to allow ourselves to collapse art, criticism, and history. This triadic structure, a structure that collapses, characterizes the period of modernism. Yet modernism, I will want to argue, cannot definitively constitute a period. So a third reason to study art criticism (a purpose that may seem specific to the historian of modernism) is to come to understand how a history of modernism can be conceived, how to write a history of those works of art that often seek to deny the ironic distance that the writing of history itself demands. What kind of history—or criticism—can there be of an art that claims to be ever original and that validates itself through its own claim to sincerity of expression?

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Given what I have said thus far, it would be presumptuous to speak of a "history" of criticism; for I have suggested that criticism and art may be very much alike and that modernist art problematizes the very notion of a history. So consider instead of a history a mere collection of the most familiar kinds of critical commentary. This collection will contain a great many examples of a certain type of joke, one so powerful and yet so hackneyed, that it is difficult to decide whether its numerous appearances are cases of witticism or of cliché. An exchange of figured representation for material reality constitutes this commonplace joke. We can imagine a very crude example of it that nevertheless carries some obvious humor: a naive observer views a television program, is amused by the representation of dramatic action that unfolds, but then asks how it is that you get all the little dolls to move around in the box. Here, features of the picture that derive from a conventional mode of pictorial transformation are mistaken—purposefully, for the sake of the joke—for features of the picture that are somewhat more natural or transparent. Attempts to analyze such exchanges of the conventional for the natural become progressively more complex as one ponders whether *any* feature of a representation can rightfully be regarded as natural. Nevertheless, something quite simple can be said of a case of mistaking figured representation for material reality: in such a case the pictorial sign has been read too literally. Or rather, the sign has been read in a strangely literal way. "Strangely literal" seems apt because the witness to such an exchange quickly senses the joke and comprehends the error in judgment or interpretation. The mistake is too blatant not to appear odd. Yet how natural this mistaking of the conventional for the natural appears, as when we say, in viewing a photograph, "that's me," instead of saying "that's a picture of me." Let me present a further example of this type of exchange, now to be regarded as a strategy of intentional error in reading the rhetoric of a picture. I will then indicate why I think the strategy is itself very significant, especially within the context of modernism.

My example comes from the journalistic response to the second Impressionist exhibition of 1876. Emile Porcheron, writing for *Le Soleil,* describes one of Degas' laundresses in a picture characterized by a contre-jour effect and a pronounced chiaroscuro (*A Woman Ironing,* c. 1874, Metropolitan Museum of Art). Porcheron takes the darkness to be a feature of the woman rather than of the light effect or the conventionalized manner of rendering it. The darkness of the figure—this darkness of pictorial surface—is seen as a mimetic effect corresponding to some darkness of surface on the real-life model. The critic writes: "Degas offers us . . . a laundress whose head and arms are almost black. The first thought the picture inspires is to make you ask yourself whether the coal vendor is a laundress, or whether the laundress is a coal vendor."[1] Porcheron's metaphor is actually richly suggestive, perhaps more so than he imagined. A coal vendor becomes black by being covered by a surface layer of black dust, a form of the same material, charcoal, with which one might make a chiaroscuro rendering. A laundress works to remove such dust from white surfaces. If the activity of the coal vendor leaves a black mark, that of the laundress eliminates it, returning the surface to its virgin purity. To paint a laundress black is to impugn her professional integrity, an integrity that Porcheron may already have regarded as questionable because of the association of laundresses with prostitution and with the waywardness of lower-class styles of life. But thoughts on this order of specificity can be left aside: those thoughts that come to mind in the wake of recent studies of the social context in which images of women such as Degas' laundresses were initially seen, thoughts of the victimization of women of a certain class or occupation, thoughts of a critical prejudice that a journalist may well have played to his audience as he interpreted realist images with wit. The *structure* of Porcheron's joke, his confusion of representation and reality, is so common and so generalizable as to demand study of a field of interpretation beyond the immediate social context before any return to that context can be justified. The relevant field of interpretation is the one that all the characteristic tropes or devices of modernist art and modernist criticism figure. My purpose is to provide a sketch of that field of art and critical practice, a picture drawn to the specifications of the historian, a picture representing time.

The value of uninspired criticism like that of Porcheron, is that it often exposes devices that in more skilled hands and minds escape our scrutiny. However commonplace Porcheron's joke may be, it reflects on our ultimate uncertainty with regard to the validation of images. Why do we trust some images and not others? How do we know what to trust? Is there, for example, something about Degas' painting of the laundress that makes us revert back to the most literal of readings as the only reliable possibility? Perhaps Degas' relative lack of convention, his impropriety in both style and subject matter, offers no alternative for the uninformed viewer whom Porcheron pretends to address.

Porcheron's critical ploy can be defined in a more precise manner that will lead to some fruitful speculations. When Porcheron confuses white laundress with black coal vendor he feigns ignorance of the pictorial convention that allows Degas to render light skin in a dark color. In effect,the critic is mistaking the criteria of iconic resemblance that would, by convention, apply to a painting of this type. To say that a picture looks like something in nature (that it is an iconic representation of that thing) is to presume the existence of some common features that can rightfully be compared, features that the pictorial context will itself highlight and bring forth in our view of the model. By convention, darkness on the surface of a nineteenth-century painting will often indicate an absence of light rather than a locally dark color. Variation in color-value is to be regarded as if a figuring device or metaphor of light; Degas' representation signifies a (figured) world of light reflections rather than a (literal) world of pigmented surfaces. More directly, we may say that Degas' canvas surface of pigments pictures not pigment but light. Because Degas conceives his representation as a metaphorical or figured picture, there can be a mistaken literal reading of it. This is the reading that Porcheron gives us, as he interprets an arm in shadow as an arm that is soiled or black.

Ultimately, this becomes a simple matter, and it may seem that I have exaggerated both its complexity and its import. But we need the background that Porcheron's joke provides in order to understand the special significance of a kind of joke Picasso will make, a modernist joke we are about to turn to. I stated that Porcheron's commentary on Degas operated in an inappropriate area of iconic resemblance. Porcheron,in other words, chose to interpret his vision improperly and, in doing so, distorted his reader's sense of the propriety of the image in question. He chose not to speak of the painting as a painting, chose not to refer to how it had been made. Had he made reference to the painter's craft—to the use of the brush and of paints—the critic could not so easily have conflated a picture of the skin of a laundress with actual skin. What Porcheron ignores is references to the picture's indexicality, that is, the way in which it reveals that, among other things, it is a representation figured *by the hand of someone,* a hand that makes marks with brush and paint, a hand with its own material physicality, a hand that mediates between picture and reality.

Every painting has both iconic and indexical features. We can identify and distinguish these features fundamentally (but not exhaustively) in the following manner. To the extent that a certain painting looks like something else (perhaps only like another, similar painting), it is iconic.[2] And to the extent that it is the trace of the physical action of a hand or some other figuring agent, it is indexical. At one moment, we may feel that a painting signifies whatever it resembles and gives some account of it; that is to respond to its iconic function. At the next moment, as we respond to the indexical function, we may feel that a painting signifies the hand that made it, giving us information about the person who motivated that hand. Art critics habitually recognize both iconic and indexical features of paintings and other objects, and if they ignore one feature to focus on another, I believe it is usually by design as opposed to naiveté. I take the peculiar history of the interplay of icon and index in works of criticism as well as in works of art as itself an indication of the nature of modernism. Modernism dramatizes the play of icon and index.

The Porcheron ploy—an exchange of figured representation and material reality—depends on a relationship of iconic resemblance that excludes consideration of indexicality. Picasso's characteristic joke depends instead on an indexical sense that will come to dominate the iconic. Like Porcheron's, Picasso's joke is generic, that is, the same structure of exchange appears over and over again in different examples of his art and in the art of other modernist masters. His still-life collage *Segment of Pear and Bottle of Bass* (1914) is a particular instance.[3] In the lower left corner we see the representation of a pear, more precisely, a sectioned or cut pear.[4] The material base of this representation is not paint (on a ground or support) in the form of a pear, but pear-colored paper that is also pear-shaped. We see that the paper has been cut; it *looks* as if it has been cut; the pear looks like a cut piece of paper as much as the paper looks like a cut pear. Now, as our attention is drawn to the cut in this manner, it may seem that we are set to confuse figured representation (the paper *as* the cut pear) with material reality (the cut paper itself) and to repeat the Porcheron ploy. But there are at least two important distinctions to be made. First, the reality that intervenes in the interpretation of Picasso's collage is not the presumed reality that is the subject of the picture (a yellow-green pear); rather it is the reality of the materiality of the picture itself. In other words, Picasso shifts our attention from visual illusion back to the material elements that might produce such illusion. Second, with Picasso we are looking not at color—a feature accessible to the eye and therefore a matter of iconic resemblance—but instead at a cut or cutting—the product of an action that is accessible to touch and a matter of indexicality. (The actual cut, which comes to represent itself, to be the sign of itself, traces out the action of the hand and its instrument of cutting. The cut is a very special kind of impress or imprinting since it leaves its mark on the paper, and also on a piece of the paper that is no longer a part of it, the piece that is cut away.[5])

The aspect of Degas' painting of the laundress that corresponds best to Picasso's indexical cut is the brushed quality of the pigment (as opposed to its tonal value, the feature Porcheron signaled). Degas' brush imprints its distinctive marks on canvas, as if to demonstrate that those marks, like a signature, represent Degas more than anything else. Picasso's collage, however, speaks more of materials and generic actions than of artistic personalities. It leaves us with the question: Are we looking at a picture of a cut pear or a cut picture of a pear? The act of cutting comes into focus because the cut of the pear, its shape, is seen to be at once figured and literal. This dual identity indexes, or connects, the representation to its materials in a thoroughly convincing manner. With Picasso, we are (as it were) no longer subject to a mistake on the order of exchanging the look of blackness for the reality of coal dust. That problem is for the iconographers who study visual resemblances. Instead we are lead more deeply into a philosophical problem, not knowing what reality, if any, is to be found *beyond* representation. Picasso's cuts are as real as can be—they leave the indexical record of their own action—and yet they are also what the representation seems to figure. (If the impact of this issue is not yet evident, think of all the attention that the presence of signatures and verbal inscriptions on paintings has received from scholars and critics during the past decade. Such glyphic marks demand to be read by the letter right across the painting's surface, yet they are also paint marks hardly different from those that make up the illusionistic features of the very same surface. It is not that painters themselves always regard signatures as problematic contradictions, but that critics, sensitized to indexicality by the likes of Picasso, cannot stop worrying about this index, the signature, that sits in a field of icons, the figured representation, as if pointing its finger at all those other marks and indicating *their* indexicality, too. If a painting has been made by hand, every mark it exhibits is indexical even as it is iconic.)

One could go on to discover an obsession with indexicality among any number of modernists, either artists or critics. But why assert that indexicality characterizes modernism? Perhaps this sense of the index allows us to view modernism as a moment or a period in a history not of artists, but of representation, a history figured, or articulated, by a continuing play or conflict of icons and indices.

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Histories are supposed to have beginnings, origins. There is a tradition, even a history, of imagining what the beginning of a history of visual representation would be like. Among those who tell and retell the story of this origin, the ancient authors Pliny and Quintilian have a claim to priority. The seventeenth-century artist and theorist Joachim von Sandrart is one among many who eventually provide illustrations to such ancient textual sources. When Sandrart illustrates Pliny or Quintilian, the result is a thoroughly conventionalized pictorial representation of a thoroughly commonplace account. So, here again, as in Porcheron or Picasso, some kind of generic performance is at issue. Our interest is in a general structure of thought or experience, to be discerned in either a work of criticism or a work of art.

In his treatise of 1675 on the visual arts, Sandrart offers two illustrations to accompany, but not necessarily to repeat, his textual references to the origin of pictorial representation. They are printed from a single engraved plate, the two images simply juxtaposed, top and bottom.[6] At the top, we see a rude shepherd standing among his animals. He looks down at his cast shadow and appears to be at the very moment of invention—Sandrart's depiction seems calculated to suggest a sudden insight or an accidental discovery. The shepherd's insight will not be available to his animals, several of which otherwise mimic the action of the human figure as they look at their own shadows. The shepherd has a hand as clever as his brain; unlike the animals, he uses tools. Significantly, he holds his staff in his hand as he observes his shadow on the sandy ground, traced by a beam of natural sunlight indicated in the picture. We grasp, as we imagine the shepherd himself to grasp, that the contour of the shadow can be re-traced in the sand with the staff. The shadow is a valid representation of the presence of the shepherd because it is his index; it can have been caused only by his presence, and it can be present only when he is present. That is, until now, until the enactment of the second tracing that is just as indexical as the tracing of the shadow by the sun. Just as indexical, because the shepherd's staff actually touches the contour of the shadow as it renders its image. Thus, for the first time in history a true representation will have been fixed, a representation that can remain convincing in the absence of its model. But as I describe this primordial act of representation, as I follow Sandrart's visual description of it, to speak of it as a part of history is not quite right, nor is it proper to speak here of the imitation of a model. Not a part of history—and also not a model—because we are located at a very special point, the very beginning. The story can be told only retrospectively, after there is already a history of representation in which we and Sandrart can participate, one that can distinguish hierarchically between original models and their imitations. We can know of history's original indexical moment only through iconic representations such as Sandrart's.[7] Sandrart participates in history as he uses the conventions of iconicity to depict the origin of pictorial representation. *Indexicality (as a theme) is here represented iconically.* Sandrart does not witness the shepherd's indexical moment; he is himself either reinventing it or imitating someone else's invention. Unlike the shepherd, he is distanced from the image he creates; and that distance is the space—or the time—of history, now to be seen as a history of iconic representation.[8]

Sandrart's second image, which depicts an alternative classical account of the origin of representation, already reveals history in operation. This iconic history is a story about the development of the skills of the hand. We see Dibutade, the potter's daughter, in the process of fixing the image of her lover, who is about to embark on a long journey. Like the image of the shepherd, the lover's image is indexical, the tracing of a cast shadow. But now the projection is figured onto the vertical plane of a wall rather than onto a horizontal ground. There are further differences: the source of light is artificial instead of natural, a lamp instead of the sun; and the subject no longer traces his own image. The entire scene has been constructed by Dibutade, a third party to this story of subject and representation. Such a third party, acting at a distance, is surely an artist, a creative maker. We can no longer imagine an accident; everything seems potentially quite deliberate, including the posture that the lover assumes. He holds himself in the "classical" contrapposto position. Are we to believe that he does so because all Greek men, or at least some, such as this one, were naturally beautiful, that Greek sculptures capture that physical beauty exactly as it appeared? Or does Dibutade have her lover assume this posture in order to make him *look* beautiful?[9] Even if she has not played so active a role in posing her model, she has indeed placed him at such an angle to the source of light that his shadow projects onto the wall surface with minimal distortion. And so the shadow that Dibutade will trace bears the conventional iconic form of its model, whereas the shepherd's shadow, which is quite amorphous, does not. And Dibutade does not use so crude a drawing tool as a shepherd's staff, but rather a refined pointed instrument, a stylus, something we recognize as belonging to a proper draftsman. We imagine the subtle movement of her hand as she traces the shadow that—to us at least, and to Sandrart, too—already looks like a traditional artistic representation. We also imagine that the hand, already skilled, acquires more and more skill, to the point where hand and eye operate in harmony, having developed a kind of motor memory that will guide the drawing of any beautiful figure. Now, clearly, we are situated beyond the indexical origin of representation. We witness instead the *history* of art in action, the origin of iconic representation, a kind of action-at-a-distance, guided by the eye. As Dibutade develops her skill, she comes to be able to draw without the shadow, at a distance from the model, and even with no model at all. Sandrart himself, along with any other artist working in the classical tradition, is Dibutade's heir. To modernist eyes that look back to a lost indexical origin and a lost innocence, the history of art becomes a history of (increasing) skill in rendering, a history of illusionism.

Modernist artists and critics, especially those of the nineteenth century, often regarded their own past history as a fall from a state of grace, a process of gradual degeneration.[10] The classical became the academic, a system of imitating the masters rather than nature. Having lost touch with nature, this system had no proper claim to validity. Then how did the tradition inaugurated by Dibutade sustain itself from antiquity into the nineteenth century? The answer to this question can be found in the rhetorical conceits of the academic system itself. The system claimed for its iconic images the validity of an indexical contact with reality.

As a short-cut to demonstrating what I have just stated, let me offer an interpretation of a photograph found in a popular drawing manual published in numerous editions around 1900.[11] In its original context, this photograph served to illustrate a classroom method of teaching "freearm" drawing to young children. But more generally it illustrates the process of learning how to draw through imitation of a "masterwork." The photograph shows part of a large class of boys working in unison, drawing with chalk on slates set before them at arm's length. We view the boys from behind and can see what it is that they imitate. They follow the master's slate at the front of the classroom, on which a schematic aucuba leaf has been rendered. A real aucuba leaf is tacked to the slate beside this drawing, as if the master's model. The master's contour rendering is similar in form to the real leaf but appears not to duplicate all its visible details nor its exact proportions. Perhaps the master, in drawing, has idealized or regularized the leaf in some sense. Our pertinent observation is that when the master exhibits the real leaf beside its schematic representation—a selective rendering that highlights a similarity of contour but not of color—she asserts that the visual resemblance between the model and its representation is a valid one. The authorized gesture of placing model and representation side by side, in plain view, calls forth this specific feature of iconic resemblance and gives it the force of the indexical. It is as if the master is claiming that the schematic contour drawing is as valid a representation of a leaf as might be a fossilized imprint or perhaps even a photograph. Here, institutional and traditional authority establishes the link between model and representation, lending it the force of real physical connection. This, then, is academicism at work, with its capacity to capture reality at a distance, visually, without touching that reality.[12] The master imitates the aucuba leaf according to a given standard of resemblance, and the pupils imitate whatever the master produces.

The master's leaf is drawn or figured (iconically), but not traced (indexically).[13] Yet there is clearly touch represented in this photograph of the drawing class. We not only sense the touch of the master's hand, but can see the pupils touching their own drawing slates with chalk. In making his own aucuba leaf, each child attempts to imitate the look of the master. To the extent that each must fail—for each drawing will differ ever so slightly from the master's and from all the others—we might say that the children lack sufficient skill to accomplish their task. This failure, however, becomes the delight of the typical modernist critic who will observe that the inborn subjectivity and perhaps genius of each child remains irrepressible. Each child reveals his own personal stamp or signature in the characteristic failures of his line.

Academic artists strove to master a visual action-at-a-distance,[14] a kind of iconic rendering appearing so natural (and also so expected, so conventional) as to seem the equivalent of a direct indexical imprint. To the extent that academics could maintain faith in their own enterprise, they could ignore the chasm that divided the index from the icon. A tradition of masters, joined hand to hand as if to form a chain, could be substituted for the physical links to the material world that indexical images provide. The pupil's picture could be validated by being in the manner of the master's, by simply looking like the master's. And the master's would be validated with respect to an antecedent master's work. Within this system, the requisite resemblances in drawing or painting style, the iconic links, are easy enough to discern since they depend on the comparison of objects that are already similar. Pictorial representations, however different, are especially similar in their flatness. Pictures look like other pictures.

It is no accident that children are taught to render leaves at the beginning of their apprenticeship, for the leaf already resembles a drawn thing in its planarity. The sense in which most other drawn or figured images might look like their models in the material world is harder to determine. In fact, one might have to rely on some elaboration of the iconic system of representation in order to establish a resemblance that one claims should already be apparent. In doing so, one might take advantage of a principle of family resemblance: between any two things that seem dissimilar a third thing similar to both of them can be inserted, as if the child of two parents. We witness the arbitrary construction of such an iconic relationship of reciprocal similarity in the famous broadside of 1834, produced in defense of Charles Philipon, caricaturist and publisher of the satirical newspaper *Le Charivari.*[15] Philipon was brought to trial for having represented the paunchy Louis-Philippe as a *poire* or pear, that is, in the lingo of the time, a blockhead, a fathead, a moron. The charge against Louis-Philippe, which brought the charge against Philipon in return, was both visual and verbal. Philipon found that he could literalize the verbal, metaphorical statement (Louis-Philippe is a pear) by translating it into visual, iconic form. In his document of defense he draws four pictures, each supplemented with a brief commentary. The first picture looks quite like Louis-Philippe—does it not, Philipon asks[16]—and so it, at least, cannot be condemned. But if the first looks like the monarch, then so must the second, which resembles the first. We can't condemn that, then, can we? Now, the third looks like the second, which looks like the first. And so it, too, must be innocent. Finally, we reach the fourth figure in the sequence, which looks rather like a pear with schematic human features, but it also resembles the third, which resembles the second, which resembles the first. This is the academic system of iconicity brought to absurdity, demonstrating that anything can be made to look like anything else. The draftsman has perhaps become *too* skillful and suffers from the curse of Dibutade.

Philipon's "pear" clearly differs from Picasso's in that the caricaturist's image features an iconic relationship whereas Picasso's art of collage stresses indexicality. One might notice, however, that the Philipon defense is analogous to the Porcheron ploy. Philipon takes the verbal sign *poire* literally and attaches it to a corresponding visual image. Porcheron takes blackness literally and attaches it to the skin of Degas' laundress; she becomes soiled rather than shaded. Both critical strategies are characterized by an exchange of the conventional for the natural. This exchange has special force in a modernist environment where contact with reality may count more than artistic pedigree. In stating this, I may seem to counter what we all accept, that the modernist is preoccupied both with original authorship and with the conventionality of the pictorial sign and its embeddedness in its own "language." Signs refer to other signs—interminably, it appears—before they refer to any natural object presumed to exist outside the sign system.

When I state that the modernist seeks contact with reality, I do not deny the dual (and conflicted) concern with authorship and convention. I argue instead that these matters become critical because of the more basic concern for touching reality. Authorship, for example, becomes a vehicle for that real contact as authorship is redefined to emphasize individual, as opposed to collective, mastery. The modernist artist strives to express a self that is itself as real as nature and is perhaps its rival. Such expression is brought about by means of techniques that seem to facilitate direct physical contact. These are techniques that we may—despite the paradox—call techniques of immediacy, neither mediated nor distanced. Some of these techniques—like the cutting of Picasso's "pear"—attain immediacy by indexing touch. And some even seem to link touch to vision, indexing both: for example, the use of juxtaposed, individual brushstrokes of brilliant color in the paintings of certain impressionists, where each stroke purports to be the marker or trace of a discrete sensation, itself the physical product of the interaction of light and sense organ.

Since historians of modernism argue that representation can only be a matter of mediation and convention, to index immediate vision by painting must appear a questionable practice. Yet according to those who appreciated some of the more radically impressionist works (Porcheron's rivals), certain paintings were indeed seen as signfying immediacy. From a viewer such as Théodore Duret, we learn that within a particular historical context, defined as much by critical as by artistic practice, certain signs of immediacy (say, brilliant color and fluid brushstroke) acted to reduce the distance of visual iconicity.[17] This is to say that certain techniques broke the chain of tradition and its masters, signaling the modern artist directly. At the same time, these techniques seemed to belong to the direct experience of a modern environment. Critics readily associated bold juxtapositions and rough edges with modern movement, especially in an urban setting. Artist and object could thus be united in a representation figuring both, one that could even claim to have indexed both. Nevertheless, a study of the critical discourse reveals that any association between immediate vision and a certain manner of applying pigment is historically conditioned and conventional.[18] And so, art history, taking this into account, becomes an ironic, distanced commentary on a self-proclaimed indexical art that must be shown to be iconic. It is iconic because its pretense to the indexical depends on its capacity to resemble a visual look that has been predetermined to signify the indexical. (Signifying indexicality presents the same dilemma as signifying one's own sincerity—how can the sign itself not reintroduce the distance sincerity seeks to overcome?)

If the art history of modernism is compelled to iconize the indexical, to see the representation wherever the original is claimed, the art historian then merely acts in tandem with the modernist artist in his most self-critical (or perhaps postmodernist) moments. One such moment—there are a great many of them—occurs when Claes Oldenburg creates his *Air Mail Letter* (1961), a piece of painted plaster approximating the size and proportions of a European air mail envelope.[19] This plaster rectangle has a pattern of red and blue bands around its edges, a concentration of markings in its upper left and right corners, and a more diffuse set of marks at its lower center. This pattern corresponds, iconically, to the configuration of printed marks (the red and blue along the edges), scripted return address, stamp with postmark, and scripted address to sender that we habitually find on much of our mail. It seems—and Oldenburg's title leaves no doubt—that he has sketched out, with paint on plaster surface, a rough image of a familiar object, easy enough to render because it is flat like a leaf and certainly as much like its presumed model as, say, Philipon's pear is to his first picture of Louis-Philippe. One iconic relationship, however, slips into another; and Oldenburg's *Air Mail Letter* might just as easily be seen (especially in 1961) as an abstract painting of the abstract expressionist type. Its proportions mimic not only the air mail envelope but any number of large abstractions, particularly those of Jackson Pollock. And its thoroughly illegible "script" looks more like the gestural "writing" of modernist painters of the 1940s and 1950s than like even the worst examples of penmanship. As a gestural painting of the early 1960s, *Air Mail Letter* must be linked to the indexical tradition of Pollock and others; but that link can only be ironic. In short, Oldenburg's painting iconizes Pollock's indexicality: it detaches the look of Pollock's art from any claim to the reality of an authentic gesture, and connects it instead, by a series of resemblances, to iconic representation of the most trivial sort.[20] Rather than to return to an ideal childhood state of expressiveness (an indexical origin), Oldenburg causes Pollock to return to an iconic beginning, like that of the boys in the classroom, drawing their schematic leaves. Drawn from the height of singular expression, Oldenburg mires Pollock in replicative representation.

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Now, to return to the central question. Can we construct an art history that has the capacity to represent the dialectical play of icon and index that characterizes modernism? I believe this would have to be a history of modes of experience that would not necessarily appear as a continuous development. This history would be conceived as period-specific in terms of both the moment(s) under scrutiny and the moment or position from which the story is told. We might call such history perspectivist or anamorphic since the position of the teller (or viewer) is figured into the account.[21] The new history would have to have a flexible sense of time, one that might allow us to think synchronically and diachronically with equal ease. The markers of this history would be neither masters nor even events, but concepts: indexicality, iconicity, originality, imitation, expression, skill. We will not necessarily be noting evolutionary development such as that from expression to skill—this is one of the structuring movements that Roger Fry's criticism relies on[22]—but we will instead find that artworks highlighting skill are contemporaneous with those that highlight expression. And if we were to associate expression with modernism, while associating skill with a seemingly subsequent postmodernism, we would be free to find that the postmodern not only succeeds the modern, but also arises in its midst and perhaps even precedes the modern.[23] It takes a certain skill or technique to be "expressive"; but expressiveness, in its extreme, tends to mask the operation of technique.

In the search for originality and self-expression, modernist artists and critics of the nineteenth century sought a leveling of authority; every man was to be, at least potentially, an artist; every point of view was to be potentially valid. The modernist critic attempted to assume the view of the artist whose works were to be judged. Alternatively, he entered into a dialogue with an artist or a work, regarded as an alterity presumed to be the critic's equal. This feature of modernism itself denies history, which depends on hierarchical differentiation. Théophile Thoré referred to such an antihierarchical society (of artists) as a panarchy—not rule by no one, but rule by everyone.[24] Everyone is master, everyone has access to reality, so long as reality is either thoroughly private (indexical) or entirely in the public domain (iconic). The modernist interest in original authorship reflects a concern for the private realm of self-expression, whereas the accompanying interest in convention and intertextuality reflects a concern for the public discourse, over which, perhaps, some privileged group might gain a certain control. Those boys in their drawing class actually form such a privileged group or class, as does any academic class (a privileged class can be very large). They are being given special access to an authorized mode of representation, and therefore access to the "true" reality.

During the past two decades, modernist critics of the twentieth century have been attacked for having established a rigid canon of masters, mostly French and American (members of privileged societies within a dominant Western culture) and almost exclusively male (the dominant gender). There is another dominance linked to the establishment of a canon: the existence of a canon, either of masters or merely of formal orders, ensures that iconic mediation will rule over indexical immediacy. In response many modernist critics will insist that some new masterwork might force them to reevaluate all past masters and to revise the canon. For the record at least, the modernist claims the capacity to assume a radically new perspective.[25]

We can now tentatively think of modernism as the "perspectivism" it claims to be and look at how the history of modernism might be graphed or figured, even "written." We will have several aims in mind. First, to defeat the impulse to fixed chronological order. We want to have a scheme that is not disabled every time some significantly earlier instance is found for something we associate centrally with a given historical configuration of events and practices. If, for example, we think we discover that Raphael was a realist before Courbet was, or that aspects of Vasari anticipate both Diderot and Baudelaire, this will not necessarily change our view of the working of history. Second, we will want to view modernism (or any other "period") as if from the inside out, as well as as if from the outside in. To this end, we will use a device of variable bracketing, setting and resetting various boundaries and conditions of limit to the field we choose to scan. Third, as I have already mentioned, we will want to write the history of representation in terms of an interplay of attitudes, characterized by certain conceptualized features. What follows in conclusion are the barest sketches of three alternative views of modernism. In figuring the "history" of modernist art from the present perspective, these three views—and perhaps others—will have to be schematized and freely exchanged. Together they will represent the interplay of art, criticism, and history.

(1) In the first view, modernist art appears at the end of a history of classicism. Its moment is corrective and regenerative. (This corresponds to the view held by the modernist artist who has faith in his project.) In this scheme, the evolution of classical art proceeds from an original indexical moment (Sandrart's shepherd) to the initiation of a tradition of skill (Sandrart's Dibutade) that follows immediately upon the first fixing of a trace. As skill increases (with chronological distance from the original indexical moment), authentic expression decreases. The history of this increasing distance is also the history of (classical) iconicity. The modernist views this iconicity as a progressive degeneration (as if from a true indexical trace or from a proper iconic image to a figured imitation—say, from Louis-Philippe to a pear). Such iconicity gradually converts the classical into the academic. Modernist art reclaims the field of the indexical, initially through personal style and self-expressive gestures, seeming to bring iconic classicism and academicism to an end. The time-line of classical art, extended to great length, reduces even to a point as modernist art converges with the childlike and primitive arts associated with its own sense of origins. Modernism aims to narrow the iconic gap between origin and representational end by whatever means it can invent.

(2) The second view is similar to the first, but complicated by the play of such means—those techniques devised to bring art back into immediate contact (in touch) with reality. A concentration on means leads to a recognition of representational distance even where unexpected. (This is the view held by the critic or the self-critical and ironic artist.) Thus one finds it necessary to imagine a moment "before" the original indexical moment. This "before" is not a moment of time but an enabling condition, a condition of originary iconicity.[26] It is this sense of iconic representation, seemingly always present, that allows us access to the image of an original indexical moment. Such a moment can exist for us only because we are not at that moment. This is to say that an original indexical moment can only "occur" historically at a time of repetitive iconicity. Without the classical tradition of representation we would have no myth of a time "before" the classical and no indexicality to which modernism could imagine itself to return.

Likewise with regard to what might conceivably "follow" a modernist art that establishes an indexicality outside of time. If modernism is nothing but a collection of originals or firsts, how can it have a history?[27] It needs a postmodernism in order to look back on itself. Postmodernist art will reveal the disclaimed iconicity of modernist art and will (just as Oldenburg's *Air Mail Letter*) return modernist art to a history of representation.

In sum, if we were to figure a time-line (but not a chronology) corresponding to our second view, it would run from a condition of originary iconicity, to an original indexical moment, to a long history of iconicity (classicism), to a second indexical moment (modernism), followed by a renewed iconicity (postmodernism). On this line, however, only classicism (the classical tradition) would appear as more than a single point.[28] The "condition of originary iconicity" and the "original indexical moment," appearing as two points adjacent to one another, contiguous, would have no separating distance and would therefore represent the same "time." The one entails the other. And so also for modernism and postmodernism. They must occur simultaneously.

(3) The third view offers a scheme in which the modernist and the postmodernist need not occupy the same position. Here modernism stretches out along a line, figuring itself as a history of indexicality. Its "beginning" is in the iconicity of classicism; its "end" is in the iconicity of postmodernism. Whenever modernists see their art as having a history, modernist indexicality becomes a representation like any other. The classical and the postmodern serve merely to bracket off a segment of a grander history of art. This third view corresponds to that of the art historian who distinguishes himself from either a critic or an artist. It is simpler than the other two views but no adequate replacement for them.[29]

We might distinguish a history seen from the three views collectively as a history written from the position of a maker rather than a (passive) viewer. To write or figure such a history is to *make* it as a product of purposefully assembled parts. The position of the maker becomes more critical than that of the viewer; to assume this position is to acknowledge that one forms an object of attention in describing an object, perhaps transforming it. The maker handles history critically, with care. He makes and remakes it and makes things with it, as if it were a tool in the hand.

Notes

[1] Emile Porcheron, "Promenades d'un flaneur: Les impressionnistes," *Le Soleil,* 4 April 1876. For a reproduction of Degas' painting, see Charles S. Moffett, ed., *The New Painting: Impressionism 1874-1886* (San Francisco, 1986), p.175.

[2] Hence, the possibility of claiming either that all icons are Peircean symbols (because the feature of resemblance that establishes the iconic relationship is "arbitrarily" selected) or that all symbols are icons (because they must resemble other symbols of their class, that is, they must look like their own paradigms or, at the least, have the generic look of symbolicity). On icon, index, symbol, see Charles Sanders Peirce, *Collected Papers,* ed. Charles Hartshorne and Paul Weiss, 8 vols. (Cambridge, MA, 1960), 2:143-144, 156-173. On icon as symbol, cf. Umberto Eco, *A Theory of Semiotics* (Bloomington,1976), pp. 191-217. On symbol as icon, cf. Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology,* trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore, 1976), pp. 48-50.

[3] For a reproduction, see Pierre Daix, *Picasso, The Cubist Years 1907-1916,* trans. Dorothy S. Blair (Boston, 1979), p. 318.

[4] For simplicity, I limit myself to observing only one figured form within this collage and to noting only one of its features among those that Picasso has manipulated. Among other features of the "pear" is an interior contour line that defines it as a wedge (as opposed to a thin, flat slice). This line is drawn both "on" and "within" the shaped cut-paper pear, as well as seeming to project forward from this (literal) yellow-green surface.

[5] Picasso often allows the cut to be seen from both "sides" since he uses the negative, concave, or cut-away piece of paper along with the positive or convex piece in a single collage.

[6] The engraving faces p. 2 of Book II in Sandrart's *Teutsche Academie der Bau- Bild- und Mahlerey-Kuenste* (Nuremberg, 1675). The top image corresponds roughly to remarks in Quintilian, *Institutio oratoria,* X, ii, 7, and in Pliny, *Historiae naturalis,* XXXV, 15. The bottom image illustrates the story of Dibutade (discussed below), most often offered as an account of the origin of sculpture in the form of low relief. For the story, without the descriptive detail usually added by pictorial illustrators, cf. Pliny, XXXV, 151. For reproductions of Sandrart's two illustrations and for other images of and references to the theme, see Robert Rosenblum, "The Origin of Painting: A Problem in the Iconography of Romantic Classicism," *Art Bulletin* 39 (December 1957): 279-290.

[7] A note on the phrase *history's original indexical moment:* we may speak of all history here, and not merely of the history of pictorial representation since any other subcategory or figuration of history (e.g., the history of literary representation) will seem to demand an original indexical moment of the same type. One might compare the mythic or originary notion of the proper name: the name as an integral part of the being who is named and, accordingly, an indexical sign. That the name of some person or thing is indexical does not preclude that the word that is the name may be figurative. See, e.g., Jean-Jacques Rousseau, "Essay on the Origin of Languages," trans. John H. Moran, in *On the Origin of Language* (Chicago, 1986), pp. 12-13; and the commentary on this passage in Derrida, *Of Grammatology,* pp. 270-280.

[8] This is not to ignore, of course, that Sandrart and his engraver index their own presence(s) in the act of making the design and the print. Sandrart's later Latin edition (*Academia noblissimae artis pictoriae* [Nuremberg, 1683]) uses different versions of the two illustrations, located at the corresponding point in the text (there, opposite p.40). The top picture no longer so clearly represents an "original indexical moment," but shows the shepherd demonstrating to three others his (acquired?) ability to trace a shadow—now with a stick and not a staff. This puts him closer to the (distanced) position of Dibutade, as discussed below.

[9] Such ambiguity characterizes the truly "classical" moment, in which the representation of the real and of the ideal cannot be distinguished. Cf. Richard Shiff, "Representation, Copying, and the Technique of Originality," *New Literary History* 15 (Winter 1984): 333-363, esp. 338-344.

[10] They spoke also of a passage from symbol (in the Romantic sense) to allegory or from immediacy to remembrance. The general thought assumes one of its commonplace forms in this statement by the painter and theorist Emile Bernard (letter to Milos Marten, 15 October 1908): "What is art if not the remembrance of paradise lost. You see, the Beautiful is at the origin of the world. To desire the beautiful is to desire what is most ancient in our memory, across the generations that have given birth to us"; John A. Stuart, ed., *L'Art plus que nous. . . Correspondance d'Emile Bernard avec Milos Marten, 1908-1914* (Grenoble, 1975), p. 62.

[11] For the photograph, see Joseph Vaughan, *Nelson's New Drawing Course, Drawing Design and Manual Occupations* (Teacher's Manual, Stage 1) (London, 1902), p. 41. It is reproduced in E.H. Gombrich, *Art and Illusion* (Princeton, 1969), p. 148.

[12] Ironically, this description seems also to fit the photograph in question until we recognize that it, along with any other photograph, is an indexical image (a pattern of reflected light

having been traced onto a light-sensitive surface). Because the photographic image is as iconic as it is indexical and because photography seems to operate at a distance from its model, it may appear as "academic" as classical realist painting. Hence, the ambivalent feelings toward this medium on the part of modernist painters, who tend to value its indexicality (and the associated capacity for replication) while distrusting its iconicity.

[13] The boundaries of iconic drawing vis-à-vis indexical tracing are not always clear. Such is the case with various forms of projection, or with the use of measuring devices or grids to facilitate the transfer of an image from one surface to another, or in the making of anamorphic images. (In taking this position, I may be "stretching," anamorphically, the somewhat more delimited Peircean senses of icon and index. Yet such flexibility characterizes Peirce's system. Cf. above, note 2.)

[14] We can speak of action-at-a-distance because the successful academic rendering will appear to be the effect of its model, which is its cause. The causal chain, of course, may be quite indirect.

[15] This image has been extensively reproduced; see, e.g., Gombrich,p.344. For interesting recent commentary, see Richard Terdiman, *Discourse/Counter-Discourse* (Ithaca, 1985), pp.149-197.

[16] One might claim that this first image must look like some other authorized picture (preferably a picture of Louis-Philippe, but perhaps merely of a monarch, or a leader, or a Frenchman, or a man . . .). This is to insist that the comparison with the model in nature must always be mediated by some preexisting representation.

[17] See, e.g., Théodore Duret, "Les Peintres impressionnistes" (1878), *Critique d'avant-garde* (Paris, 1885),pp. 64-70.

[18] Cf. Richard Shiff, *Cézanne and the End of Impressionism* (Chicago, 1984), esp. pp. 70-123.

[19] For a reproduction, see Christie's (New York) auction catalog, "Contemporary Art," 6 November 1985, p. 42.

[20] The irony comes about whether the artist intends it or not. And ironies abound since Oldenburg represents not only the air mail letter but writing itself, figuration *par excellence*. He doubles back on the commonplace figure of the painter's mark as a kind of (personalized) handwriting. What is the status of the hand-made imitation of handwriting—will the indexical relationship dominate, or will the iconic?

[21] Since this is a history of visual representation, reference to perspective and anamorphosis seems appropriate. A concern for the observer's expectations and perspective in relation to the specific object of interpretation is, of course, a familiar feature of modern hermeneutical study.

[22] See, e.g., Roger Fry and Desmond MacCarthy, "The Post-Impressionists," *Manet and the Post-Impressionists* (London, Grafton Galleries, 1910), p. 12.

[23] For a version of this argument focused on the play of original and copy, see Richard Shiff, "Mastercopy," *Iris* (Paris) 1 (September 1983): 113-127.

[24] Théophile Thoré, "Van der Meer de Delft," *Gazette des beaux-arts* 21 (1 November 1866): 458.

[25] For a classic version of this argument, *coincident* with the emergence of a modernist canon, see Charles Baudelaire, "Exposition universelle, 1855, Beaux-arts," *Oeuvres complètes*, ed. Claude Pichois, 2 vols. (Paris,1975-1976), 2:575-583. Baudelaire contributed to the establishment of Delacroix' canonical status while simultaneously claiming a capacity to shift views (even away from modernism), itself a modernist trait. Cf Clement Greenberg, "Abstract, Representational, and so forth" (1954), *Art and Culture* (Boston, 1961), p. 134: "the whole history of art is there to demonstrate the futility of rules of preference laid down beforehand: the impossibility, that is, of anticipating the outcome of aesthetic experience."

[26] To write of such originary iconicity is to make oblique reference to a Derridean argument; cf., e.g., Jacques Derrida, *Speech and Phenomena,* trans. David B. Allison (Evanston, 1973), pp. 66-69.

[27] Here, the notion of a ''first'' is rather naive, referring merely to an action appearing as independent of the imitation or reiteration of any other action. Despite the sense of primacy, for Peirce, this would not be a ''first'' but a ''second''; cf. Peirce, 1:148-151, 161-163.

[28] 'And when classicism is conceived according to one of its own ideals, as a preservation of a primordial originality, a tradition without change, it too collapses to a point. After all, the classic is ''timeless.''

[29] A more detailed exposition of the three views might introduce such concepts as life and art, symbol and allegory, and metamorphosis and anamorphosis.

Reasons for Aerial Theatre

By Steve Poleskie

In the Aeneid, Vergil recounts one of the earliest attempts to convey information through the sky. This is the story of the goddess Fama (Rumour), who spreads reports by flying at night on wings midway between the earth and sky. The motto, ''Fama super aethera notus'' (I am known by my fame in the heavens above) is from a speech by Aeneas to Venus.

For more than a decade now I have been using an airplane, flown by me and trailing smoke, to communicate through the sky. My activity differs from commercial skywriting and from military precision teams in intent and therefore in result. A marching band and a ballet company are both engaged in the same practice, that of moving bodies in some sort of order across a space on the ground. However, as their purposes differ so do their results. The analogy that can be applied to my aerial theatre as the only similarity between this and skywriters or military precision teams is the use of an airplane to move a person through space in the sky.

The purpose of aerial theatre is to create an artistic event in the sky. The action of my airplane lays down lines which can momentarily be observed. This action, however, does not create a tangible art object, a fact which presents difficulty to the viewer accustomed to equating artistic activity with a resulting product. The product of my flight then exists like a dance only as a remembrance of something seen.

The purpose of aerial theatre is not, therefore, the creating of objects in the sky. The viewer conditioned by his apriori knowledge of art wherein an artistic activity leads to the creation of an artistic object, expects something material to result. Art is not the making of objects for commerce. Art is spirituality and the perception of the will of its creator. In my aerial theatre I surround the viewers with a highly charged environment of movement and sound that energizes and expands what is seen. I seek to absorb the functions of drawing, sculpture, and dance into the act of flying itself. Although the separate parts of each piece are known aircraft maneuvers and practiced beforehand, they by themselves have little artistic identity. It is only when a selection of these previously experienced elements are joined in an integrated four dimensional performance in space that anything that can be seen as art occurs. In these events the making of the drawing becomes more important than the drawing itself.

These aerial theatre events are not improvisational, however, but are thoroughly planned beforehand. This does lead to the production of a great many works of a conventional nature, such as collages and drawings on photographs. These works are useful to me in preparing for an event and in helping to visualize what I am going to do. Originally I had intended to keep these works private but now find it helpful to exhibit this material to aid in the understanding of the aerial pieces.

Likewise the documentation which remains after an event, the photographs, films and videos, while they may also be useful to the understanding of the event they are not essential to its existence. My pieces are not designed for documentation and many have not been documented. Some have been performed at random over unannounced sites to an audience of whom I had no knowledge.

When we gaze outward at the world around us we can see objects but we cannot see ourselves. We only know ourselves in relation to external appearances. To see ourselves we must look inward. This inward view has no form. Form as we know it is the object appearance which reality presents to the eye when the eye responds to external stimuli. Objects are therefore the external appearance of a reality and not the inward reality itself. My aerial theatre is not concerned with objects but, like life, deals with its own consummation. This art, like life, must be experienced, constantly changing and evolving, never definitive.

All previous portrayals of objects have resulted in immobility and as a consequence, dead forms. The dead form is one of the main characteristics of art today, especially sculpture. This is nowhere more evident than in the work of Alexander Calder, an artist credited by some as having introduced motion to sculpture when actually his works have little motion and could more accurately be described as the titillation of trite forms. While his forms do modify the space they are installed in, the small amount of motion they are capable of does little to set up any additional relationship to the initial situation.

Aerial theatre deals with form which is variable and therefore evolutionary and unique from any other concepts which have existed until now. The Futurists spoke of form in movement and the movement of form. Through this dual conception of form they attempted to give plastic life to their work. They were looking not for pure form but for pure plastic rhythm, not the construction of an object but the construction of an object's action. However, they abstracted and removed the form from the living environment, thereby arresting its motion. A form which has the appearance of being in motion but which itself is not in motion is likewise a dead form, for a consequence of its immobility is its inability to generate a new form.

It is the ability to create new forms that gives aerial theatre its four dimensional context. While the pieces may appear as only lines, these lines laid down by the airplane complete those three dimensions which determine volume: height, width, and depth. The simultaneous action of the absolute motion (the aircraft's direction) and the relative motion (the direction of the wind) transforms the created form in relation to its environment. However, it is not only the decomposition of the form's shape that constitutes the fourth dimension. While the decompositions and distortions in themselves do have plastic value, their main impact is the creation of new, living forms out of the dying. In this infinite expansion of form, the conflict between the absolute motion and the relative motion, between environment and object, we find form revealed in a life of its own.

On June 14, 1986 I performed an event over Manhattan in which I incorporated the relative winds of two fronts. A warm front lay to the south of the city and a cold front to the north, meeting approximately at 14th street. From my altitude of 9500 feet this delineation was clearly visable as downtown was hazy with scattered clouds while uptown was clear. As the winds in a high pressure system flow clockwise and in a low pressure system flow counter-clockwise, a straight line laid down the center of Manhattan and would drift southeastward on the uptown side, changing to a northwestward drift after crossing 14th Street. I attempted to use these winds to my advantage and executed several of the pieces across the front line so that they appeared to disintegrate in two directions at the same time. I also worked with the existing clouds. At one point I saw a small cloud drifting toward the cold front. This I wrapped with a band of smoke, departing the cloud on the downwind side to give the illusion that the airplane was "pulling" the cloud. This cloud was then "pulled" into the cold front where it disintegrated.

I used the relative movement of the winds as a symbolic as well as a plastic gesture. This performance called *Winds of Change* was given on the day of a large protest against apartheid held in Central Park.

The perspective of aerial theatre is likewise unique and transcends all other known perspectives. This perspective rejects the notion of a point of view. It is a dynamic concept which is the antithesis of all static perspective. The lines laid down by the airplane will appear different to two spectators depending on their relative positions. Thus, the same line can take on opposite meanings. The dynamic and penetrating acute angle can be seen from another position as the vague and open-ended obtuse angle. Likewise, a rhythmic and oscillating curved line seen from below can become static and straight when seen at eye level.

Furthermore, the terms close and distant no longer matter in terms of relation to the observer as with traditional perspective. Rather, these terms take on an emotional quality as a piece one knows to be twenty miles wide can appear intimate enough to be held in one's hand and the sky can be brought down to the level of the ground.

This way of treating perspective surpasses earlier notions of perspective in emotive intensity and in plastic complexity. The lines laid down by the airplane with their absolute and relative motions create in the mind of the observer a mass of plastic emotions. This presents an art object which has no identity in itself but is capable of assuming an infinite number of identities. The forms exist not only of themselves but also as an extention of the spectacle. This living object, being characterised only by its absolute and relative force lines, is unable to be perceived as a whole. We know the object only through a succession of intuitive stages which is essentially our interpretation of life itself. Aerial theatre, with its complex pattern of lines simultaneously beginning and concluding, stirs and enthralls the viewer more by what it suggests than by what is materially expressed.

In 1919 the Futurist Fedele Azari, an aviator in the Italian airforce during the first World War, issued a manifesto calling for a "Futurist Aerial Theatre." In it he wrote: "The artistic form that we create with flight is analagous to dance, but is infinitely superior because of its grandious background, its super dynamism and the greatly varied possibilities it permits."

While Azari's manifesto did argue much of what I am doing today and he is purported to have performed flights of "elementary aerial theatre" near Milan, I have been unable to find any documentation of this work. He had hoped for his aerial theatre to be a "truly popular theatre. . . offered free to millions of spectators."

Likewise, my own aerial theatre is given free to those who see it and thereby participte in it. It belongs to those who retain it in their mind, existing long after the external movements and sounds have ceased.

My interest in airplanes began in my childhood. My uncle, who was a pilot, lived with us and I built model airplanes. This interest lay dormant for ten years while I pursued my activity as an artist in New York City. In 1968 I moved to Ithaca, New York, to teach at Cornell University. There, I learned to fly privately.

Until that time I had been a realist artist, but the view from the cockpit, the vast sense of space, compelled me to attempt to recreate this experience. However, the rather flat landscapes, with jumbled aerial perspective that resulted were to me considerably less than the reality I had seen. For me, a work of art by its very nature must transcend the reality that inspired it. These works being less than that were then less than works of it. The main elements lacking were the enormous space, the sense of speed or movement and the ability to change. I stopped painting entirely and devoted myself to exploring the use of the airplane as a tool for making art.

My first use of the airplane was in 1972 when I performed an aerial piece over Hamilton, New York in connection with an exhibition of my art works at the Dana Arts Center of Colgate University. For the next three years I did little artwork but spent my free time developing my piloting skills by participating in aerobatic flying competitions.

One man's dilettantism is another man's avant-garde. I did not wish to be an amateur pilot-artist flopping about the sky in a stunt airplane calling it a work of art. I wanted to control my craft with consummate skill so that the ideas I worked out on paper could be executed in the sky. I progressed through the ranks from sportsman to advanced, winning several competitions on the way. In 1977 I won the Canadian Open Championship and retired from competition.

In 1975 I took apart the aerobatic biplane I had bought from a stunt pilot in Nebraska and rebuilt it as a work of art. After installing a new engine and several modifications to make it more suitable for my purpose, I recovered it and painted it in an aesthetic motif.

A few years earlier Alexander Calder had been asked by Braniff Airlines to design a paint scheme which would turn one of their Boeing 747's into a work of art. The result was so ugly that Braniff pilots were unhappy when they were assigned to fly the airplane, and passengers were reluctant to get into it. The airline subsequently had the paint design removed.

Unlike Calder's asymmetrical pattern, I wanted my design to respect the original lines of the airplane. I spent one year on the project and made over 400 sketches. The design was to incorporate the coloring of birds, of WWI camouflaged airplanes and the art of the native American Indian. This airplane and a group of my drawings was exhibited in New York City at the Louis K. Meisel Gallery in 1978.

The first use of my biplane trailing smoke in an aerial performance was on October 27, 1976 when I flew over the campus of California State University-Stanislaus. At that time I was a visiting artist at the University of California at Berkeley. Two weeks later on November 19, I performed the "Great Berkeley Airshow" over San Pablo Reservoir near Berkeley for a crowd of students and museum people from the university. In the spring of 1977 I performed a piece over Stanford University. This was witnessed by the American painter San Francis, who had himself caused a piece to be executed in the sky by helicopters trailing smoke over Tokyo, Japan several years earlier.

For the next seven years I executed pieces solo over a number of cities including Washington, D.C. and New York. In 1984 I did the first performance in concert with music and dancers on the ground. This took place in Toledo, Ohio over the Maumee River and was called "Sky Dance of the Maumee." This was accomplished with the aid of the Tower Brass Quintet and the Valois Dance Company. In June of 1985 I did a performance in Richmond, Virginia over the James River. This event, called "Richmond/River/Ritual," was done in collaboration with a brass quintet formed by members of the Richmond Symphony.

My first performance of aerial theatre in Europe was in August of 1985. This was executed using a rented Bucker Jungmann over the Italian town of Pallanza on the Lago Maggiore. This site was chosen because it was the birthplace of the futuristic Fedele Azari.

More recently, I have been using my second airplane, a 1958 Piper Apache. This model was the first airplane designed for private business transport. As it is a twin engine airplane, I have equipped both engines with smoke systems. I had hoped to have two lines of smoke but the slipstream causes the trails to merge as one a few feet behind the airplane. As this is not an aerobatic biplane I must design the pieces using only non-aerobatic maneuvers. An advantage, however, is that this is a standard category airplane which is allowed to fly directly over cities. As my biplane was in the experimental category as well as being aerobatic, I had to confine my performances to being over lakes, rivers and other open spaces.

In the future I hope to be able to expand the scope of my aerial theatre. I plan more collaborative efforts with other pilots flying in elaborately choreographed spectacles in which the airplanes perform *pas de deux* as well as solo. I would like to have the music played live at some central place and broadcast live over the radio so that it could be heard by people in all parts of the city. In addition, television cameras in the airplanes would broadcast live the pilot's eye view from the cockpit. Also as I had at Locarno, airplanes with television cameras circling above would broadcast from that vantage point, while parachutists wearing mini-cameras on their helmets would dive through the pieces making videos. These would be immediately shown on banks of monitors located throughout the city at the same time as the simulcasting of the on-going event. In this way, a spectator would observe the realtime performances, involving the use of marching bands, fireworks, searchlights, and poets circling in planes reading the libretto through loudspeakers.

But what are the reasons for this aerial theatre? Is it a Utopian idea or a novel means of articulating ideas that could more simply be expressed some other way? The story I was attempting to tell in *Sky Dances of the Maumee* was of a city in flux, Toledo, Ohio. Seen from the air the downtown, wrecked by urban renewal, looked like it had experienced a bombing. Whole blocks had been leveled and were now parking lots. Corporate structures rose to thirty-three stories, not out of a need for space but only to be taller than the corporate structure at the other end of the street. From the sky, the Maumee River, called 'Toledo's link to the world,' could clearly be seen as the dividing line between the city's management and working classes. The river leads to the lake, the lake to the sea; across the sea is Europe where the still-living grandfathers of many of these people had come from, but where few would go. Most were living the good life in America drinking beer, playing softball and watching television.

One Sunday an estimated 125,000 of these people watched my performance. Perhaps many of them did not understand what I was trying to convey but they saw it. Had I made a painting, how many years would it take for it to be seen by 125,000 people? Or for 125,000 people to read my book? This is not to say I feel that aerial theatre is better than the other media, only that this is the way I have chosen.

All meaning is contiguous to some other meaning. This is a four dimensional concept that implies that an idea can grow or increase in ever expanding circles, provided it is not restricted by the social structure in which it is involved.

Unfortunately, an artist is often forced by circumstance to take a position, to try to locate himself in relation to what is currently being done and what has been done before. This presents difficulty, for the original meaning or intent of the work may then be subverted by external forces to serve a different social schema. The artist must be free from the social order (and the society of artists) so that he can avoid the demagogues of distinction who would have us believe there is only one true way.

In 1903 the Wright brothers made their flight in an airplane which had two wings, two motors facing backwards with propellers that pushed the airplane toward the rudders and elevators which were in the front. The pilot lay on his stomach and the airplane took off from rails. Six years later the Frenchman, Bleriot, became the first man to fly across the English Channel. What is significant is that this airplane used principles exactly the opposite of those of the Wright brothers. His craft had only one wing and one motor which faced forward; the propeller pulled the airplane which had its rudder and elevator in the rear. Bleriot flew sitting upright and took off on wheels. We are all heading toward a new land, though we may be proceeding by different routes. Let us hope that on our eventual arrival we will find this new land better than the one we left.

The beginnings of flight lie in the aesthetic. The aircraft as a thing of magic and beauty was created in art and literature centuries before its existence as a thing of function. I seek to return the airplane to its origins in art and fantasy. I feel that art must reflect the sum of human knowledge in an age and therefore use the airplane to communicate with the greatest number of people in the shortest possible time. If this leaves aerial theatre in a critical no-man's land, it is of no consequence; it is not theatre, it is not performance, it is not air-show nor sculpture or drawing. It is the art of true nature, an art given free to a vast public audience, an art that unites formal beauty with the expansive spirituality of the imagination.

Hal Foster, *Recodings*.Port Townsend, Washington: Bay Press, 1985.

By David Luljak

In retrospect, the back cover blurb does sum it up rather nicely:

> Hal Foster offers a careful reading of recent art and critical theory in ten essays that will be of value to anyone concerned about contemporary culture. He examines the codes, conventions and ideologies of current art as it complies with or resists the commodification of history and culture in this era of consumer capitalism.

The catalogue of themes is accurate, if blandly presented. But the blandness is the key: measured, cautious, scholarly, serious, vaguely titillating—this is the true representation of Foster's *Recodings,* a collection of previously published (with one exception) and revised essays. His examination consists of a bit of poking and probing, with a reshuffling now and again. He is always "careful," that is, he is not impetuous, he wants to do a good job, he attends to his task, but he keeps that distance indicative of insecurity or disengagement, or both. These essays are the intern's examination, not the operation performed by the full-fledged surgeon.

The analogy, too harsh, has mitigating factors. The essays, it seems to me, were published more for their topicality than the ripeness of their insights. But the ripeness is in their topics, and it is here that we are able to conduct our own inquiry, to do our own learning, for Foster takes up a number of issues that, while increasingly discussed, are still too little regarded.

Foster's perspective is largely based on Jean Baudrillard's "correction" of Marx: the development of capitalism has revealed the logic of the sign that underlay the logic of the commodity, thus Marx's production model based on use value as the underpinning for exchange value is replaced (or "recoded") by a semiological model of pure exchange value. "Use value" is regarded as a fiction (following the lines of the deconstruction of the metaphysics of presense) and capitalism is seen as an endless play of signifiers. There is a danger in this formulation, apparent to both Baudrillard and Foster. If Marx's production model mirrored the productivist ethos of early industrial capitalism, this semiological model mirrors the consummativist ethos of late capitalism. What we now are understood to consume are not real things, but signs of wealth, beauty, power, etc. Adherence to the poststructuralist model (the play of signifiers) results in "a passion for the code not the critique of it" (6), that is, collusion with the empty commodification characterizing late capitalism.

The problem—how to intervene in an apparently totalizing and impenetrable capital logic—is not a new one. It was addressed by Lukács' concept of reification and the Frankfurt School's notion of the culture industry. Foster enters the debate influenced by the semiological cast given it by various French critical theorists. Culled from these theorists are a number of concepts which he utilizes—anti-humanism, anti-essentialism, otherness, difference, transgression, inscription. The German tradition is not ignored. References are made to Adorno, Benjamin, Bloch and Marcuse, and Foster does not shun the dialectic, as do most French theorists. If this account suggests a grab-bag of concepts and theories, the impression is not unwarranted, but it can be said in Foster's favor that his project, at least theoretically, involves a working relationship of two traditions that are almost always pitted against one another these days, whether by those within them or by those without who take sides. If in practice this dual investigation is superficial, a result of Foster's general theoretical weakness, at least his is one of the initial signals to those who cover this ground in the art world that a serious consideration of the theories advanced by French and German thinkers alike (as well as non-continental philosophers) might reveal a common theater of thought with productive similarities and differences that are at present lost in the blindness of vulgar partisanship.

Totalization and intervention appear as the main themes of *Recodings.* Totalization is viewed both synchronically and diachronically. Synchronically, Foster concerns himself with "the connections of recent art and architecture with media spectacle and institutional power" (1). He discusses the "subtle conformism" (13)—and the not so subtle—of postmodern art and poststructuralist theory with the fragmentation and decentering produced by late capital ("Against Pluralism"). In "Contemporary Art and Spectacle" he considers art (Robert Longo's) that participates in totalization's most overt and seductive form—the spectacle. Throughout the essays, Foster explores the constitution by white patriarchal society of its hegemony, thematized most strongly in "The 'Primitive' Unconscious of Modern Art, or White Skin Black Masks." This last essay, as well as others, takes up a diachronic counterpart to these various forms of synchronic totalization—the historicism of a narrowly defined modernism (epitomized, of course, by Clement Greenberg) that seeks to recuperate lineage by procrustean doctoring.

The possibilities for disrupting a stifling hegemony are what motivates Foster's investigations. (At times it seems that art that is disruptive is valorized as postmodernist art for him; at other times postmodernism seems to function only as a "heuristic term" (7).) That these possibilities take different forms, all of them advanced tentatively by Foster, indicates the complexity—probably direness is not too strong—of the social situation as he sees it. Here are some of the tactics suggested: in "Between Modernism and the Media" and "Subversive Signs," the exposure of the social creation and subjection of the subject; in "Contemporary Art and Spectacle," the Utopian project articulated by Jameson; in "(Post)Modern

Polemics," the dispersal of patriarchal and phallocentric authority; in "For a Concept of the Political," a revelation of the *modus operandi* of political power and the denial of its absolute control; and in "Readings in Cultural Resistance" and "The 'Primitive' Unconscious of Modern Art," a "cultural revolution" in which a historically grounded minor culture resists the ahistorical logic of a major culture, following Jameson, Deleuze and Guattari.

All of these positions share what Foster sees as a shift from the transgressive purposes of the avant-garde to a resistant stance. In place of the avant-garde's "utopian abstractions" and "anarchic negations of art," Foster advocates "resistant and postmodernist practices" which "stress cultural representation" and "explore the social affiliations of texts" (152). By rejecting what is to him the dreamy and ineffectual idealism of the avant-garde and the passivity of the "capitalogic" argument (wherein it is believed capital will spawn its own revolution, if only we would wait for it), Foster banks on the fissures in society's apparently seamless fabric: "to see in the social formation not a 'total system' but a conjuncture of practices, many adversarial, where the cultural is an arena in which active contestation is possible" (149). Such a "situational aesthetics" aims at practical results that seem denied the abstract and absolute concepts formulated by the avant-garde.

The art that interests Foster attempts an immanent critique of art's representational practices, explores its ideological suppositions, and traces its social ties. If not the art itself, then his view of it is to a large extent overdetermined by a linguistic paradigm. In itself this reductionism is problematic. Is life only a matter of getting our representations right? Foster, like other critics of his bent, seems not to question Lacan's metonymic model of desire, thus leading him to proceed part-by-part without a sense of a larger picture. The pragmatic nature of this localism is in some measures salutary, but it also works in collusion with the entropic specialization of late capitalism. Over sixty years ago Lukács feared the danger of losing sight of the totality and thereby playing into the hands of capitalism's domination. If today the notion of a critically thought totality seems all but unrecoverable, blindered progress along the metonymic chain is not the necessary, but only an extreme, consequence.

When art world practices question only other art world practices, Foster himself has reservations, as in the cases of Louise Lawler and Allan McCollum. But Carter Ratcliff's objections to deconstructive impulses in general is worth a thought here—no matter how broad the issues addressed, does this kind of art speak to anyone not privy to the conventions of the art world?[1] The matter comes down to one's perspective on this question: how much of the art's energy is directed outward, how much inward? These deconstuctions may be the latest episode of art-for-art's sake raiding the "real" world for content to bolster a wizening aestheticism.

I don't see the matter in such black-and-white terms. Two artists whom Foster values highly, Jenny Holzer and Barbara Kruger, also seem to me to have found successful ways of addressing the public issues of their art (and criticism, in Kruger's case) to the actual public. But if artists have traditionally—especially so in the last century—worked in a narrow range in order to explore its possibilities more fully, a critic cannot be so confined. Foster's criticism unfortunately shares the restricted scope of the art he discusses. Furthermore, it provides us with an inadequate model for our own critical activity. If criticism is to be exemplary of thinking in general, then it must be rigorous, it must be truly critical, and it must reconstruct where it deconstructs.

Foster delineates four aspects of criticism which he does not wish to adhere to. He elaborates on them in a footnote which I will quote here and follow with his account of his own critical undertaking:

> The risk of the first, aestheticist approach is to turn criticism into judgment, that of the second, ideological-critical method is to mystify it as "scientific"; the danger of the third, hermeneutic approach is to reduce the text to the signified of one interpretation or intention, and that of the fourth, structuralist method is to impose a logic on the work that is then "discovered" to be its structure. (211, fn. 3)
>
> Criticism for me enters with its object in an investigation of its own place and function as a cultural practice and in an articulation of other such psychosocial representations; as it does so, it seeks to separate these practices critically and to connect them discursively in order to call them into crisis (which is after all what criticism means) so as to tranform them.
>
> Thus rather than make a fetish of theory, it seems legitimate to me (though legitimacy is not the issue) to engage different objects with different tools as long as the critical specificity or "sectoral validity" of each method in the present is kept in mind. My sympathy with this idea of theory as a "toolkit" is also a situational necessity: though written in suites, these essays were occasional in first form, mostly conceived in the midst of polemical debate (they often remain more ethical than analytical). Yet I prefer to see in this critical pragmatism a "theoretical indiscipline" concommitant with the indiscipline of critical art and theory regarding its traditional proprieties and institutional affiliations. The example of such work has impelled me, tendentious as these essays often are, to speak out of place, 'to generalize exactly at those points where generalizations seem impossible to make.' (2-3)

Marx's notion of the reciprocal constitution of object by subject *and* subject by object underlies Foster's enterprise, as evidenced by its reliance on the object for aid ("enters with its object") and its determination to some extent by the object ("engage different objects with different tools"). But instead of a lively exchange between criticism and art, we get either criticism which is little more than a mechanistic reproduction of the linguistic preoccupations of the art, or criticism which reduces the art to typicality to advance its own (largely linguistic) concerns. Even the extended piece on Longo does not examine his work immanently and dialectically so much as it applies stereotyped versions of it to an argument.

More disheartening and more apparent is Foster's lack of critical examination of the theories on which he so heavily depends. The general lack of distinctions made among various theories and a failure to give considered attention to the reasons for picking up on them at certain times and dropping them at others gives one the feeling of a merry-go-round of accepted notions. Of course, it is not the case that Foster denies any critical scrutiny of his sources; still, the players come and go so quickly that the criticism is lost in the spectacle. Illustrative of the confusion spawned by Foster's lack of criticality is his relation to the French theorists, especially Baudrillard, who is so important to him. While relying on them so heavily throughout his arguments, at crucial points he draws back from their more nihilistic tendencies. These rejections, usually one-liners, are little more than asides, but their importance, coming as they do at pivotal moments, renders his otherwise wholehearted embrace of them problematic. Foster owes us a more sustained consideration of these theories so that their points of acceptance and rejection do not appear whimsical.

The most blatant case of "received idealism" is "The Expressive Fallacy," which comes off as little more than a deconstructive set-piece grinding out the old hash of a "metaphysics of presence" and the "discourse of the other." No doubt it performed the service (when first published, in January, 1983) for art worldlings who had never looked beyond the commercial art magazines of acquainting them, from a poststructuralist perspective, with the current debate over expression, intention, and selfhood. But far from bringing any new focus to bear on the question, the essay comes armed with an established conceptual system and thus becomes one of those academic deconstructive exercises which is (here we go!) "always already written."

The issue of Foster's indebtedness is a large one. Indeed, the question of quotation in postmodern criticism (as opposed to art and architecture, in which it has been much discussed) is one that deserves study. Quotation can serve a number of functions, including acknowledgment and allegory, but in *Recodings* it serves mainly (and unconsciously, no doubt) as pastiche and as a rhetoric of authority. If we replace "history" by "criticism" we can turn this passage of Foster's against him:

> But does not the eclecticism of pastiche (its mix of codes) threaten the very concept of style, at least as the singular expression of an individual or period? And does not the relativism of pastiche (its implosion of period signs) erode the very ability to place historical references—to think historically at all? To put it simply, this Postmodern Style of History may in fact signal the disintegration of style and the collapse of history. (127).

Or can we? Perhaps Foster would not object to the notion of pastiche criticism if it serves to replace individuality with textuality, to emphasize that ideas are always re-presentations. What honest theorist doesn't recognize his derivations? Additionally, the passage is taken from an essay ("(Post)Modern Polemics") which, more than others, seems to support fragmentation as a way of dispersing "patriarchal and phallocentric" power (136). In the art world, these issues reached their first widespread manifestation a decade ago in pattern painting. Is it facetious to see this as pattern criticism—celebrating its non-hierarchical and non-exclusionary ethos?

A different move (although consonant with those who saw pattern painting as Modernism's last gasp) would be to turn against Foster another insight of this essay, that "what self-criticism is to modernist practice, deconstruction is to postmodernist practice," (130) and accuse him of textual aestheticism. If not that, perhaps he is guilty of the more worldly activity of a sort of corporate management of accepted notions, in place of the production of new ones. In either case, he lacks the distance from received ideas that separates the critic from the annalist, journalist and, at the worst, cheerleader. This distance is also necessary to the deconstructionist, and it is here that Foster seems to have misunderstood, and merely appropriated, his sources.

The difficulty is signalled already in Foster's account of his own program (see above), four of whose crucial ideas are imported from other thinkers, standing in for his own critical process while shedding on it a glow of assured authority. Unfortunately, Foster appears to be heading in the direction of knitting an increasingly tighter web of borrowed concepts. The revising of the essays for publication has resulted in some cases in a substantial thickening of the footnotes and the most recent essay, "The 'Primitive' Unconscious," is a regular riot of received ideas. Among concepts/terms familiar in poststructuralist writing we find in the 26 pages (includes illustrations) of this essay "rupture" 17 times, "difference" 18 times, "transgression" 29 times and "other" 57 times. Not only would this repetition provide a field day for a deconstructionist, it represents a restricted and ossified conceptual framework.

The same essay contains an emblematic sentence in which seven French theorists appear together—Lacan, Levi-Strauss, Bataille, Mauss, Baudrillard, Foucault, Derrida (203). If these seven can be so easily lumped together grammatically, it is important to remember that as productive as their interrelationships certainly were in actuality, they were rather limited in scope. They spent little time jumbled together, much more time going their separate ways. But Foster outdoes them—not understanding their criticality sufficiently—by relating to all of them, seemingly simultaneously. In another passage, "Lacanian psychoanalysis," "Foucauldean critiques," and "neo-Gramscian resistance" are run by us so quickly we barely have time to say them, let alone think about them, which, after all, took the respective theorists a lifetime each.

More alarming than the appearance of so many quotations in *Recodings* is the use to which they are put—made to parade their credentials, they seem to demand consent. When substituted as such for critical thinking they are so many "figures of authority, ciphers of regression." If a pastiche of theories throws a blanket over our perspicacity, their implied apodicity subdues it altogether. To some degree, the sheer number of theorists presented subverts their authority (whose side are we to be on?), but their blurring together tends to create for them a mass and anonymous reputation. The lack of Foster's critical intervention makes this authority seem "natural." We confront it monolithically—and, if we are thinking, we reject it. By allowing this sort of reception for his work, Foster does himself a disservice. His insights tend to get thrown out as so many babies with the bathwater.

The univocal, if amorphous, presence of this text denies the reader the engagement offered by either personal voice or textuality. The glaze, as it were, uniting these essays prevents the multiple entrances and exits that I take to be the goal of textuality. If by voice I seem to be playing right into Foster's deconstructive hands, I mean by it commitment, a clear stance—a person, rather than a personality, if you like—and it can be read as easily in Derrida and Baudrillard as in Oscar Wilde. If the reader is to be inspired to go at the text critically, and not rendered passive and fed information, she must be given a position to which she can respond.

But the essays vacillate between a kind of authoritarianism and a stasis which I find to result from Foster's understanding of his critical endeavor. In fact, in one sense the two are opposite sides of the same coin—by merely stating, Foster achieves stasis. The "homelessness" of the dialectic in Foster's writing is symptomatic of this. Much as he speaks of the dialectic, it is here in name more than in spirit. The structure of his arguments is not informed by it. Perhaps the patchwork of theories and issues is more properly characterizable by the binary or tetrarchal structure favored by French theorists. Where the dialectic does appear it functions mechancially.

To return to Foster's definition of criticism, "criticism for me enters with its object in an investigation of its own place and function as a cultural practice and in an articulation of other such psychosocial representations; as it does so, it seeks to separate these practices critically and to connect them discursively in order to call them into crisis (which is after all what criticism means) so as to transform them." (2-3) The figures of place and categorization lend the enterprise an air of academic lassitude. The cover blurb's metaphor of examination is no doubt unconsciously—or uncannily—drawn from the domination of these figures: investigation, articulation, separation, connection. Even the activity proposed (calling into crisis) is passive—what if they don't come?—and the transformation ("so as to tranform them"), it seems, will happen of its own accord. The preoccupation with placing (betraying an incomplete rejection of structuralism) appears to be undertaken to allow Foster "to speak out of place" (3), but this bit of romantic excess seems trivial in the university pall hanging over everything. The self-conscious stridency is meant to indicate urgency—if not that pariah, "authenticity"—but it is truly "out of place" here—only a barbaric yap.

The failure of these essays is essentially a failure of criticality, for, as criticism, that is ostensibly what they are about. Foster, for all his concern with form and the critique of formality, is blind to the stultifying, if somewhat slackly made, formalism governing his own work. In criticism, where form is—to a large extent—content, it bears thorough consideration. But in Foster critical method, where it is not borrowed and thus rendered uncritical, is reduced to a model which allows one "to think" certain concepts or situations. Criticism has more to give than this, however, for it can show more than what it allows one to say—it can show what it allows one to do. Criticism serves as a cognitive model—which is not to deny its affective powers—which can generate cognitive activity in its readers. If we take Habermas' *Legitimation Crisis* and Lyotard's *The Post-Modern Condition* (about which Foster only notes that they are "very different examples of such diagnoses" [226, fn. 1]) and bracket their "content," we can see in Habermas a rigorous working through of the problem next to which

Lyotard's work looks like notes on a (small) envelope. The comparative richness of Habermas does not come from any static qualities of a model—the statuesque, the ability to hold a pose well—but from the complexity of the "reproductive experience"[2] offered to those who will re-live his thought processes, a modulation of a passive model into active modeling, engagement leading to edification.

Foster may object to all this, since he has blithely asked us to "think of those who draw a direct line from the Enlightenment to the Gulag" (197), but if we accept—as Foster may or may not—that a wholesale rejection of the Enlightenment (whatever that would mean) is not required of us, then we must make our way by the kind of critical thinking denied by pastiche, authoritarianism, academicism and simple statement. Along the way we must certainly depend on the insights of previous theorists (including those which contribute to this very dilemma we are discussing) and on the issues raised and competently outlined by Foster. But for a model of our procedure we need something different than the stunted criticality offered in *Recodings*. Only a hard-nosed and free-spirited criticism can prove transformative.

Footnotes

[1] Carter Ratcliff, "Resentment," *Art in America* 70:6 (Summer 1982), p. 13.

[2] The idea of "reproductive experience" is found in Habermas' discussion of the hermeneutic nature of the cultural sciences in *Knowledge and Human Interests* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1974), p. 144.

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