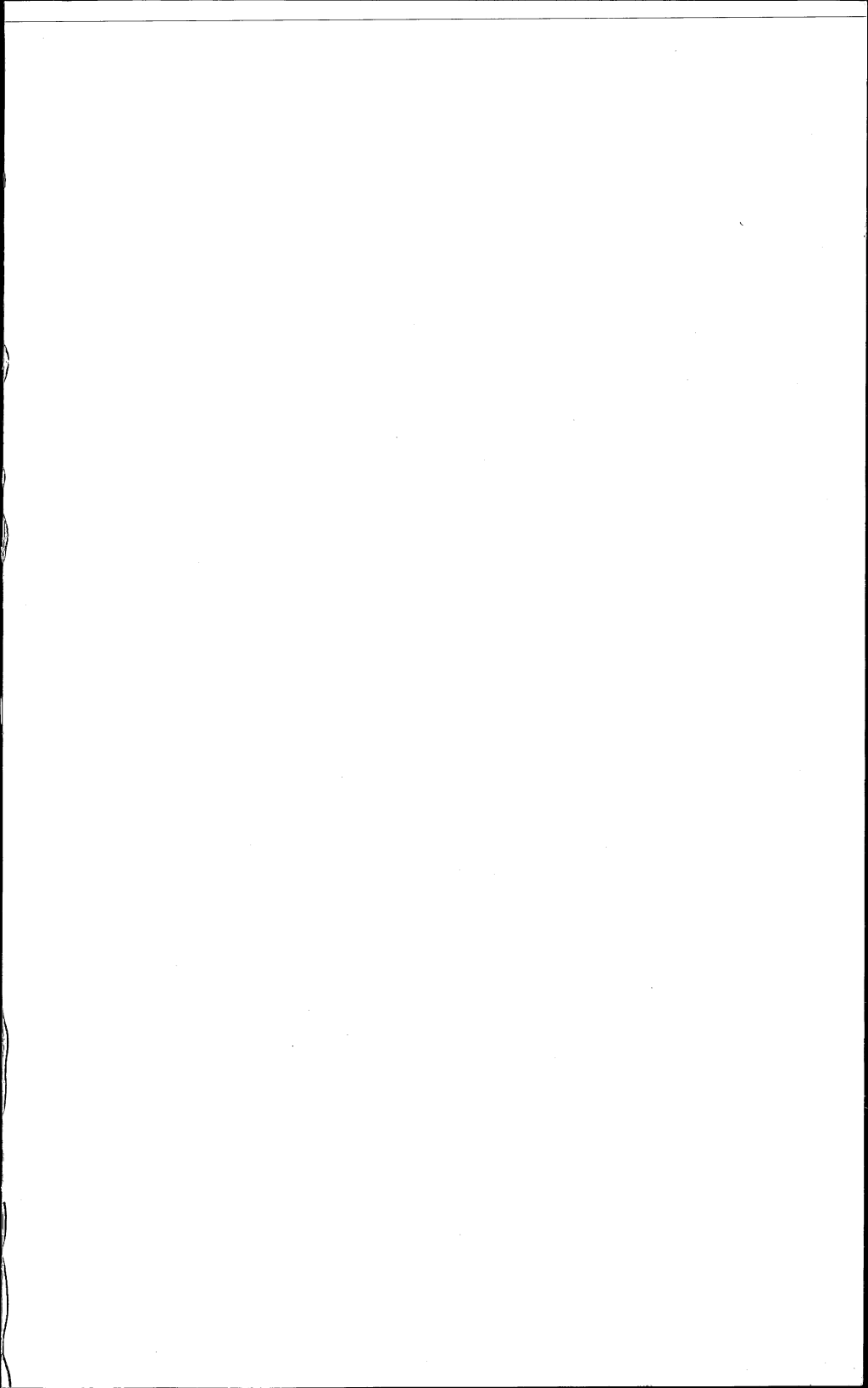


Volume 16, Number 2

ART
CRITICISM



Art Criticism

Art Department

State University of New York at Stony Brook

Stony Brook, NY 11794-5400

The editor wishes to thank Art and Peace, The Stony Brook Foundation, President Shirley Strumm Kenny, Provost Robert L. McGrath, and the Acting Dean of The College of Arts and Sciences, Robert Lieberman, for their gracious support.

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ISSN: 0195-4148

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Art Criticism is published by:

Department of Art

State University of New York at Stony Brook

Stony Brook, NY 11794-5400

Prospective contributors are asked to send abstracts. However, if a manuscript is submitted, please include a self-addressed stamped envelope for its return. Manuscripts accepted for publication must be submitted on a PC computer disk. Please contact the managing editor for a style sheet. Subscriptions are \$20 per volume (two issues) for institutions and \$15 per volume for individuals in the continental United States (\$20 outside the continental U.S.). Back issues are available at the rate of \$10 per issue.

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Toys are Us: Toys and the Childlike in Recent Art

Eva Forgacs

Because they are visceral and relate to long-forgotten, long-suppressed experience, toys are exceptionally powerful vehicles of communication. Their images plumb the darkest pits of memory, making their way directly into the unconscious long before we can articulate what they stand for. But while their instantaneous power has made them frequent components of literature and film, they did not, until the last decade and a half, appear with any regularity in the fine arts¹. Now post-Pop Art childhood references are inundating the art scene, and artists have dramatically smashed the remaining notions of purity and innocence which, though long since challenged by writers and psychoanalysis, still remained attached to childhood.

Childhood, a mere 200-year-old invention of adults, has been rediscovered and frequently revisited in art. After all the great novels and painted portraits of children of past centuries, toys have been selected to address a vast complexity of cultural issues reflecting a new kind of vulnerability, psychological awareness, and self-reflection.

The present wave of toys and the childlike in art is not the first time in Western culture when images of childhood have mediated regression, or longing for regression. The idea and cult of childhood first appeared along with the critique of culture at the time of the Enlightenment. At the same time when Kant argued for the newly acquired maturity that "the public use of one's reason"² can establish, the anti-rationalist concept of the child as genius, free of the corruption perpetrated by culture, was introduced by Rousseau and was further cultivated by Goethe. Generations of reform pedagogues based their methods on saving the "innate genius" of children. Romanticism saw childhood as the entirety of the possibilities any human being has ahead in life. Freud and Proust, the expressionists, and the surrealists were all intent on fathoming childhood. The child was discovered inside the adult as the bottom of his ego, his primitive, authentic, primordial core of uncorrupted sensitivity.

The work of the few artists I refer to here are but samples from an ocean of toy-based art works. These works have been widely and adequately interpreted; but not, or only few of them, put in the perspective of the history of our culture. In what follows I will examine toy-based art works in the context of some of the cultural currents which might not be highlighted had this art not existed; and in the historic context of traumatic events such as the Nazi holocaust that resist rationalization.

Christian Boltanski, after creating a series of toy-based works in the late 1960s, started to build up his works of children's re-photographed photo portraits in the early 1970s. It took him a few years to realize that the sense of loss he associated with the loss of life symbolized by the loss of childhood was in fact related to the holocaust. Images of childhood in his works stand for this unnamable trauma. Every child portrait that Boltanski mounts on the wall is a memorial and has the potential to become an accusation. His private loss – the deprivation of an unhidden family history and peace of mind in what Lipot Szondy calls the “family unconscious” - and the historic loss signify one another and point to one another. The loss of childhood and the loss of life declare the loss of a Europe that had existed only prior to the Nazi holocaust. When he juxtaposes the idyllic frills and smiles typical of middle-class family photography with images evoking the highly organized industry of killing, as in *Archives* (1987), Boltanski comes up with the iconography of the central narrative of Western culture in this century.

This narrative has remained suppressed in the visual arts, which is why an open reference to it, like Zbigniew Libera's *LEGO Concentration Camp Set* (1996), caused such scandal. Invited by Lego among a few other artists to create a work of art of their building blocks, the Polish artist used Lego bricks and packed them into authentic-looking Lego boxes with false serial numbers for a Lego set complete with barracks, barbed wire, skeletons, guards, gallows, and remains of bodies, all neat and tidy as any other Lego set meant for children to play with to develop their sense of construction and space. The work had to be withdrawn from the 1997 Venice Biennale as “explosive material that treats too frivolously one of the darkest moments in European civilization.”³ The work was dismissed as anti-Semitic, although that it was certainly not. An obvious allusion to Nazi camps, it could also be read as one of Stalin's concentration camps, or one in Cambodia, Bosnia, or Rwanda. What is really chilling about this work is that it actually conveys what Hungarian writer Imre Kertész called “The Holocaust As Culture”: awareness of industrialized genocide mediated into the fabric of quotidian life. As the TV announcer does not miss a beat between giving the news of terrorism or genocide and the weather forecast, the little Lego bricks can also connect up to form a charming red-roofed cottage or a horrendous scene of mass execution. Lego aptly visualizes the structures we operate with: it is the same small particles all over that connect up to become life or death. The work is to be seen in a local context, too: “The Lego collection”, Libera said, “is neither anti-Semitic nor irreverent, but a provocation about child rearing, social norms and the cultural cacophony that the free market has brought to formerly communist Eastern Europe.”⁴ Libera's work is as scandalous as any real truth: the adults' games do not spare children any more, in any part of the world.⁵ Moreover, Libera's Lego set is politically

idiosyncratic: If he was not willing to yield to communist ideology, he would not comply with corporate thinking, either.

Two of David Levinthal's several polaroid photo series featuring toys, *Hitler Moves East* (1977) and *Mein Kampf* (1994), did not create scandal, because they framed their subject matter historically rather than directly linking them to the culture of the present. Although the availability of toy soldiers in Nazi uniform with swastika armbands, not to mention toy Hitlers, could have been alarming, they were seen as documentary objects of the past. Using toys, which relate to every viewer's early and intimate experience, to enact Nazi atrocities, Levinthal's blurred polaroids, like Libera's Lego sets, suggest that toys, like the various components of the culture or the psyche, are bricks that can connect up to produce formations that may be fundamentally opposed to, or out of the control of the culture that had produced them.

The Neo-expressionism of the 1980s deliberately reached back to the childlike. Precursors of the period like Jörg Immendorff and A.R. Penck communicated their political *Weltgefühl* when, still in the cold war atmosphere, they regressed to the use of stick figures and simplified, childlike language as a sign of distancing themselves from the "adult" world, and to express their helplessness in the face of its machinery.

Seen from this perspective, much of the new expressionism of the 1980s involved sophisticated adults who faked naiveté. Jean-Michel Basquiat with all his outburst of genuine painterliness, was informed by, and indebted to, the acquired childishness of, among others, Jean Dubuffet; while the childlike simplicity of Keith Haring suggested a quest of commonality as well as a sense of narcissistic self-pity. Self-pity and narcissism were in the air: one had only to recognize their visual expressions. René Ricard depicted his favorite Francesco Clemente in his 1981 essay "The Radiant Child." He singled out a Clemente picture of a frog in a green pond as the "preservation of a lost moment from childhood, perfectly seen and remembered in a flash," and claimed that it was exactly this flashed childhood moment that "sets this picture apart as art."⁶ But he was most of all moved by Keith Haring's *The Radiant Child*. "We are the radiant child and have spent our lives defending that little baby, constructing an adult around it to protect it from the unlisted signals of forces we have no control over. We are that little baby, the radiant child."⁷ Ricard is claiming back the Winnicotian "true self", lost amidst the maturing process and the worldly operations of "false self" adults.

By the end of the 1980s this narcissistic melodrama gave way to a more sophisticated and more educated critique, which combined sociological, psychological, anthropological and even educational aspects while exuding alarming vulnerability and psycho-analytical awareness, the distinguishing marks of late 1980s and 1990s art.

Most famously Mike Kelley's soft toys challenged the culture's fa-

vorite myths: those of family bonds and perfect hygiene. Using soiled and sullied toys that he had bought in thrift shops, Kelley elicited sexuality, aggression, solitude, and yearning, that is, the actual reality of children, as opposed to the idealized world of flawless perfection and cleanliness represented by the toys they are given. Kelley was perplexed by the aggression of gift-giving. He saw home-made plush toys, supposedly the tokens of love, also as impositions of a will on children. "If you give this thing to Junior," he said, "he owes you something. It might not be money, but he owes you something. The most terrible thing is that he doesn't know what he owes you because there's no price on the thing."⁸

The question is answered by Brian Sutton-Smith, who observed that toy objects have had a tendency to replace games in children's lives, and that the toys are designed for solitary occupation to isolate children from the earliest age on.⁹ "Although the 'gift' is meant to bond the child to the parents, the child's reciprocal obligation is to become capable of solitary behavior. Solitariness is the child's gift to the parents."¹⁰

Home-made toys, Kelley observed, feature big heads like babies. They do not follow the proportions of the adult body, like a Barbie doll. "So the thing automatically produces the same problematic questions a baby does, but these are invisible even to the makers. These objects ... have a creepy aura because all the decisions that go into their production are unconscious."¹¹ The sight of plush toys plumb the unconscious of maker, exhibitor and viewer alike. They are derived from what Winnicott discovered to be the "transitional object"¹²: they represent the outside world for the child and the child to the outside world. Children, encouraged by the giver, grow very close to the soft plushy figure, and their relationship to it is meant to be a model of their relationship to the world. Love and anger go to the toy first; they are only to be *shown* to the parent. Indeed, parents often insist on being replaced by the toy. Robert Dickes describes a model case when

a boy was frustrated in his wishes to have more candy than his mother allowed. When he burst out in rage at her, she gave him his 'Wah Wah' instead of managing the issue directly and dealing with the results of her restriction. 'Wah Wah' was a rather strange and shapeless homemade doll that showed considerable wear and tear. The woman then told her son that he was making 'Wah Wah' unhappy, that this wasn't nice. He should love 'Wah Wah'. The child banged the doll around a few times and then cuddled it. The candy was quite forgotten. Here again we can see how a mother can enhance the value of an inanimate object in place of herself.¹³

Teaching children to transfer emotions from parent to toy and to develop a particular intimacy with dolls including their use in a sexual fashion

is one of the cornerstones of child rearing as we know it. The toy will then "betray" the child and bear "ugly" traces of physical contact that appear distasteful in the eyes of the world whereupon it is taken away from the child as "dirty" and is thrown away. Kelley's works are not about individual pathology: he uses large groups of toys in his installations to avoid getting lost in individual cases. The target of his cultural critique is the commodification of the child-parent relationship and the obsession of the culture with hygiene, so the generic toy is a case in point. "Take the stuffed animals," he said, "It's all about their tactile presence. You can't convey that in a drawing. Also, if they are dirty or fouled, you just can't convey that."¹⁴ In his toy works Kelley was relentless in floodlighting the ultimate fakeness and failure of the family idyll. His worn toys, redolent with saliva, negate the myths of the deodorant culture (he addresses the issue literally in his 1991 installation *Citrus and White*, having lumps of stuffed animals hung from the ceiling and sprayed periodically with lemon-scented deodorant).

Annette Messenger focuses on the ritual rather than the social aspects of toys and unfailingly keeps the subject matter of childhood in the vicinity of the theme of death. In her 1995 MOMA and LACMA shows she exhibited dolls' clothing under glass like memories of someone who passed away, and in *Histoire des robes* or *Story of Dresses* (1990-91) she spread dresses on the floor in sealed boxes which looked like Snow White's glass covered coffin. In "My Little Effigies" (1990), a group of plush teddies, frogs, bunnies, and dolls, she hung spellbinding photos of fragmented body parts — lips, tongues, genitalia, nipples, toes, eyes, soles, buttocks, body hair, ears, and nostrils, around the toy animals' necks, enhancing erotic power and reverence for the body and pre-verbal childhood. Most of these toys show some trace of abuse. They have been torn, blinded, or otherwise tortured. In *Anonymes*, or *The Nameless* (1993), Messenger displayed twenty-three taxidermized animals perched on metal poles, each toppled with the head of a stuffed toy animal. This montage of real and toy animals is a disturbing mix of once "nice" pets and the act of their killing. Once cuddled and cherished, now dead, they enable Messenger to suggest that the borderline between sadism and loving care is precarious and often blurred. "I don't think there is something so innocent about toys and childhood," she said. "We speak to the toys things we cannot say to the family. And so they represent something secret and not so innocent."¹⁵

Although her focus is on the mythic aspects of culture, Messenger challenges the socially acceptable imagery and representational norms. Her 1993-94 work, *Penetration*, features inner organs sculpted and sewn of stuffed fiber. She conquers the bare reality of nature the way children dissect their dolls: wanting to know, but leaving it between knowledge and play. The arteries, brain, bowels and other organs she neatly arranged and hung from the

ceiling are the bare facts of life and death as well as pretty, colored, soft textile objects. Understanding childhood as culturally unrestricted, and highly charged with sexuality and sadism, Messenger incessantly transgresses boundaries. Fiercely responding to the general horror of every form of decay and the abject, a pursuit shared with Kelley, she exhibited photos of *Children with Their Eyes Scratched Out*, and *Boarders at Rest* (both works, 1971-72), a collection of taxidermized sparrows for which she knitted tiny blankets as if they were dolls. But since they were, unlike dolls, *really* dead, she put them under glass in a showcase.

Kim Dingle also manipulated infants' photos by putting guns into their chubby hands. Her *Priss Room* installation (1994) plays on the sharp contrast between the cultural facade – frilly white dresses and black shoes for flawlessly cute little girls – and the reality of these two-year-olds with feces smeared on the wall of their nursery and violently ripped plush toys lying all around. The Prisses – prim, cissy and belligerent – clench their tiny fists, raring to fight. They explode with the energy of aggression and violence. Hand-made and dressed by Dingle (and fashioned as caricatured self-portraits), they look like miniature beasts of prey, ready for action at any minute. If they have a demonic quality about them, it stems, as in Kelley's works, from the demons of our culture. The Prisses' piercing eyes express little illusion about life being a ruthless fight – a physical fight, that is – and they are clearly chomping at the bit, taking pleasure in the prospective. And no wonder: pull up their Sunday best dresses, and you will find bellies covered with tattoos that are in fact miniature oil paintings depicting scenes from great American myths: wild battles with the native Americans, all horses, whips and guns. These hidden pictures provide a clear-cut vision of the culture as unending source of violence.

Re-framing adult conflicts in the terms of childhood and thus confronting adult reality with childhood promises is the subject of Ellen Phelan's doll picture series, which she painted throughout the late 1980s and early 1990s. Her work is self-analysis rather than cultural criticism. The set of dolls she owns provided a kind of alphabet for her to spell out issues like – quoting her picture titles – *Mother and Daughter* (1987), *Rejecting Mother* (1991), *Revenge* (1991), *Betrayal* (1992). Delicately painted, many of them in gouache and watercolor, they are studies of role and identity, tracing these back to early childhood. Using the idiom of childhood with all its poetic aura, Phelan casts her dolls in the roles of beautiful mother, inferior daughter, elf, barmaid, betraying and betrayed lover, and has them re-enact psychodramas in dark-toned pictures, the figures often hardly discernible from the mist of dream, fantasy, or the unconscious.

Phelan's narratives revisit painful dilemmas of the "true self" and its struggles. Dreams, secrets, little plots unfold. The dolls are as charged with secret fantasies as Kelley's stuffed animals, though Phelan is less direct and

her narrative tells of growing girls instead of infants. Her art differs from Kelley's and Dingle's in its delicacy: indeed, it is their delicate fragility and lack of harsh definition that opens "a royal road to her own and everybody else's unconscious."¹⁶

Nayland Blake's *El Dorado*, an installation of 1994,¹⁷ features yellow toy rabbits (apparently cloned) as parts of a model-size community. One rabbit is gleefully smearing some brown substance on the wall, another is drawing. One group has constituted an execution and is preparing to shoot one of their fellow rabbits; another group is simply playing. One rabbit, chased by yet another group, is trying to hide; another lies dead in a refrigerator. There seems to be no moral or other scale to differentiate between individual actions. Killing is like "playing at execution," being dead is like "playing dead"; drawing may be interrupted for shooting. Since the toy world so resembles the real one, there is no clear-cut borderline between feigning an action and performing it. The cute little bunny-rabbits, as spotless as Kelley's toys were when first given to a child, act out their little masters' or their own unconscious ideas and desires in a violent free-for-all.

One of the best-known "super-flat" artists, Yoshimoto Nara paints transparent, dematerialized, cartoonish figures of children. He lays a doll prone on a piece of green fabric covered with plastic daisies in his faintly ironic 1995 installation *There Is No Place Like Home*.¹⁸ Nara's children inhabit the empty space in front of a monitor screen. Reduced to mere contours and meaningless patterns, they evoke "a subtle, destabilizing anxiety"¹⁹ in the viewer. Flatness and shadowy presence convey an absence of reality they could have a grip of.

The novelty of the use of toys in the art of the 1980s and 90s, as opposed to the way surrealists used them is that they change the route of communication between artist and viewer. Although each artist uses them in a different way and for different purposes, toys are more objects than representations. They are not handmade by the artist, nor are they displayed as *objets trouvés*. As mass-produced or serially handcrafted objects they are familiar from everyone's childhood, so it is justified to use them as the lowest cultural denominator of at least one generation. They lack the intellectual sophistication of the surrealists who addressed the unconscious through symbols so the viewer could intellectually respond to the challenge by deciphering them. When the surrealists flashed images that were meant to reverberate in the unconscious, they still relied on the sophistication they shared with their select audience and they actually talked, in spite of all the well-known surrealist tenets, to the viewer's mind rather than "the optical unconscious." The artist of the 90s does not address the viewer's mind. S/he uses the viscosity of toys directly to electrify the viewer's unconscious, art's real target. The intellectual step between the image and its frame of reference is eliminated. The

readymade was a carefully chosen object that had to be so neutral it did not invite any kind of identification. It stayed halfway between viewer and exhibitor. The toy, by contrast to the bicycle wheel, is an object which absorbs both the artist and the viewer. Not only does it address the childhood ego, but, by its physical presence, powerfully reinvigorates it, so that it ceases to be, like other artworks, the object of contemplation. Instead, it is recognized as part of the viewer's self. Childhood has been discovered as the last common myth and cultural bond. Toys invite both artist and viewer, who share an otherwise not admitted anxiety, to regress into pre-verbal childhood.

Many among the artists mentioned above have already abandoned toys and embarked on new projects. Toys, however, are not only ubiquitous but also define a paradigm of contemporary art. Regression to childhood is disconcerting. Writing about a similar trend in the 1920s Benjamin H.D. Buchloh pointed out that

The Harlequins, Pierrots, Bajazzos and Pulcinellas invading the work of Picasso, Beckmann, Severini, Derain and others in the early twenties (and, in the mid-thirties, even the work of the former constructivist/productivist Rodchenko in Russia) can be identified as ciphers of an enforced regression. They serve as emblems for the melancholic infantilism of the avant-garde artist who has come to realize his historical failure. The clown functions as a social archetype of the artist as an essentially powerless, docile, entertaining figure.²⁰

If regression in the 1920s materialized, among other things, in the figure of the clown, it still found in the clown a longtime cultural symbol condensing a rich poetic, dramatic and literary tradition, quite unlike plush bunnies and Barbie dolls. The clown was still the emblem of the modernist artist who had art as an alternative to the world of power even when he was left powerless.

As a brief discussion of a few artists can demonstrate, most artists are driven to thematizing toys and childhood because they follow the thread of aggression, violence, sexuality, and anxiety they recognize within as well as without. Childhood, as it has become part of our general education, contains the core of our psychic formula. It is the reservoir of any knowledge we hope to have of ourselves and about humans in general. Two hundred years after Western culture created the "child" and the "adult," a particularly emotional tie to our own beginnings emerged while the formation of our cultural self became the object of psycho-analytical scrutiny. The origin of our relation and use of toys is illuminating with regard to the understanding of toys and the childlike in our present art and culture. In an attempt to probe the issue I wish to focus

on the discoveries made by D. W. Winnicott in revealing the anatomy of creativity.

Winnicott observes that "infants, as soon as they are born, tend to use fist, fingers, thumbs in stimulation of the oral erotogenic zone,"²¹ and that this habit very soon extends to an external object – the corner of a blanket or some other soft, woollen fiber that they can suck or use to caress themselves, a forerunner of later toys plushy or otherwise. This "transitional object," as Winnicott calls it, comes into play in the absence of the mother's breast, and, as symbolic of it, becomes very important. Parents acknowledge its value and approve of its use. Mothers do not mind if it gets dirty and smelly, because they understand it has a meaning and needs to provide unbroken experience to the child. Winnicott finds it of paramount importance that there is a paradox surrounding the object: namely, that it is symbolic as well as real. It is a real object, which is not the breast, but its specific value derives from the fact that it stands for the breast of the mother. Moreover, it is an object that the infant creates, and the only visible evidence of its "journey from the purely subjective to objectivity."²² But the journey can be successful only if the original experience of the illusion – that the mother's breast is part of the infant and is under its magical control – is complete. It is the mother's task then to provide disillusionment, and "if things go well, in this gradual disillusionment process, the stage is set for the frustrations that we gather together under the word weaning."²³ In the process of separating inner reality from external reality (while keeping them interrelated), Winnicott explores a third field: the transition from one to the other, the experience of which must remain *unchallenged*. He summarizes his argument as follows:

Transitional objects and transitional phenomena belong to the realm of illusion which is at the basis of initiation of experience. This early stage of development is made possible by the mother's special capacity for making adaptation to the needs of her infant, thus allowing the infant the illusion that what the infant creates really exists. This intermediate area of experience, unchallenged in respect of its belonging to inner or external (shared) reality, constitutes the greater part of the infant's experience, and throughout life is retained in the intense experiencing that belongs to the arts and to religion and to imaginative living, and to creative scientific work.²⁴

To understand the implications of toys in recent art, we need to see that an important, if not the most important element in the process of creativity, is a solid support at the very outset. In the case of the individual this solid support is the mother. Transferring the model to the scale of entire cultures, original solid support was provided by deities. The secularization of Western culture has a particularly visible impact on those generations which had never

had that original support: a process revealed, among other things, by the substitution of fairy tales with "safe stories", as Bruno Bettelheim called them, written for children by individual authors. Whereas fairy tales were symbolic narratives of a solidly centered universe walking children through their greatest fears and anxieties to land them safely on a good ending,²⁵ the new, realistic-sounding "safe stories" sidestepped children's primary concerns. "The deep inner conflicts originating in our primitive drives and our violent emotions are all denied in much of modern children's literature."²⁶ "Safe stories" are much like the world in Yoshimoto Nara's pictures. "In America," says Kelley, "there also seems to be an intense fear of death and anything that shows the body as a machine that has waste products or that wears down."²⁷ Modern ersatz stories downsize the children's questions concerning life and death and pretend that they are not valid. Art works which programmatically focus on childhood attempt to re-claim the validity of the childhood self.

Insistence on childhood and even on the option of never becoming an adult dramatically appears in post-World War II literature. The metaphoric use of childhood as historic innocence and pre-traumatic wholeness provides a particularly illuminating backdrop to the 1980s and 1990s art of the childlike.

Childhood as a perspective on the world is powerfully used by Günther Grass in his 1958 novel *The Tin Drum*.²⁸ The hero, Oskar, makes a conscious decision at the age of three not to grow up.

I remained the three-year old, the gnome, the Tom Thumb, the pigmy, the Lilliputian, the midget, whom no-one could persuade to grow. I did so in order to be exempted from the big and little catechism and in order not, once grown to five-foot-eight adulthood, to be driven by this man who face-to-face with his shaving mirror called himself my father, into a business...²⁹

Although a three-year-old, Oskar is still "superior to all grownups," because he "was complete both inside and outside, while they, to the very brink of the grave, were condemned to worry their heads about 'development.'"³⁰ His three-year-oldness features non-verbal skills which do not belong to the adult world, such as his ultrasound-like voice that cracks glass, and his innate or imprinted ability for drumming. Oskar will grow a little, though, and he changes from adult-minded child into a midget adult: but in a key scene of the novel that takes place in the Onion Cellar, he drums the adult audience down to the level of the three-year-old. Understanding the loss of language and the collapse of all cultural paradigms in the face of the catastrophe that had happened, he downgrades the citizens of post World War II Germany, who use onions to be able finally to weep, into grateful kindergarteners who line up and march behind him, singing children's songs, and squatting to do number one, only to

return to the cloakroom and check out their adult-size coats in which they walk home.

Oskar is not the embodiment of the Biedermeyer concept of the child. He is neither innocent ("just think of all the innocent grandmothers who were once loathsome, spiteful infants"³¹), nor cute, let alone helpless and unformed. Rejecting adulthood, Oskar rejects Germany past and present, and is the genius as Romanticism had it, with considerable dark powers, which he uses, albeit not quite knowingly, at several key points of the narrative to determine the fate of others. His voice breaks windows, and his constant drumming drives everyone around him crazy. He is "vain and wicked – as a genius should be," as his fellow midget friend observes.³²

Remaining a child is a way to not get involved, to be able to observe, to have a perspective on the world. It also means to remain powerless in the sense those who become society's players have power. But there are moments when not even this much is enough. Not only does Oskar wish to remain a child, at several points of the novel he expressedly desires to regress even further. He dreams of hiding away beneath Grandma's legendary skirts, and not even this is enough: "You've guessed it no doubt: Oskar's aim is to get back to the umbilical cord."³³ These fits of escape come over him whenever confronted with aggression: at the sight of his communist neighbour friend's wounds after he has been beaten up in the local pub; and after the storm troopers have killed Sigismund Markus, the Jewish toy merchant, who had sold him the tin drums.

Staying buried in childhood offers a unique distance from the unfolding events of World War II, and fascism and serves as a unique vantage point for Grass to portray his country.

A decade and a half after Grass finished the writing of *The Tin Drum*, Isaac Bashevis Singer started to serialize his novel *Shosha*, the protagonist of which is a girl who would not grow up. Shosha and Aaron are 5-6-year-old children in Warsaw's Jewish quarter in the early 1910s. They are neighbours and spend most of their time together until Shosha's family moves out of No. 10 Krochmalna Street (Singer's actual home address) into No. 7. Twenty years later Aaron is a well-known writer caught in a web of friends and lovers. He is penniless until an American businessman shows up in Warsaw looking for a play in which his girlfriend Betty could play the lead in Warsaw's Yiddish Theater. Betty has a crush on Aaron, and wants to see the sites of his childhood. When they walk past No. 7 of the old street, Aaron wonders whether Shosha's family still lives there.³⁴ They do, and Shosha has not changed. She is still the same little girl who she was 20 years before. "The girl is an idiot. She belongs in an institution. But you're in love with her," Betty blurts out after the visit. "The moment you saw her, your eyes lit up in a strange way ... What do you see in her?" she asks, whereupon Aaron answers: "Myself."³⁵

Narcissism as a form of regression is equally pivotal in the play he is writing for Betty. Titled "The Ludmir Maiden" (apparently a sketch for *Yentl*), it is the story of a young woman who disguises herself as a man so she can study the Talmud. She is possessed by a Dybbuk – the soul of a dead man, whose spiritual reincarnation she is – and falls in love with this Dybbuk. At times she talks in her own voice, at times in the voice of the dead man. "This means I'll have to conduct a love-affair with myself?", Betty asks. "Yes, but in a sense we all do," Aaron answers.³⁶

Shosha is, in this sense, Aaron's Dybbuk: his alter ego, his unconscious, and his dead childhood, which surfaces uncorrupted from the depths of time. Adulthood and childhood are thus juxtaposed, and the linear flow of time is broken to give way to the timelessness of the unconscious. This is underlined in many ways, for example: "Shosha, in her fashion, denied death"³⁷; she regarded the dead as if they were still around. "Has Shosha found a magical way to stop the advance of time?", Aaron wonders, "Was this the secret of love, or the power of retrogression?"³⁸

Like Oskar, Shosha will also grow a little, though. She becomes Aaron's wife, and she too turns out to be a kind of genius of intuitive understanding. Singer has mercy on this heroine of his: when the Germans occupy Warsaw, Shosha, on her way out of the city, simply sits down by the road and dies – refuses to live as she had refused to grow up.

Growing up, in Singer's understanding just as in Grass's view, means acceptance of the world as it is. Not growing up is a hypothetical, tacit, but firm opposition: the only resistance of the individual against overpowering madness and inhumanity.

The protagonist who would not grow up brings forth the image of toys in both novels. By killing his toy merchant, the masters of the universe wanted to expel all toys from the earth, Oskar muses. The story of the Jewish toy dealer is delivered as an archaic legend. It is a link in the chain which starts with a Nazi musician slaying his four cats, and continues with a watchmaker who denounces the musician for thus having damaged the storm troopers' reputation (and in vain did the musician excel in burning synagogues and smashing the Jews' stores; he ended up being excluded from the Nazi party.) The next link in the chain is a tin drummer, who, due to the joint efforts of the musician and the watchmaker, is deprived of his toy merchant. This takes us to the last link, the toy merchant by the name of Markus, who, when killed by the storm troopers, takes all the toys on the earth away with him. The metaphor of the toy dealer as a Jew paraphrases Adorno, suggesting that after Auschwitz toys and playing are barbarous.

In Singer's novel playing and toys emerge in the image of Coney Island. As a strange new dimension of being – indeed, the anticipation of *anything goes*, Coney Island epitomizes a newly found absurdity: everything

that had been unimaginable before. It might be the weird "future of mankind. You can even call it the time of the Messiah. One day all people will realize that there is not a single idea that can be really called true – that everything is a game – nationalism, internationalism, religion, atheism, spiritualism, materialism, even suicide... Play is the very essence of human endeavour, perhaps even the thing-in-itself. God is a player, the cosmos is a playground ... There is no reason why hedonism, the cabbala, polygamy, ascetism... could not exist in a play-city or play-world, a sort of universal Coney Island..."³⁹

Focus on toys is to pull just one thin thread out of these novels, but a thread that is directly linked to their central idea: the protagonist who is determined to remain a child. In Grass's book toys stand for poetry, imagination, and a sort of innocence that had passed unnoticed until the Nazis wiped it out. In Singer's novel, on the other hand, the toy world is the antithesis of the real world. The vision of Coney Island is the vision of America as seen by a survivor of the European catastrophe. A world topsy-turvy, where nothing is real. What had had weight and significance in the Old World has become mere triviality here – or worse: *fun*, that very New World idea. The most absurd aspect of this tawdry toy reality is that it may well be the real reality: that nothing that had happened in the Old World may have had any sense at all.

With different emphases, both authors use the image of toys to express a fundamental change that has irrevocably altered the world. It is no longer a world that draws one toward maturity and participation. Not to grow up is tantamount to defying, even rejecting the modernist concept of unbroken progress. Faith in progress was thoroughly undermined by the experience of two consecutive wars and the Nazi holocaust. Both the German and the Jewish novels were written after the unspeakable European trauma, and they powerfully anticipate those visual works of the 1980s and 90s that appeal to childhood, and the childlike, seeking an understanding with their audience in the common pre-verbal sphere of toys.

In the 1980s and 90s it didn't take the art world to see children, with or without toys: they were ubiquitous. Ads in the print media and TV commercials still incessantly flash images of infants, toddlers and children to sell insurance, safe cars, or retirement plans, to mention only a few typical items. Images of security and images of happy childhood have grown inseparable, while the exploitation of the sexuality, consumer potential, and emotional reverberations related to children, have also become ubiquitous. Childhood, as PR experts have realized, has come to be seen as the ultimate safe haven from anxiety. The multifaceted use of children or the childlike in a multi-layered vernacular is reflected on in many artists' works, such as Sally Mann, Charles Ray, Nicole Eisenman, Tamara Fites, Tony Oursler, and others.

Not giving up childhood is a soft resistance of the "essentially powerless" artist, in Buchloh's words, in the world of hard-edge corporate architec-

ture. "Powerless" seems to have had a different meaning in the past. Franz Kafka, who felt entirely powerless in his relationship to his father, summed up his weakness in his *Letter to his Father* and turned his very weakness into a powerful weapon in the battle against him. This struggle was not only Oedipal. It was tantamount to rejecting the world of the adults, which he saw epitomized, just as Oskar in *The Tin Drum*, by business. While he passionately expressed a sense of not belonging, he created the alternative space of the artist for himself, because, in the scale of Modernist values the successful artist (who he already was) ranked higher than the successful businessman. Art was cosmic, universal whereas money was materially functional. Having the power of artistic imagery and articulation was superior to worldly power.

It is inconceivable today that a son, armed only with artistic talent, could defeat corporate power whether it materializes in the figure of his father or otherwise. Art is weak unless it functions on the level of a corporate agency. Whether in the service of enforced psychoanalytical inquiry or social critique, the presence of dolls and soft toys in art enhances the expression of helplessness and narcissistic self pity in the face of both this power structure and the historic traumas.

Among the very few cases cited by Winnicott there is one about a woman who has experienced the loss of her mother several times. First the mother proves unreliable, then she seems to have disappeared, and finally she is really gone. As a result of these repeated disappointments, the patient comes to believe that the only real thing is the unreal. As a child the patient had had toys, a pet dog, and a great many fantasies. The strikingly new feature of this case for Winnicott was that "these were symbolical of something and were real for the child; but ...she had to doubt the reality of the thing that they were symbolizing."⁴⁰ In other words, "they remained real in themselves, but what they stood for was not real."⁴¹

In this sense the toys we find in recent art represent the abandoned symbols of a lost reality; they are reminders of the lost substance they were originally meant to symbolize. They themselves are undoubtedly real, but what they originally stood for has lost its reality.

Notes

- 1 Analysis of Surrealist episodes, such as Hans Bellmer's dolls, Klee's childlike drawings, or the Expressionists' cult of childhood as a primitivism of sorts would take me beyond the scope of the present paper. The same goes for the art of Joseph Cornell or Balthus.
- 2 Immanuel Kant, "What Is Enlightenment?" in *Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals*, (Indianapolis, New York, Kansas City: Bobbs Merrill, 1959), 87.
- 3 Dean Murphy, "Artist Constructs a Volatile Toy Story," quotes Jan Stanislaw Wojciehowski, curator of the Polish Pavilion at the 1997 Venice Biennale, Los

Angeles Times, May 20.1997.

4 Ibid.

5 Appealing to childhood had, during the 1960s and 70s, different purposes in Eastern Europe than in the West. Adapting the child's point of view offered to writers the possibility of maintaining integrity and independence. The child's eye was, in a very practical sense, the only uncorrupted eye. However, in an interview about the frequency of childhood and adolescent stories in the Hungarian literature of those decades, Péter Nádas remarked that there was more to it than just bypassing censorship. He observed that focusing on childhood gave an opportunity to writers to distinguish and prioritize "subjective time, that everyone creates for himself" as opposed to the generally accepted concept of time, and thus keep a distance from the world they depicted. However, Nádas also contended that "thematizing childhood was a hidden response to schematism and to the ensuing more sophisticated forms of manipulation. Throughout the 1960s childhood was the only domain that had remained clean of ideologies and historic partialities." (Péter Nádas: "A gyerekkor: rejtett válasz a sematizmusra" [Childhood: a hidden response to schematism], interview with András Görömbei in *Alföld*, 1977/7. My translation.)

6 René Ricard, "The Radiant Child" *Artforum* (December 1981), p.38.

7 Ibid.45.

8 Mike Kelley, interviewed by John Miller in Los Angeles on March 21, 1991. In *Mike Kelley* (Los Angeles: Art Press, 1992), 18.

9 Brian Sutton-Smith, *Toys As Culture* (New York: Gardener, 1986), especially the chapters "The Toy as Solitariness," and, "The Use of Toys for Isolation."

10 Ibid, 53.

11 Kelley, 30.

12 See D.W. Winnicott, "Transitional Objects nad Transitional Phenomena," in *Playing and Reality* (London/New York: Routledge, 1971).

13 Robert Dickes, "Parents, Transitional Objects, and Childhood Fetishes" in Simon A. Grolnick, ed. *Between Reality and Fantasy* (New York/London:Jason Aronson, 1978), 307-319.

14 Taylor, p. 59.

15 William Turner, "Annette Messenger, An Interview," *Venice* (July 1995), 74-77.

16 Pete Schjeldahl, "Dollness: Ellen Phelan's Doll Drawings" in Ellen Phelan, *From the Lives of Dolls* (University Gallery, University of Massachusetts at Amherst, 1992), 24.

17 Christopher Grimes Gallery, Santa Monica

18 Blum and Poe, Santa Monica, 1995.

19 Michael Darling, "Yoshimoto Nara", *Art issues*, #39 (Sept./Oct. 1995), 41.

20 Benjamin H.D.Buchloh, "Figures of Authority, Ciphers of Regression. Notes on the Return of Representation in European Painting" in Marcia Tucker, ed., *Art After Modernism* (New York: New Museum of Contemporary Art, 1984), 18.

21 Winnicott, 1.

22 Ibid, 6.

23 Ibid, 13.

24 Ibid. 14.

- 25 See Hans Dieckmann, *Twice-Told Tales: The Psychological Use of Fairy Tales* (Wilmette, Illinois: Chiron, 1986), and Bruno Bettelheim, *The Uses of Enchantment: The Meaning and Importance of Fairy Tales* (New York: Knopf, 1976).
- 26 Bettelheim, 10.
- 27 Rugoff, 86
- 28 Other works could be cited. For example, Sebastian, a central character in Evelyn Waugh's 1945 novel *Brideshead Revisited*, is unable to become an adult. In love with his childhood, clinging to his teddy-bear Aloysius and to his nanny, he becomes an alcoholic in response to the demands of the world, which is itself falling apart.
- 29 Gunther Grass, *The Tin Drum*, tr. Ralph Manheim (New York: Pantheon, 1961), 60.
- 30 Ibid.
- 31 Ibid., 498.
- 32 Ibid., 171.
- 33 Ibid., 179.
- 34 This scene brings to mind the "magical realm of the unconscious" in fairy tales (Dieckmann, 50), which can be reached through a well or in a nearby forest. The childhood scene is there, in the middle of Warsaw where Aaron lives. For twenty-some years he never emerges into the street from the dark house where Shosha lives.
- 35 Isaac Bashevis Singer, *Shosha*, tr. Joseph Singer (New York: Fawcett Crest, 1978), 89.
- 36 Ibid., 51.
- 37 Ibid., 98.
- 38 Ibid., 99. Shosha's idiocy is of the same kind as that of Dostoyevsky's *Idiot*, Prince Mishkin. Although she is also described as ill, as Mishkin is epileptic, her real problem is that she has failed to acquire the skills of worldly, adult behavior. Lacking what Winnicott calls the "False Self," an interface between the world and the "True Self," she is vulnerable.
- 39 Ibid., 141-142.
- 40 Winnicott, 24.
- 41 Ibid.

Jackson Pollock, Three Theoretical Sources, and Rosalind Krauss's "Six"

Michael Peglau

In "Six," the sixth and final chapter of *The Optical Unconscious*, Rosalind Krauss presents a series of linked speculations on Jackson Pollock's drip paintings. These speculations, which are quite elliptical, presume a familiarity with a diverse group of thinkers including Sigmund Freud, Erwin Straus, and Jacques Derrida and a familiarity with the criticism and scholarship on Pollock. While "Six" is best read by a small group of theoretically practiced experts on Pollock, Krauss certainly did not only write "Six" or *The Optical Unconscious* for an imagined symposium. The deeper ambition of "Six" was as a challenge to the existing consensus on Pollock and to all theoretically uninformed positions on Pollock. *The Optical Unconscious*, in general, is intended to challenge the consensus positions on twentieth-century art, while "Six," in particular, invites reading not only as an attack on most existing scholarship and criticism on Pollock but also as a new model for art historical analysis, one where 'normal' art historical concepts, such as stylistic influence, iconographic analysis, or the contextual reconstruction of probable intention, are voided and supplanted by other concepts such as the vertical, *différance*, indexicality, the arche-trace and verticality/horizontality. I will consider Krauss's use of each of these concepts later in this essay. The point here is that as a model for a revision of either the interpretation of Pollock or for twentieth-century art in general, "Six" is problematical. Indeed, it stands as a striking example of what I believe are symptomatic and burgeoning issues in art history. Those issues are how theoretical sources distort and transform basic art historical problems such as the reconstruction of intention, and how contemporary theoretically formulated art history tends to operate at a level of generality even more sweeping than the grand idealist schemes of art history's past.

Krauss boldly dismisses the issue of reconstructing intention in Pollock's work in one of her endnotes:

My own feeling is that since Pollock's statements can be shown to have been the result of a kind of ventriloquy practised by his various mentors, starting with Benton and Graham and his psychoanalysts and going up to Greenberg and Krasner (and even, beginning in 1950, Michel Tapié), they give no reliable sense of his own intentions, but rather a script of self-justification to which he had recourse. I don't feel that Pollock's "intentions" are recoverable in any useful sense.¹

Beyond asserting Pollock to be a ventriloquist's dummy and, at least on the

level of speech, a sham scripted by mentors he echoed, Krauss claims an omniscience here which gives her freedom to declare Pollock's motivations to be anything she might intuit. Her hunches on issues pertaining to Pollock's motivations supercede the work of all previous scholars and all prior critics who have considered this matter. Indeed, the "I don't feel" is the declaration of an all-knowing authority who has no doubt whatsoever about her clairvoyance in the complex matters of Pollock's motivations and how they might relate or shear off from his various statements, rather than of a scholar well aware of contemporary hermeneutics questioning the univocal authorial voice. In short, it is a curious position for someone so invested in Post-structuralist theory to return to the authoritarian, seer-like voice of an old-fashioned art biographer. At the very least it suggests an unfortunate and potentially blinding arrogance in relationship to not just prior criticism and scholarship but to Pollock himself. It also suggests a self-inflation which could trouble the many issues of critical and scholarly judgment crucial to any reading of Pollock, let alone one where the claim of unconscious motivations is said to play a prominent role. In that "I don't feel" lies a transference problem. Krauss is far too ready to insert herself into just the ventriloquist's role she disputes. Her own claim of authority not only dismisses prior scholarship, it leaves her alone to speak finally as Pollock, or at least the Pollock whom in her estimation could never speak for himself concerning his own intentions. In supplanting Pollock's voice with her own psychoanalytically colored guesses she commits a fundamental error which haunts any number of psychoanalytically influenced interpretations of art. Without citing sufficient biographical material, and without rigorous psychoanalytical regard of art works, she selects a line of interpretation which agrees with other theoretically driven aspects of her argument. Her Pollock becomes a fiction of her theoretically shaped transference, not a Pollock issuing from Pollock. While Krauss's misuse of psychoanalysis in "Six" could well constitute an interesting essay, I will instead concentrate on the large arbitrating concepts listed above which structure "Six."

Beyond the bald declaration of omniscient authority in its endnotes "Six" is remarkable for the oracular series of ruminations and pronouncements that are interspersed through the main body of its text. For example, Krauss announces the vertical in a terse paragraph:

The vertical is not, then, just a neutral axis, a dimension. It is a pledge, a promise, a momentum, a narrative. To stand upright is to attain to a peculiar form of vision: the optical; and to gain this vision is to sublimate, to raise up, to purify.²

Leaving aside, for the moment, the substance of this brief paragraph, its tone is

remarkable for both its grandiosity and its irony. This paragraph appears intended to persuade us through two conditions, the over arching self confidence with which it is written, and our assumed familiarity and assent to a parallel and much more developed array of literature arguing for approximately the same refutation of opticality,³ and its presumed dependence on the vertical. The aura of this literature, which of course is very great, lends to Krauss's declaration here not only a substance which otherwise it might lack, but also supports the august style of her pronouncement. Her pronouncement assumes our compliance to not just its supporting body of theory but more crucially to its projected authority: that such propositions about the vertical require no other demonstration than the received authority of preceding theory. To ask that historical evidence, which has credibility on empirical grounds, be offered in corroboration of such propositions is implicitly understood as a backwardness, as unmannerly, or as outright stupidity. Through the authority claimed by and granted to them, such theoretically based pronouncements dispense with the skeptical scrutiny which formerly greeted conclusive statements rising from novel methodologies, and they also skirt the key problem for any new method in historically grounded fields of knowledge: the methodology should be responsive to evidence in a manner which is not strongly disruptive to the character of the evidence and should provide fresh insights into the issues connected to that evidence.⁴

All methods, of course, inflect evidence and incline toward treating certain types of evidence over others. It is also obviously the case that no method will ever transparently present evidence in pristine relationships to its original historical context but recognizing these caveats is quite different from accepting or legitimizing methods, or theoretical models which absolutely ride over evidence, organize it teleologically, or misrepresent it to an ideological purpose. Those caveats also make the sustaining of art historical inquiry which values high standards in the treatment of evidence, open discussion about what the evidence might show, skeptical rigor in critical debates, and tolerance for dissent all the more pressing. Art history has not recently enjoyed anything resembling a consensus about proper methodologies and the discipline has also lacked confidence about the proper domains of inquiry. I doubt now that such consensus will ever again be possible and its desirability is questionable. However, if the oracular certainty, theoretical commitments, and the outright dismissal of other points of view so notable in "Six" become the future of art history, it will be a future far more dominated by a culture of theoretical initiatives and a culture of the ideologically committed than is its present.

Beyond all else for Krauss the drip paintings are not vertical. Rather the paintings are utterly opposed to and different from the vertical as she posits it. Yet while the vertical is the key oppositional term in "Six,"⁵ and a term

against which nearly every passage relating to Pollock is posed, Krauss offers nothing like a sustained critical discussion of the vertical. The term is introduced in a sequence of allusive and at times disjunctive paragraphs that conflate formalism, Freud, Erwin Straus's phenomenology, and Gestalt psychology with viewing paintings attached to walls; thus Krauss claims the centrality of the vertical to Greenberg's criticism;⁶ the theoretical prominence of the vertical for Freud, for Erwin Straus and Gestalt psychology.⁷ In relation to the overall ends of her argument, and particularly in relation to her claims about the basis for Pollock's making the drip paintings, the most telling theoretical articulation of the vertical is Freud's famously bold speculation in *Civilization and its Discontents*. In a footnote at the beginning of Part IV, Freud proposes that the assumption of an upright posture by early humanoids was the prime condition permitting the development of civilization:

The fateful process of civilization would have thus set in with man's adoption of an erect posture. From that point the chain of events would have proceeded through the devaluation of olfactory stimuli and the isolation of the menstrual period to the time when visual stimuli were paramount and the genitals became visible, and thence to the continuity of sexual excitation, the founding of the family and so to the threshold of human civilization.⁸

For Freud the adoption of upright posture led to the diminution of smell as the evidently dominant mode of sensory awareness, at least in sexuality. Menstruation was therefore displaced as a key agent of sexual excitation by the sight of the genitals. No less important, menstruation became a taboo in that it stood for a phase of earlier development which was now surmounted through phylogenetic development and hence an "organic repression."⁹ Also of key importance to Freud in this account is a progressive trend toward cleanliness and order that arises out of the same displacement of smell by sight.¹⁰ This trend is closely connected to a suppression of anal eroticism which succumbs to the same organic repression of smell. The consequences of this organic repression are not entirely happy for Freud:

... with the assumption of an erect posture by man and with the depreciation of his sense of smell, it was not only his anal eroticism which threatened to fall victim to organic repression, but the whole of his sexuality; so that since this, the sexual function has been accompanied by a repugnance which cannot further be accounted for, and which prevents its complete satisfaction and forces it away from the sexual aim into sublimations and libidinal displacements.¹¹

Thus beyond the inhibitions and decorum ordered by civilization to circumscribe sexuality, Freud posits a deeper and ultimately obdurate condition: An "organic repression," coextensive with the possibility of civilization itself, delimits and frustrates what for Freud is an important aspect of sexuality, anal eroticism. This hard organic conditionality is an important marker of the evolutionary strain in Freud's work.¹² Such phylogenetic emphasis also marks the great differences between Freud's thinking and the linguistic emphasis of Lacan and all in his train. At root "organic repression" is clearly a concept informed with a psychobiological core.¹³ It is a manifestation of Freud's overall emphasis on drives, somatic manifestations as symptoms and on the importance of biological models for much of his thinking.¹⁴

Krauss does not acknowledge the significance of the somatic and biological for Freud yet she wants to return to the horizontal ground of Freud's olfactory humanoids as the crucial site and condition of Pollock's work. On one side Krauss's Pollock, through a tough beat attitude, adopts a lowness and a brooding distance from anything "cultured" or "urban."¹⁵ This Pollock is juxtaposed to Greenberg's "sublimated" Pollock who is neither brutal nor regressive in his work in the drip paintings but instead possessed of measured elegance.¹⁶ Yet Krauss's Pollock is much more regressive than even the most surly beat. Her Pollock is really beyond the honored "primitives" of so much of the discourse on modern painting, he is absolutely an inhabitant of the horizontal and brutal terrain Freud alludes to in *Civilization and its Discontents*. This Pollock works with a violence which if not specifically of the primeval brutality renounced at the dawn of civilization is at least at a great symbolic removal from what stands as culture, or Modernist culture.¹⁷ Krauss wants the symbolic force of Freud's prehistorical horizontality for her Pollock while simultaneously moving that horizontality away from a phylogenetic and biological past into a theoretical present. To accomplish this difficult reversal of Freud's argument, Krauss turns not to an analysis and critique of its terms and assumptions, or to any of the vast scholarship on Freud, but to a knowing, and dismissively ironic recapitulation of Freud's speculation:

Freud had told the story years before, had he not? "Man's erect posture," he had written could in and of itself be seen "to represent the beginning of the momentous process of cultural evolution." The very move to the vertical, he reasoned, is a reorientation away from the animal senses of sniffing and pawing. Sight alone, enlarging the scope of attention, allows for a diversion of focus. Sight alone displaces the excited humanoid attention away from its partner's genitals and onto "the shape of the body as a whole." Sight alone opens the possibility of a distanced, formal pleasure to which Freud was content to give the name *beauty*; this passage from the sexual to the visual he christened *sublimation*.¹⁸

Krauss's jocular paraphrase has more than *Civilization and its Discontents* under review; she evidently also wants to conflate Freud's brief discussions of beauty with Greenberg's notion of quality¹⁹ thereby making quality conditional to sublimation and Freud's notion of beauty similar to quality. For Freud, however, beauty as it is treated in *Civilization and its Discontents* is not "a formal pleasure" but arises from a sublimation of sexual feeling:

Psychoanalysis, unfortunately, has scarcely anything to say about beauty either. All that seems certain is its derivation from the field of sexual feeling. The lure of beauty seems a perfect example of an impulse inhibited by its aim. 'Beauty' and attraction are originally attributes of the sexual object. It is work remarking that the genitals themselves, the sight of which is always exciting, are nevertheless hardly ever judged to be beautiful; the quality of beauty seems, instead, to attach to certain secondary sexual characters.²⁰

Beauty, Freud states unequivocally, derives from sexual feeling and it is fundamentally associated with the secondary sexual aspects of the sexual object. Beauty, therefore, is anything but disinterested and neutral. Yet while beauty at the deepest level is descended from sexual feeling, Freud includes in his use of the term examples which are at some remove from the sexual instinct *per se*:

... we welcome it as a sign of civilization as well if we see people directing their care too to what has no practical value whatever, to what is useless—if, for instance, the green spaces necessary in a town as playgrounds and as reservoirs of fresh air are also laid out with flower beds, or if the windows of the houses are decorated with pots of flowers. We soon observe that this useless thing which we expect civilization to value is beauty.²¹

For Freud beauty even in these examples could be understood as an example of "an impulse inhibited by its aim."²² In short, the *Heimlichkeit* of those examples would scarcely stop Freud from analytical interpretation but their simple homeliness is at antipodes to Greenberg's notion of quality just as is Freud's sexual derivation of beauty.²³ For Greenberg as Donald Kuspit argues the notion of quality arises directly from the experience of the art work unsupported by any factors extraneous to the way the art work looks. Quality is entirely independent of the personal or ideological grounds from which the work might have arisen or to which it might refer.²⁴ Quality for Greenberg is entirely independent of psychological or unconscious factors which are at the root of Freud's remarks on beauty and of Freud's thoughts on the palliative role of art.

While Krauss's attempt to conflate Greenberg with Freud involves incompatible views on beauty and quality, her attempt to link Freud's view on vertical posture to Erwin Straus's phenomenology depends on an outright misrepresentation of Straus. It also involves some complications for her attempt to make the drip paintings the brutal norm of what she calls horizontality. Krauss paraphrases Straus's essay, "Born to See, Bound to Behold: Reflections on the Function of Upright Posture in the Aesthetic Attitude," by stating:

The animal can see, the psychologists wrote, but only man can "behold." Its connectedness to the ground always ties the animal's seeing to touching, its vision predicated on the horizontal, on the physical intersection of viewer and viewed. Man's upright posture, they argued, brings with it the possibility of distance, contemplation, of domination.²⁵

Krauss is attempting to combine Straus's argument with a generalized gestalt position on vision, hence the "they."²⁶ However, while Straus was certainly knowledgeable of Gestalt psychology, the thrust of his argument in "Born to See . . ." is thoroughly phenomenological. Krauss's paraphrase is adopted from Part I where Straus distinguishes between animal vision and human vision.²⁷ While Krauss's paraphrase might seem faithful to Straus, she in fact introduces two terms, "sight alone" and "domination" which are not used by Straus. Not only are the terms inserted by Krauss, they are utterly different from the texture and purpose of Straus's nuanced, reflective argument. Straus intends to distinguish the basis of aesthetic vision from both an absolute vision and from vision as emotionally fraught grasping.²⁸ He is also intent on distinguishing aesthetic vision from the practical command of everyday space:

In this attitude of composure we reach the visible and yet leave it as it is. Distance is the condition for seeing the other as other in his uniqueness. We comprehend things without prehending them. We apprehend them in their suchness, in their place, their mutual demarcation, simultaneously and successively ordered within the horizon as a whole. The distant does not set off a region which might be approached and reached in the future. The distant opens itself to our gaze in contemplative regard, not in aggressive action; it opens itself in our looking over there, not in going over there.²⁹

"Sight alone" can in no way be squared with the phenomenological concerns evident in phrases such as, "we reach the visible and yet leave it as it is." This 'reaching' in vision to the visible and yet not altering it speaks to the basic phenomenological concepts of embodiment, and to vision in which a caring

regard for everything in its otherness leaves it in its self-presencing.³⁰ As I will sketch below, "sight alone" is also utterly antithetical to Straus's psychiatric thinking which is also enfolded by a phenomenological understanding of embodiment. "Domination" likewise is foreign to the texture of Straus's discussion. Even a cursory reading of "Born to See, Born to Behold" cannot mistake its exalted tone as a call for some kind of 'domination.' Rather, the passage I quote articulates the phenomenological grounding and concerns of the essay, that Straus views aesthetic vision as part of the responsibility of humans for others in the world.³¹ In the norming terms of Heidegger, Krauss is attempting to make Straus a proponent of *Vorstellung*, of the setting out in measured objectivity of an object for scientific or technological control.³² Straus, however, in no place in his work advocates such an understanding of vision as technological, analytical, and objectifying, rather he stresses an engaged caring in vision. In the essay in question he is concerned to distinguish aesthetic vision from any involvement with the mastering or manipulation of that which is,³³ from any laying hold of, and from any practical control. More pointedly, Krauss's use of "domination" is antithetical to Straus's sense of 'composure' and 'seeing at a distance' which show that aesthetic vision rises from a letting be of what is,³⁴ from a patient openness to that which comes into presence. The attitude given in Straus's understanding of 'composure' belongs rather to the phenomenological concern of vision imbedded in ontological attunement to the world.³⁵

Straus's presentation of vision as a concerned relatedness to the world clearly bears no relationship to vision in *Civilization and its Discontents*. In other essays, Straus specifically attacks important Freudian concepts that shape the understanding of vision in his famous speculation.³⁶ In Straus's view the fundamental interrelationships of mind which Freud articulates, the energetic relations of ego, id, and superego, are mechanistic and repeat the Cartesian mind-body dualism albeit with the *res cogitans* now supplanted as prime agent by the unconscious.³⁷ Thus the role of consciousness, in Straus's view, is devalued and constitutes merely part of "an apparatus" erected in place of "an experiencing being."³⁸ Straus is no less doubting of Freud's famous phylogenetic speculation about upright posture which he dismisses as inventing prehistory,³⁹ and when these criticisms are coupled with Straus's discussion of shame, it is manifest that not only is the role of vision in Straus's phenomenological psychology scarcely relatable to Freud but that Straus's entire psychological project is opposed to Freud in its aims and concerns.⁴⁰

Krauss's objective in attempting such an unlikely linkage between incompatible bodies of thought and in misrepresenting Straus is more than the erection of a straw man. The purpose behind such baldly false terms as "sight alone" and "domination" is to place Straus in the tradition of vision as a means of technological mastery and control, under the assumption that her readers

will never consult Straus. In linking this false Straus to Freud, she hopes apparently to conjoin Freud's speculation with a misrepresentation of Straus. Both thinkers are thus dismissed by misrepresentation and outright fabrication with Straus, and by scarcely veiled ridicule with Freud.

Some phenomenological skepticism is obviously useful in the face of Krauss's thinking. It is no less useful in considering Pollock's paintings. He did after all paint the drip paintings while standing, bending over, squatting, or moving. We know that the plane of his vision was generally parallel to the canvas as he worked. He did not lie down, or look away or strive for a disorienting posture, or otherwise attempt to disrupt his visual addressing of the canvas. The key differences between his working method on the drip paintings and his earlier work were not so much the lying flat of the canvas *per se*, but the weaving of his movement over it and the falls of paint from implements which did not usually touch the canvas. The variety of movements, from walking as he ribboned out paint, to bending over in order to make a heavier splatter, to flicking a spray with his arm and wrist, to squatting to negotiate a delicate loop, all these movements linked his arms, trunk, and legs in stretching, swinging, and twisting. In the continuity of his movements as he worked and in the degree to which his arms, torso, and legs were engaged, Pollock's drip process stands within Straus's analysis of human movement and spatiality.⁴¹ Indeed, the Pollock of the drip paintings is the ideal representative among painters.

For example, in "The Forms of Spatiality," Straus writes about the engagement of space through dance movements and especially through movements that engage a person's trunk, or torso and pulls on or twists it out of mere standing or walking.⁴² Such movements, which we know were involved in Pollock's 'drip' process, and documented by Hans Namuth's still photographs and films, shift the "I" in Straus's terms from a "gnostic" attitude to "pathic."⁴³ For Straus this distinction is between an analytic consciousness that operates on the basis of specific distinctions and discrete particulars (i.e., "gnostic") and "the pathic" in which one is enfolded into the immediately given and sensorially manifold presence of things and persons as they cohere to the full field that one primordially perceives.⁴⁴ Movement then which involves bending, twisting, reaching, stretching, etc., displaces the "I" from the region of eyes to the trunk and one no longer addresses particular objects in the world as at a distance and separated but instead comes into an embodied relatedness which is then comprehension or observation and other also from willing and acting through specifically willed intent.⁴⁵ It is a relatedness which is built from bodily attunement with the world and a mood of felt engagedness.⁴⁶

Pollock's well-known remarks à propos of the 'drip' paintings are suggestive of a "pathic" attitude:

... On the floor I am more at ease. I feel nearer, more part of the painting, since this way I can walk around it, work from the four sides and literally be in the painting. This akin to the method of the Indian sand painters of the west.

... When I am *in* my painting, I'm not aware of what I'm doing. It is only after a sort of "get acquainted" period that I see what I have been about. I have no fears about making changes, destroying the image, etc., because the painting has a life of its own. I try to let it come through. It is only when I lose contact with the painting that the result is a mess. Otherwise, there is pure harmony, an easy give and take, and the painting comes out well.⁴⁷

The first hand accounts of Hans Namuth and of Robert Goodnough both emphasize Pollock's immersion in his painting and the dance-like character of his movements around and over his canvas. Pepe Karmel carefully considers both accounts in his discussion of Pollock's process. For example, he cites Namuth, "His movements, slow at first, gradually become faster and more dance-like as he flung black, white, and rust-colored paint out, the canvas ..."⁴⁸ This statement may be compared to Goodnough's, "... starting automatically, almost as a ritual dance might begin, the graceful rhythms of his movements seem to determine to a large extent the way the paint is applied, but ... he is working toward something objective, something which in the end may exist independently of himself."⁴⁹ In Goodnough's statement an important distinction is made between Pollock's gestural painting and pure automatism, Pollock works "toward something objective, something which in the end may exist independently of himself." The dance-like movements do not lead to something merely arbitrary, or abstract in some pure disembodied sense. Rather, Pollock's painting gestures are connected to "deeper and more involved emotions"⁵⁰ which evidently Pollock believed carried their force to the painting as it evolved through each gesture and each fall of paint.⁵¹ Pollock insisted to Goodnough that his painting "does not depend on reference to any object or tactile surface, but 'exists on its own'."⁵² This self-sufficiency can be related to the drips, runs, and flows of paint, which while shaped and distributed by Pollock's movements, break entirely from the ordinary sense of dramatic, cut edges typical of expressionistic brush work. Instead, the paint falls in the drip paintings lacking inscription at their edges, the laying out of paint, its exact shape on the canvas is finally a product of gravity's intersection with its fall, its viscosity and the drying properties of each color. The edges of the paint fall are properly outside of Pollock's control, he can only start and direct the fall of paint but not inscribe the edge. In these unscripted edges the drip paintings take on a self-created aspect which is like some natural surfaces marked by water, glaciation or lichen and in that aspect they are significantly different

from other paintings. This self-sufficiency also strengthens their kinesthetic quality. Coupled with the evident physical display of movement in the splatters, sprays, drips, and flows of paint it is embedded in and appears to arise out of illusory spaces remarkably unlike those in earlier abstract painting. Notably in the large scale paintings those spaces are without the limits and architectonic parameters imposed by format which characterized earlier twentieth-century abstraction. The illusory spaces in the large paintings also possess a complexity which sets them apart from the virtual spaces in other abstractions and, like the lack of inscribed edges in the paint falls, gives Pollock's spaces a self-created quality. The spaces seem to be more the product of growth intersecting with other forces—like light dancing in a sage flat—than the controlled product of human making. In this independence they are close to Straus's remarks on the transformation of lived space in dancing:

Dance space is not a part of directed, historical space but is a symbolic region of the world. It is determined not by distance, direction, and magnitude but through "wide openness," loftiness, profundity, and autokinesis of space.⁵³

The complex depths, protrusions, and expanses of space in the drip paintings, are of spatial order radically other than the rather shallow, limited and focused spaces typical of earlier twentieth-century abstraction. The spatiality of the drip paintings not only is connected to Pollock's "pathic" practice but also displaces, following Straus, what might be called the "gnostic" viewing habits invited by earlier abstraction. The drip paintings, particularly when large, more engulf the beholder than set up aesthetic conditions. They present their beholders with an unstable spatial array that is without clear coordinates or anything like explicit structure. As Pollock said, the drip paintings "do not have a center, but depend on the same amount of interest throughout."⁵⁴ The "interest" that Pollock refers to does not merely engage the beholder neutrally and optically as Greenberg and others have argued, but kinesthetically and pathically. Particularly with the larger paintings, the spatiality of the painting can be uprooting, one can feel as though lifted off one's feet, carried off from oneself and into the spatial array of the painting.⁵⁵ This disorientation, which is also tied to the sheer accident of the paint falls, can make one feel as though the painting is closer in character to a lava-splattered wall of blond sandstone than to abstract painting. That is, there is a quality of givenness, of natural marking in the drip paintings that is different from the insistence on human fabrication so typically at issue in earlier twentieth-century abstraction. In the drip paintings both the "pathic" quality and the autokinesis of the spaces withdraw the painting from evident manufacture of other abstraction as it also withdraws them from the strident inscription typical of most expressionist

facture. Rather, Pollock sets up a self-created quality in the paint falls and in the accidents of their drying which, while perhaps less various than markings left by lava, glaciation, mineralization, and lichen in nature, cannot be much more easily compassed. The drip paintings in their myriad of markings and spaces cannot be mastered visually. Like nature they appear to change constantly and resist descriptive finality: they are beyond inscription.

Against Pollock's insistence upon the self-sufficiency of the drip paintings, Krauss posits that they are exemplary of two interrelated terms which play key roles in Derrida's thinking. The first of these is *différance* and the temporal disjunction inherent in *différance* which for Krauss splits the self-presence of Pollock away from his painted marks thus fissuring what she calls "the event" of the making of the drip paintings.⁵⁶ The second is the arche-trace and what for Krauss is the interpretive fit between that term and what she asserts is the indexicality of Pollock's dripped marks.⁵⁷ Krauss introduces indexicality and prepares the way for her citations of Derrida through the notably peculiar device of treating the question of why Pollock stopped making the drip paintings as though this question arose from a crime which created a mystery.⁵⁸ That supposed crime and its mystery is solved for Krauss by a clue found in the work of another painter, Cy Twombly, ca. 1955-56.⁵⁹ For Krauss the clue is the indexicality and specifically the graffiti-like indexicality of Twombly's work.⁶⁰ That indexicality points directly toward Derrida's term the trace and, therefore, also toward *différance*.⁶¹ The problem with Krauss's mystery and solution is that it depends on a series of metaphorical displacements and specious inferences which she either makes or invites the reader to make: Pollock stops making drip paintings. This is a mystery; as a mystery it implies a crime; crimes yield clues. The clue here is that Twombly's work is indexical like graffiti. Therefore, Twombly is like a graffitist. Because Twombly's indexicality is the clue that resolves the drip mystery, the drips are also indexical and so Pollock too is like a graffitist,⁶² and hence he also works with an awareness like a graffitist hurriedly making a wall:

... he strikes in a tense that is over; entering the scene as a criminal, he understands that the mark he makes can only take the form of a clue. He delivers his mark over to a future that will be carried on without his presence, and in so doing his mark cuts his presence away from himself, dividing it within into a before and an after.⁶³

Krauss needs to metaphorically displace Pollock to Twombly to graffitist to make the drip paintings a species of inscription which rends the self-presence of its inscriber in a manner parallel to Derrida's critique of metaphysical self-presence through *différance*.

Of course, the temporality of Pollock's drip process in no way re-

sembles the temporality Krauss ascribes to graffiti. Pollock did not work in a single, rushed foray toward violating a public space. Nor was he self-consciously looking over his shoulder, so to speak. Rather his working process involved repeated sessions of painting which lasted an hour or more and which were separated by days or even weeks of considering the painting,⁶⁴ his well-known "get acquainted" period.⁶⁵ Pollock's process was also notable, as discussed above, by his deep psychological inhabitation within it and, what following Erwin Straus, I refer to as its "pathic" character.⁶⁶ Pollock's statements obviously emphasize that "pathic" character and also emphasize that a loss of that deep inhabitation meant ruining the painting: "It is only when I lose contact with the painting that the result is a mess. Otherwise there is pure harmony, an easy give and take, and the painting comes out well."⁶⁷ The temporality indicated in "an easy give and take" and the psychological sense in "pure harmony" simply cannot be related to Krauss's metaphorical displacement of Pollock to graffitiist. One either abides by the temporality that Pollock's statements indicate about his process and accepts the confirmation of that temporality in the accounts of Namuth and Goodnough or, as Krauss does, one substitutes a fiction contrived to suit one's claims. In short, Krauss's compression of Pollock's process to a single furtive act, as it were, and her substitutions of the state of mind of a petty criminal for Pollock's, again as it were, are inventions, obvious in their reach toward *différance*.

While Krauss avoids a difficult argument with these subterfuges one might still legitimately raise the question of how *différance*, as temporalizing deferral, might intersect critically with the temporality of the drip process and with what might be deciphered of Pollock's presence to himself within the process. Through *différance* Derrida contends that presence or full presence can never come into being.⁶⁸ The presence of the signifying element, or the presence of self-presence is subject inevitably to delay and deferral.⁶⁹ It is always marked by a past which it must carry forward in order to signify and it is partially voided by a future to which it also must subscribe.⁷⁰ In particular, Derrida through *différance* as deferral targets the metaphysics of presence as founded on time understood as immutable and eternal and as an orientation toward Being understood as suffused with such eternality.⁷¹ He further holds the position that this metaphysically enduring conception of time not only shapes Western metaphysics but formally determines philosophic discourse in our era. As M. C. Dillon argues, what Derrida overlooks is that there are powerful contemporary alternatives to such Eleatic time.⁷² Of particular relevance for Pollock is the alternative Dillon advances:

...the phenomenology of time, in articulating the primacy of becoming in terms of the irreducibility of perceptual unfolding, provides a conceptual matrix far more adequate to temporalization

than a schema that would locate its non-origin in a noumenal or self-erasing trace that necessarily generates impossible articulations and conceives perception in terms of a deferred/transformed inscription of a trace that was never present. The reduction of the perceptual world to a text forever relegates the question of the origin and referent of that text to darkness.⁷³

For many painters, at least those who work in terms of some kind of responsiveness to perception and to the placing of individual marks of paint, time has an elasticity shaped by the painting process. Responsiveness to perception is an aspect to many different ways of working, both abstract and otherwise. It was an important concern for many modernist painters and certainly for Pollock. The key and linking quality for modernist practice was inhabitation by the painter in perceptions arising from or driving the making of the painting and an openness to where they might lead. Those perceptions could be external sensations or emotions crossed with sensation or internal feelings, in any case the crucial concern for this strain of modernist practice was to give one's self over to them. Embedded fully in such responsiveness time can slow, or telescope hours into seeming moments, or feel as though it ceases and disappears. Temporality does not contain process, or measure it, or mark it out differentially, but instead coalesces with process. Pollock's statement, "When I am in my painting, I'm not aware of what I'm doing. It is only after a sort of 'get acquainted' period that I see what I have been about,"⁷⁴ carries both a sense of this inhabitation and a sense of the disappearance of time in the process. It also places Pollock at great removal from the brittle self-consciousness suggested in Krauss's displacement of Pollock to graffitiist: "This even at the time the marker strikes, he strikes in a tense that is over, entering the scene as a criminal, he understands that the mark he makes can only take the form of a clue."⁷⁵

Had Pollock painted with such furtive assertion, he also would not have needed a "get acquainted" period to consider his work. The need of seeing what he was about would have never arisen. The "get acquainted" period raises another serious difficulty with attempting to treat the drip paintings as a species of *différance* severing the maker from the process. A proper term for the character of that period is probably circumspection, or circumspectual.⁷⁶ Once he reached a significant pause in the making of a painting, and needed some distance to grasp what he had done, Pollock generally removed a painting from off the ground and hung it on a wall in his barn studio. There he could both better see the whole painting and could live with it for a while, consider how it stood up, reflect on what it might suggest in terms of development. This getting acquainted with the painting would apparently involve a growing familiarity and an openness to what the painting was show-

ing. It would also evidently involve other less conscious awareness of the painting. Both states of mind can lead to an imagining of how to treat the painting. The practical and the responsive deepening of familiarity with a painting cannot easily be aligned with the fracturing of self-presence in *différance*, to *différance*'s aim at a self oriented unconditionally toward Being.⁷⁷ After all, we are speaking here of living with a developing painting as Pollock did in his "get acquainted" period, or of time away from directly working on a painting in general. These pauses really contain no metaphysical overtones. Painters get tired. They cannot see a painting clearly, they lose emotional contact, they get hungry, or simply need to get away. None of this is so very different from the pauses which overtake other tasks both challenging and unchallenging. In fact many different practices, like gardening or training a dog, require getting acquainted periods and are also marked by give and take, and by getting away from the task.

None of this is metaphysical in the least and the breaks are as likely to be imposed by simple bodily needs as by anything else. Indeed we know from Namuth and Goodnough that fatigue played some role in Pollock's pauses as it certainly does with other painters. It is difficult to tie fatigue, or even losing emotional contact with a painting with the withholding of presence through deferral of the trace, through the ceaseless demarcations of *différance* which postpone self-presence, or presence of any sort. The physical energy to paint, or the lack of it is evidently not within a metaphysical circle interrupted by *différance*. *Différance* as temporalizing deferral no better fits with a get acquainted period than it does with "being in my painting." Indeed to treat something like fatigue as an effect of *différance* would be to broaden *différance* absurdly and make it into a 'catchall' term—or more ominously to make it into a totalizing term. Forced onto the specifics of Pollock's process *différance* starts to appear as both vastly general and as potentially totalizing.

Krauss is frankly undaunted by this prospect and as we will see in the last paragraphs of this essay she uses Derrida's terms in just such a sense. Indeed, she turns to the arche-trace and *différance* without the least attempt to qualify or limit either term. In a manner typical of the ellipses and leaps of "Six," she immediately follows the passages displacing Pollock to Twombly to graffitist with her insertion of Derrida into her argument:

When Derrida would come to analyze this condition—the pure form of the imprint—to which he would give the name arche-trace, he would invent the term *différance* to account for the temporal disjunction fissuring this event. He would say of this form, "It is not the question of a constituted difference here, but rather, before all determination of the content, of the *pure* movement which produces difference. *The (pure) trace is différence.* It does not

depend on any sensible, audible or visible, phonic or graphic. It is, on the contrary, the condition of such plenitude."⁷⁸

Having juxtaposed Pollock as graffitist to arche-trace and *différance*, Krauss turns to the predication of violence in *différance* and to brief citations of a few passages tied to *différance* in this sense in *Of Grammatology*.⁷⁹ Rather than follow her down that path, I think it more critically germane to consider the drip paintings in relationship to the arch-trace or better the trace which bears of course on the suitability of *différance* to them in a sense other than deferral. I write trace because properly speaking the arche-trace cannot be tied to a specific conditionality, the "this" of Krauss's account.⁸⁰ Rather it is a term which indicates the necessary possibility or inscription in general, not some special example, as with graffiti.⁸¹ This points to a deep problem in Krauss's use of Derrida's terms in "Six." By metaphorically claiming Pollock's drip paintings as graffiti and then treating graffiti as though a prime example of *différance* without making a close analogic argument for this claim, she places *différance* and arche-trace in a metaphoric relationship to the drip paintings.⁸² While this saves her from a complex argument, it, of course, misrepresents the critical intention of Derrida's terms, an issue which I will discuss at the end of this section. In any case, trace here would be a better term for Krauss's argument.

As Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak points out, "trace carries implications of track, footprint, imprint,"⁸³ and this dimension of meaning is basic to Derrida's concern with absent presence and clearly to Krauss's use of this issue. Calling Pollock's drips, flung paint, and splatter imprints, however, scarcely proves that they are, either in a Derridean sense or in a conventional sense. While virtually all painted marks can be called indexical in the sense that as deposited marks of paint they bear resemblance to a common example of the index mentioned above, the track as in a dragged stick say, in that the implement of their making is registered in its deposit. The brush, for instance, is registered to some degree in the paint as deposited, although that register is disguised or inflected by the viscosity of the paint, the trajectory, the speed, the pressure on the brush, the nature of the bristle, and its degree of wear. Given those disguising conditions the painted mark seldom approaches another common example of the index in clarity, the footprint. More important, in almost all cases, the painted mark's reference is more complex than its link to the implement which made it, that is, its range of meaning and its referents extend beyond what is usually ascribed to indexes. In general, the class of signs called indexes refers to those signs where there seem to be a direct link between the sign and its referent and where that referent, the brush in the example being pursued, is primary in interpreting the sign. Only under almost absurdly limited conditions can this be said of painting and in Pollock's case it leads toward the 'know nothing' view of Pollock as merely dripping paint.

In no small part Derrida is concerned with setting up a proximity to arche-writing through the trace⁸⁴ as imprint and in making of Pollock a kind of graffitist Krauss is also using imprint to suggest inscription. The problem is that Pollock's drips, even less than brush marks, fail to conform to any proper sense of imprint, or inscription. Pollock's 'drips' are not impressed into the canvas. They are not set onto the canvas with pressure or with a vertical and downward aimed stamp, nor are they in any proper sense a kind of 'writing' echoing, a prior lexigraph of signs. The drips, spots, splatters, and flows of paint in no sense display the mechanical or hand focused pressure of printing or the coded demarcations of shape and of interval proper to inscription. Most of Pollock's 'drip' paintings also involve a scope of gesture, and a scale utterly different from that implied by inscription or imprinting. They are also constituted of dispersals and overlays of the flows, and sprays, and splatters of paint which utterly violate the ruled orderliness implicit in the term inscription and which run beyond the boundaries implicit in the term imprint. The circumscribed particulateness of the impressed or inscribed mark basic to imprinting or inscription is in no sense at work in Pollock's drips, sprays, splatters, and flows. Stretching the term imprint to cover Pollock's drip painting broadens the meaning of imprint to cover nearly any mark whatsoever and it points at an unremitting danger in *différance*, that the term is prone to expand toward referring to everything in which some kind of marking or "spacing" is at work.⁸⁵

So distended, and looming over virtually any practice, *différance* on one hand borders on banality and on the other starts to function very much like a metaphysical principle. Derrida, of course, is quite aware of this problem and in the argument in *Of Grammatology* from which Krauss pulled the citation above he attempts to carefully circumscribe what he identifies as a transcendental quality in his terms.⁸⁶ In her use of arche-trace and *différance* Krauss does precisely the opposite. For her arche-trace is very close to the formalist sense of 'form.' "The pure form of the imprint," for example, in Krauss's use is a prime and initiating condition which gives rise to the term arche-trace.⁸⁷ Arche-trace is for her synonymous with the "imprint" in its "pure form" and her use of these terms in the passage cited above is almost Platonic.⁸⁸ Thus, the arche-trace in her treatment is the ideal template for all further instances of the "imprint." Equally notable in her formulation is her conjoining "pure" with "form" which not only essentializes "form" but makes it, whether Derrida would approve or not, into something overtly idealistic. Derrida, in the paragraphs which underlie Krauss's language certainly does not join "pure" with "form." Instead, he is concerned with laying out the basic conditions both conceptually and operationally, of articulation, whether in phonic form or in writing. In this argument he is at particular pain to delimit and specify the interrelationship of non-presentation and presentation through the trace. The tension between non-presence and presence, for Derrida, can neither be reduced to transcen-

dental qualities nor be broken off entirely from them.⁸⁹ In terms of the practice of articulation this means that the originary trace, or the arche-trace is never actually present in any articulation. Rather it, as *différance*, sets up the conditions for the possibility of articulation, it permits graphic and phonic articulation. The arche-trace, therefore, is without essence or necessary form, it is neither a merely intelligible term nor a sensory term. Indeed it does not exist in itself but moves through a series of nominations, from arche-trace to (pure) trace to *différance*.⁹⁰ In joining "pure" with "form" and thus transforming Derrida's terms into immanent ideas Krauss arrests the transitive nominations necessary to Derrida's thought and instead she reforms his language to a metaphysical concept: "the pure form of the imprint."

Krauss's metaphysical brokering of Derrida, in short, is already implicit in her assertion that arche-trace, *différance*, and imprint exist as distinct conceptual entities for Derrida. Krauss's assertion, of course, is false. As Spivak points out, or as is a commonplace in the literature on Derrida, he does not invest his thinking in conceptual "master terms," nor does he persist in using a term univocally throughout a text or even for very long in a precisely delimited role.⁹¹ In the paragraphs in *Of Grammatology* under discussion here, arche-trace becomes (pure) trace, "(pure) trace is *différance*," and *différance* elides back to origin.⁹² All these terms, or others in the discourse, bear on the issues Derrida ties to the originary trace and the structure necessary for differentiation, and none of them are exclusive and executive in their function.⁹³ No single term therefore emerges as a principle in the discovery or discussion of these issues.⁹⁴ Krauss's isolation of arche-trace, imprint, *différance*, points to an urgency to make Derrida into a systematically formal thinker, at least in so far as these terms might bear on Pollock. Her isolation of these terms also indicates that her understanding of Pollock requires an absolutist basis conferred by metaphysically endowed language, where her "arche-trace" or "pure form of the imprint" is the basis for Pollock's essential resemblance to Twombly to graffitist, for Pollock's drip paintings being in an essential sense graffiti.

Such idealist and formal foundations for Krauss's thinking are obvious in one final theoretical locale she proposes, verticality vs. horizontality.⁹⁵ Verticality, ironically descending as we have seen from Freud and Straus, is opposed by a root horizontality, a plane beneath all culture, a plane for an undifferentiated unconscious, descending in part from Bataille's *bassesse*,⁹⁶ and in part from Freud's olfactory prehistory. Krauss's Pollock as graffitist is said to act within this domain, and under its spell:

At some point it became clear that that figure [the figure of an undifferentiated unconscious, of the unconscious in its potentiality] could only be approached through *bassesse*, through lowering,

through going beneath the figure into the terrain of formlessness. And it became clear that the act of lowering could, itself, only register the vehicle of a trace or index, through, that is, the stain that would fissure the event from within into an act of aggression and mark, or residue, or clue.⁹⁷

Beyond the portentous tone of this paragraph, the zone of activity realized through "lowering" has a metaphysical potency which is nearly magical for Krauss. Thus the undifferentiated unconscious, the "figure" of the unconscious can only "be approached" through "lowering," through "going *beneath* the figure into the terrain of formlessness."⁹⁸ The act of lowering has no other way of manifesting itself than through "the vehicle of a trace or index" which is properly "the stain" which fissures the event of its making violently from within.⁹⁹ The ruffling of *différance*, the little violences of its demarcations and its reiterative skepticism are apparently for Krauss like incantations making for a splitting of oneself toward arrival in a magical underworld. Her Pollock is an Odysseus in a Hades where no shades appear only the stain of his sacrificial trench which alone announces to him that he is in Hades even as the intention of its making is lost to him. Krauss's Pollock is properly a figure of myth but her construal of Derrida is, of course, not a myth that Pollock himself would have understood, unlike the mythic material of Jung or Freud which was clearly meaningful to him.¹⁰⁰

The metaphysical power of verticality/horizontality for Krauss is clear also in the inverted hierarchy she attaches to it. That inverted hierarchy implies a reverse eschatology where to be low and supposedly amongst the fallen is really to be with the elect and where to be upright or elevated is to be condemned. She sets up a comparison between Siqueiros and Pollock which is based on just such a moralistic opposition:

Like everything Siqueiros had been producing, *She Wolf* operated the "stencil" to achieve an image. But it carried nonetheless these vague, original associations with the ground, which had been encoded into Siqueiros' process. And everything else Siqueiros had thought he was encoding: good riddance to bourgeois culture, death to easel painting, out to pasture with "stick with hairs on its end," etc. Nothing that Siqueiros had managed had gone below "culture," of course, since he had continued to produce the image.¹⁰¹

Krauss's approval of the "below 'culture'" versus her disapproval of "culture" with all its 'bourgeois' implications scarcely addresses Pollock's own stress filled ambivalence toward 'breaking the ice.'¹⁰² It also echoes the hackneyed pairs of opposites that can make the reading of art criticism so tedious and so predictable: avant-garde vs. kitsch; radical vs. conservative; cutting-

edge vs. academic; abstract vs. figurative; "below `culture'" vs. culture. In her advocacy of "below culture," Krauss courts a nihilism which is all too fashionable. It is also tied to a strangely naive misreading of Freud and his followers which makes the eruption of repressed material in undifferentiated and infantile form the valorized, substantive alternative to the presumably worn artifice of culture. Krauss's lack of calculation of the costs of the return of the repressed either for Pollock or in a broader cultural sense is certainly counter to Freud's psychology or his probing and pessimistic mediations in *Civilization and its Discontents*. Instead, she traffics at a safe distance in the contemporary fashion for a Real and this distance is intrinsic to the metaphysical spatiality of her founding formal opposition, verticality vs. horizontality. That metaphysical spatiality is the final guarantor of her thrown, rent Pollock:

But what was lower than both the pictorial image *and* the cultural plane of writing was, it could be seen, the floor, the ground, the beneathness of the truly horizontal. That was lower. That was out of the field of vision and out of the cultural surface of writing onto the plane that was manifestly below both, below the body.¹⁰³

Krauss's concept of "the truly horizontal" not only inverts a longstanding metaphysical hierarchy, in its opposition to the acculturated planes of viewing and writing, it is clearly a subspecies of the nature/culture polarity. The deconstruction of the nature/culture polarity is of course one of Derrida's most prominent concerns in *Of Grammatology*.¹⁰⁴ Krauss's employment of such an obvious variant of it in "Six" underscores how Derridean terms like *différance*, trace, and arche-trace are stripped of their critical movement and allied with a metaphysically based formalism. In its invocation of the nature vs. culture polarity, Krauss's "truly horizontal" vs. verticality ultimately rests, like nature vs. culture, on the most basic of metaphysical oppositions, matter vs. form. Its only significant difference from these categories is its efficiency. Her Pollock as graffitist somehow escapes the acculturated boundaries of graffiti (or painting), or any other boundaries implied by Krauss's metaphorical displacements of him, and is 'magicked' down to "the truly horizontal." In this descent he also goes below the body which evidently must be left behind in this *nekyia*. Escaping all cultural parameters her Pollock avoids being merely an arche-writer and instead in an act of self-rending he realizes "the figure of the unconscious" in all its awful potency, a potency which depends on its undifferentiated coalescence with the unknowable power of "the truly horizontal." As we have seen, "the truly horizontal" is a hypostatized realm in this myth which is analogous in its potency to Hell. It is also in binary and symmetrical opposition in Krauss's account to the repudiated paradise of the vertical. Krauss's "Six" and her understanding of Pollock depend

not only on the inversion of the metaphysical oppositions of nature vs. culture and form vs. matter, but also on the theology of high and low, of heaven and hell. The metaphysical quality that Krauss imputes to arche-trace, imprint, and *différance* are one with the theology of vertical/horizontal. Krauss does not simply misrepresent Derrida, she uses his terms cosmetically to disguise the formal and ultimately metaphysical basis of her essay which is rather more 'essentialist' in character than any of Greenberg's writing on Pollock.¹⁰⁵ "Six" not only traffics in the vast, sweeping conceptualizations which make much theoretically determined art history problematical, it is based on an inverted metaphysics where low has vanquished high.

Language of metaphysical sweep taints other recent theoretically motivated art history where the unruly complexity of images is forced to submit to superordinate principles.¹⁰⁶ Metaphysics also underlies the historicist narratives of Marxist art history.¹⁰⁷ Certainly, a more open and subtly critical methodological attitude is asked to address the complexities of an image, its intention, and its uses. The interpretation of Pollock's drip paintings, particularly discussion of the arrest of the liquidity of the paint and the kinetic implications arising from that arrest, would be enhanced by a piece of phenomenologically informed historical criticism. Karmel's fine discussion of Pollock's process would provide a foundation for this project which should also involve a critical reading of the existing descriptive criticism of the drip paintings with special attention as to critical voice and premise. While Krauss's misrepresentations of Derrida should prove cautionary to other argonauts wishing to rebuild art history through Derridean concepts, they likely will not. Derrida's unremitting skepticism, which is perhaps the most salient characteristic of his thought, seems to go unnoticed by his unwanted, would-be acolytes in art history. Just as Derrida turned that skepticism upon the phenomenology of Husserl, Heidegger, Levinas, and on other philosophical texts, it is also appropriate to turn a tolerant, but critical skepticism on Derrida's work and especially on art history and art criticism which claims to be informed by Derrida. The basic spatial categories of art, virtuality for painting, real metaphorical displacement for sculpture, and socially constructed space for architecture, all invite phenomenological analysis in relationship to actual works even as those spatial categories raise obvious challenges to the utility of Derridean terms.¹⁰⁸ Such analysis should also be informed by and measured against credible, historical reconstruction of the intentions and uses of those works. Any attempt at theoretically ordained interpretation which endeavors to remove art work from the contexts of its manufacture and use in its given historical circumstance and to construe evidence to ideological purpose must be rebutted. In art criticism, the unexamined historicism framing much art criticism obviously needs dismantling. When Derrida is invoked, however, it is not for the needed vetting of the metaphysics underlying historicist narratives nor is it for the

deconstruction of the binary oppositions which pass for thinking in much art criticism. Rather, appropriated Derridean terms are harnessed to promotional purpose. The actual matters of judgment, both aesthetic and ethical, that confront contemporary criticism are lost in the reiterative endorsement of one or another post-modern trope.

Derrida's remarks on his plays with his terms should be remembered by any art historian or critic who attempts to borrow on the seeming authority of those terms:

What I do with words is make them explode so that the nonverbal appears in the verbal. That is to say that I make the words function in such a way that at a certain moment they no longer belong to discourse, to what regulates discourse – hence the homonyms, the fragmented words, the proper names that do not essentially belong to language. By treating words as proper names, one disrupts the usual order of discourse, the authority of discursivity.¹⁰⁹

The volatility of Derrida's terms, coupled with the interplays of the various lines of argument and the indirections of tone within any argument, make the direct importation of key Derridean terms into art history or art criticism a fool's errand. The undressing of disguised ideology or the unmasking of metaphysical oppositions in art history or art criticism would better adopt the rigor of Derrida's procedures in *Edmond Husserl's Origin of Geometry: An Introduction*, than mimic the play of voices in *The Truth in Painting*. While Derrida's ways of questioning might be usefully focused on particular art historical or art critical assumptions, they are certainly not useful as mere models for imitation or as lexicons for repetition. As such they become a costume closet with which to festoon familiar agendas in art history and art criticism.

Notes

- 1 Rosalind Krauss, "Six," *The Optical Unconscious* (Cambridge, MA and London: MIT Press, 1993), p. 322.
- 2 *Ibid.*, p. 246. Beyond such oracular pronouncements Krauss adopts several other voices or tones in "Six." In this procedure she is manifestly imitating Derrida in any number of his later texts.
- 3 On the principle thinkers of the theoretical tradition which lie behind Krauss's pronouncement, see Martin Jay, *Downcast Eyes: The Denigration of Vision in Twentieth-Century French Thought* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1993). Note Jay's sections on Bataille, pp. 216-236; Lacan, pp. 329-370; Foucault, pp. 381-416; Barthes, pp. 435-459; and Derrida, pp. 443-528. Note also Jay's discussions of Heidegger whose work is central to Lacan, Foucault, and Derrida.
- 4 Probably the most influential attempts at harnessing Post-structuralist methods to

- art historical problems is the work of Norman Bryson. For some of the problems related to the treatment of art historical evidence in Bryson and for certain blind spots concerning such methods in addressing painting, see my essays: "On Mimesis and Painting," *Art Criticism*, Vol. 4, no. 3 (1988, State University of New York at Stony Brook) pp. 1-25. "On Façure, Painting and Norman Bryson," *Art Criticism*, Vol. 10, no. 2 (1995, State University of New York at Stony Brook) pp. 1-31.
- 5 The term figures implicitly throughout Krauss's discussion of Pollock. Krauss's op. cit., pp. 244-248; pp. 256-259; pp. 270-276; pp. 284-289; pp. 293-308.
 - 6 Ibid., pp. 244-248.
 - 7 Ibid., p. 247, p. 324.
 - 8 Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and its Discontents* in Standard Edition, Trans. and ed. James Strachey (London: Hogarth Press, 1961), Vol. 21, pp. 99-100.
 - 9 Ibid.
 - 10 Ibid., pp. 93-94, 96-97, 99, 100.
 - 11 Ibid., p. 100.
 - 12 On evolution and Freud see Frank J. Sulloway, *Freud, Biologist of the Mind: Beyond the Psychoanalytic Legend* (New York, NY: Basic Books, 1979). See Chapter 7, "The Darwinian Revolution's Legacy to Psychology and Psychoanalysis," pp. 239-276.
 - 13 Ibid., p. 194 and especially pp. 368-382.
 - 14 Ibid., especially Chapter 10, "Evolutionary Biology Resolves Freud's Three Psychoanalytic Problems (1905-39)," pp. 361-392.
 - 15 Krauss, op. cit., p. 244, p. 254.
 - 16 Ibid., pp. 244-245.
 - 17 Ibid., pp. 307-308.
 - 18 Ibid., pp. 246-247.
 - 19 On Greenberg and quality, see Donald Kuspit, *Clement Greenberg: Art Critic* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1979). See "Taste and the Concept of Criticism," pp. 117-152.
 - 20 Freud, op. cit., p. 83.
 - 21 Ibid., p. 92.
 - 22 Ibid., p. 83.
 - 23 Kuspit, op. cit., p. 126.
 - 24 Ibid., pp. 120-121. Of course Greenberg's reductivism is itself stringently materialistic on one side and positivist on the other. See *ibid.*, pp. 164-165.
 - 25 Krauss, op. cit., p. 247.
 - 26 See Krauss's bibliographical note, *Ibid.*, p. 324, where she indicates her sources.
 - 27 Erwin Straus, "Born to See, Bound to Behold: Reflections on the Upright Posture in the Aesthetic Attitude," in: *The Philosophy of the Body*, ed. Stuart Spicker (Chicago: Quadrangle, 1970), pp. 340-343.
 - 28 *Ibid.*, p. 342.
 - 29 *Ibid.*, pp. 342-343.
 - 30 On vision in this sense and its phenomenological background see David Michael Levin, *The Opening of Vision: Nihilism and the Postmodern Situation* (New York and London: Routledge, 1988). See "Crying for a Vision," *Gelassenheit*, pp.

233-250.

- 31 Straus, *op. cit.*, p. 343.
- 32 For perhaps Heidegger's most influential presentation of *Vorstellung* see Martin Heidegger, "The Age of the World Picture" in *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*, trans. Art Hofstadter (New York: Harper and Row, 1977). See p.119, p.150. Krauss, of course, does not cite Heidegger though he lies behind Foucault who is her most immediate source for notions like vision as the basis of domination.
- 33 Erwin Straus, trans. E. Eng, *Phenomenological Psychology* (New York: Basic Books, 1966). See "Objectivity," pp. 118-135. See also, *ibid.*, "The Upright Posture," p. 152: "While experienced distance cannot, therefore, be expressed completely in spatial terms, it never lacks a spatial element. The space to which it is related, however, is not the conceptual homogeneous space of mathematics but perceptual space, articulated with the specific corporeal organization of the experiencing person."
- 34 Straus, "Born to See," pp. 342-343.
- 35 Straus, *Phenomenological Studies*, "The Forms of Spatiality," pp. 3-37.
- 36 Straus considers Freud's speculation to be an "historical fantasy." *Ibid.*, "The Upright Posture," p. 142.
- 37 *Ibid.*, "The Sigh," pp. 249-250.
- 38 *Ibid.*, p. 250.
- 39 *Ibid.*, p. 142.
- 40 *Ibid.*, "Shame as a Historiological Problem," especially pp. 218-221. Straus criticizes psychoanalysis as solipsistic and contrasts that claim against his more social and anthropological analysis of shame.
- 41 *Ibid.*, "The Forms of Spatiality," pp. 3-37.
- 42 *Ibid.*, pp. 21-27.
- 43 *Ibid.*, pp. 16-17.
- 44 *Ibid.*, pp. 25-26.
- 45 *Ibid.*, p. 26.
- 46 *Ibid.*, p. 32.
- 47 Jackson Pollock, "My Painting," *Possibilities I* (New York) Winter 1947/48, p. 79, as excerpted in: *Theories of Contemporary Art*, ed. Herschel B. Chipp (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968), pp. 546-548.
- 48 See Pepe Karmel, "Pollock at Work: The Films and Photographs of Hans Namuth," for the most careful and complete reconstruction of both Pollock's drip process and of Namuth's role in recording it. In Kirk Varnadoe, *Jackson Pollock* (New York: MoMA and Abrams, 1998), pp. 87-137. For this quote of Namuth see his full account found in: Hans Namuth, "Photographing Pollock," in Namuth, *Pollock Painting*, ed. Barbara Rose (New York: Agrinde Publications Ltd., 1980), n.p. as cited in Varnadoe, *op. cit.*, p. 134, n. 2.
- 49 *Ibid.*, pp. 94-98, for Karmel's interesting discussion of Goodnough. For Goodnough's famous article see: Robert Goodnough, "Pollock Paints a Picture," in Frank O'Hara, *Jackson Pollock* (New York: George Braziller, Inc., 1959), pp. 38-41, pp. 60-61 as cited in: Varnadoe, *op. cit.*, p. 134, n. 20.
- 50 Goodnough, *Ibid.*, p. 60.

- 51 Ibid., p. 60.
- 52 Ibid., p. 60.
- 53 Straus, "The Forms of Spatiality," in *Phenomenological Psychology*, op. cit., p. 35. Karmel points out that there is no direct correspondence between the various painted marks and the movements one might imagine to correspond with those marks. See Karmel, in Varnadoe, op. cit., p. 124. However, my argument here is about the overall sense of space in the work, and Pollock's own involvement through moving in creating that space.
- 54 Goodnough. op. cit., p. 60.
- 55 For Straus on the disorientation of someone abruptly moved from a 'gnostic' mode to a 'pathic' mode of perception see Straus, "The Forms of Spatiality," op. cit., pp. 28-29.
- 56 Krauss, op. cit., p. 260
- 57 Ibid., p. 260.
- 58 Ibid., pp. 251-256 for Krauss's quite peculiar narrative and her attempts at justifying it.
- 59 Ibid., pp. 256-259.
- 60 Ibid., pp. 256-259.
- 61 Ibid., pp. 259-260.
- 62 Ibid., p. 259.
- 63 Ibid., pp. 259-260.
- 64 Karmel, in Varnadoe, op. cit., pp. 92-95.
- 65 Pollock, op. cit., p. 548.
- 66 See n. 43 above.
- 67 Pollock, op. cit., p. 548.
- 68 For a terse articulation of *différance* see Jacques Derrida, *Positions*, trans. A. Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), pp. 24-30. For a careful scholarly account of the reach and operation of *différance* see Roland Gasché, *The Tain of the Mirror* (Cambridge, MA and London: Howard University Press, 1986). See especially "A System Beyond Being," pp. 194-205.
- 69 Gasché, *ibid.*, pp. 197-198.
- 70 Ibid., pp. 197-198, see also Jacques Derrida, *Speech and Phenomena*, trans. D. Allison, (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1973), pp. 142-143.
- 71 M.C. Dillon, "The Metaphysics of Presence: Critique of a Critique" in *Working Through Derrida*, Gary B. Madison (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1993), pp. 190-192.
- 72 Ibid., pp. 190-192.
- 73 Ibid., p. 202.
- 74 Pollock, op. cit., p. 548.
- 75 Krauss, op. cit., p. 260.
- 76 I adopt David Michael Levin's use of this term in the following argument, for his use of circumspection. See: Levin, op. cit., pp. 234-235.
- 77 For the philosophical terrain again see Levin, *ibid.*, pp. 233-243.
- 78 Krauss, op. cit., p. 260. The passage in *Of Grammatology* to which Krauss refers is found on p. 62, Jacques Derrida, trans. G. Spivak, *Of Grammatology* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1974, 1976, corrected

1997). The discussion to which it belongs is much more extensive and technically intensive than Krauss indicates and can be found on pp. 45-65, "The Outside Is the Inside," from "Linguistics and Grammatology" in Part I, "Writing Before the Letter," pp. 1-94.

79 Krauss yokes together several disparate and brief citations from Derrida, a risky and questionable practice. Krauss writes, *op. cit.*, p. 260:

For if to make a mark is already to leave one's mark, it is already to allow the outside of the event to invade its inside; it cannot be conceived without "the non presence of the other inscribed within the sense of the present." This marking, which "cannot be thought outside of the horizon of intersubjective violence," is thus "the constitution of a free subject in the violent movement of its own effacement and its own bondage."

Krauss's bibliographical note, "The Indexical Mark," *ibid.*, p. 325, does not lay out this questionable citation of Derrida. She writes: "The discussion of the arche-trace is from Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Spivak (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1974) p. 62 and p. 132." *Of Grammatology*, page 62 as indicated in my note 78 is the location for the sentences Krauss uses in the first part of her paragraph inserting Derrida into her text. The phrases pertaining to violence, cited above in this note, come from two different sections, three different pages, and two quite different arguments in *Of Grammatology*. "The non-presence of the other inscribed within the sense of the present" is from p. 71 in "The Hinge," pp. 65-73, 65-73, which is the final section of "Linguistics and Grammatology," cited above, n. 78. The phrase, "cannot be thought outside of the horizon of intersubjective violence," is from p. 127, in the section "Writing and Man's Exploitation by Man," pp. 118-140, from the chapter, "Violence and the Letter: From Levi-Strauss to Rousseau," pp. 101-140, which is in Part II: *Nature, Culture, Writing*, pp. 95-316, *Of Grammatology*. The phrase, "the constitution of a free subject in the violent movement of its own effacement and its own bondage," is from p. 132, "Violence and the Letter . . ." as cited above. Krauss's focus on the ruptures *différance* effects in self-presence is not furthered by this assemblage of disparate phrases. The scholarly sloppiness or laziness inherent in taking short phrases out of context, and different contexts at that, and then not giving accurate page information certainly undermines the credibility of Krauss's use of Derrida. More seriously, such stringing together of phrases from different arguments obviously creates a high danger of misrepresentation, a problem that as we have seen mars earlier parts of "Six." For example, while the first phrase she quotes seems to approximate her usage of *différance*, Derrida has a much larger concern in mind: he is considering the problem of the spatialization of presence in both space and time. Krauss obviously is contracting this to a narrow moment of self-fissuring without regard to spacing. The second two phrases Krauss borrows are from a long and intricately critical discussion of Levi-Strauss where the phrases in question arise not from a specific critique of

metaphysics but from the broader cultural implications of writing and especially of arche-writing:

Distinguishing this, "the sociological" from "the intellectual and," attributing the former and not the latter to writing, one credits a very problematical difference between intersubjective relationship and knowledge. If it is true, as I in fact believe, that writing cannot be thought outside the horizon of intersubjective violence, is there anything, even science, that radically escapes it? Is there a knowledge, and, above all, a language, scientific or not, that one can call alien at once to writing to violence? (*Of Grammatology*, p. 127)

Derrida goes on to state (p. 128) that not only is writing interstitched with violence, but that *différance* as arche-writing is the basis of speech, and by implication therefore no pure being is possible outside of, and anterior to arche-writing and *différance*. Now, while this position is within the greater domain, so to speak, set out in "The Hinge," to make it appear contiguous to a phrase lifted from that discussion involves a crude dismemberment very different from the rigorous and precise cuts of Derrida's deconstruction of Lévinas and Heidegger in "The Hinge" or of Levi-Strauss in "The Violence of the Letter...." Indeed, it is almost the opposite practice for it involves ripping small pieces from two complex arguments and then uniting them under a term, violence, whose specific texture in those arguments has been sacrificed. In this Krauss betrays her strong predilection for invoking what Gayatri Spivak calls "master terms," terms that Derrida, of course, is careful to deconstruct in his own practice. (See Spivak's "Translators Preface," *Of Grammatology*, p. xv and lxxi.) On Derrida and some of the problems of violence he addresses see Edith Wysogrod, "Derrida, Lévinas, and Violence" in *Derrida and Deconstruction*, ed. Hugh J. Silverman (New York and London: Routledge, 1989) pp. 182-200. Drucilla Cornell, "The Violence of the Masquerade: Law Dressed Up As Justice," in *Working Through Derrida*, pp. 77-93, op. cit., n. 71. Dallas Willard, "Predication as Originary Violence: A Phenomenological Critique of Derrida's View of Intentionality," in *Working Through Derrida*, pp. 120-136, *ibid.* Above all, see Jacques Derrida, "Violence and Metaphysics: An Essay on the Thought of Emmanuel Lévinas," in: J. Derrida, trans. A. Bass, *Writing and Difference* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978) pp. 79-153.

80 Gasché, op. cit., p. 188.

81 *Ibid.*

82 I am grateful to David Summers for this insight, and particularly for the opposition of analogic to metaphoric in bringing terms from Derrida to art.

83 Derrida, op. cit., *Of Grammatology*, see p. xv of Spivak's "Translators Preface."

84 Derrida, op. cit., *Of Grammatology*, pp. 69-71.

85 On "Spacing" see Gasché, op. cit., pp. 199-201. See also, Derrida, op. cit., *Positions*, pp. 91-82 and p. 101.

86 Derrida, op. cit., *Of Grammatology*, p. 62.

87 Krauss, op. cit., p. 260.

88 Ibid.

89 Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, p. 62. In these paragraphs Derrida names and refers to the domain of possibility indicated by the term arche-trace in various ways: "the originary trace," "the minimal unit of temporal experience," "a trace retaining the other as other in the same," "The (pure) trace, is *différance*," "it permits the articulation of signs among themselves with the same abstract order," and so forth. Ibid., pp. 62-63. Nowhere does Derrida call the arche-trace "the pure form of the imprint." Rather, "its passage through form is a passage through the imprint" and thus clearly a delimitation of its transcendental implications not an example of them as Krauss asserts. Ibid., p. 62.

90 Ibid., pp. 61-62. See especially how Derrida articulates temporalization.

91 Ibid., G. Spivak, "Translators Preface," p. xv, and especially lxxi. See again, Gasché, op. cit., pp. 184-185.

92 Note the movement of terms in the section from which Krauss adopts her use of *différance*. Derrida, op. cit., *Of Grammatology*, especially pp. 61-63.

93 Ibid., pp. 62-63.

94 Gasché, op. cit., pp. 185-194.

95 Krauss, op. cit., p. 327, pp. 284-289, pp. 307-308.

96 Ibid., p. 284, see also, Krauss, op. cit., "Four," p. 150, "2: Base Materialism, and Gnosticism," and Krauss's Bibliographical Note 2, p. 193, "Base Materialism, and Gnosticism." Georges Bataille, "Le bas matérialisme et la gnose," *Documents*, 2, no. 1 (1930), pp. 1-8; reprinted in Georges Bataille, *Visions of Excess: Selected Writings, 1927-1937*, ed. and trans. Allan Stoekl (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1985) as cited by Krauss, *ibid.*, "Four," "Biographical Note," p.193. Krauss (with Yves-Allain Bois) links Pollock to Bataille's theology of baseness in another text; Yves-Allain Bois and Rosalind Krauss: *Formless: A Users Guide* (New York: Zone Books, 1997) originally published: *L'Informe: Mode d'emploi* (Paris: Editions du Centre Georges Pompidou, 1996). Krauss's engagement in the theological fantasies of Bataille is strikingly uncritical, particularly in the use of baseness relative to Pollock.

97 Ibid., p. 284.

98 Ibid.

99 Ibid.

100 For bibliography on Jungian interpretation of Pollock see Kirk Varnadoe, "Comet: Jackson Pollock's Life and Work," in K. Varnadoe, op. cit., p. 80 see n. 44 and endnote 45. For a second, scholarly account of depth psychology and Pollock see Michael Leja, "Jackson Pollock & the Unconscious," in: *Reframing Abstract Expressionism: Subjectivity and Painting in the 1940s* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1993), especially pp. 121-191. For another valuable discussion of the climate supporting Pollock's interest in Jung see Stephen Polcari, *Abstract Expressionism and the Modern Experience* (Cambridge, U.K., New York, N.Y., and Victoria, Australia: Cambridge University Press, 1991). In particular Chapter 2, "Propaedeutics: The Intellectual Roots of Abstract Expressionism," pp. 31-90, especially pp. 40-49, and Chapter 8, "Jackson Pollock: Ancient Energies," pp. 233-262, especially pp. 242-250, pp. 256-258. For the most sustained Jungian interpretation of Pollock, see Elizabeth

- Langhorne, *A Jungian Interpretation of Jackson Pollock's Art Through 1946*, University of Pennsylvania, 1977 (unpublished Ph. D. dissertation). See especially pp. 4-7 for a review of the literature on Pollock from a Jungian perspective. See also Elizabeth Langhorne, "Jackson Pollock's *The Moon Woman Cuts the Circle*," *Arts*, (1974): 127-137; Judith Wolfe, "Jungian Aspects of Jackson Pollock's Imagery," *Artforum*, (November, 1972), pp. 65-73; Jonathan Welch, "Jackson Pollock's *The White Angel* and the Origins of Alchemy," *Arts*, (March, 1979): 138-141. For a more Freudian Pollock see: William Rubin, "Pollock as Jungian Illustrator: The Limits of Psychological Criticism," Parts I-II, *Art in America*, 67, no. 7 (November, 1979): 104-123; 67, no. 8 (December, 1979): 72-91. Rubin, who seems almost prejudicially indisposed toward Langhorne in particular, also oversteps into speculation from a Freudian perspective. For an interesting treatment of depth psychology, both Jungian and Freudian, in relationship to Pollock see Donald E. Gordon, "Pollock's 'Bird,' or How Jung Did Not Offer Much Help in Myth-Making," *Art in America*, 68, no. 8 (October, 1980): 43-53. For replies from some of the writers Rubin attacks see "Department of Jungian Amplification, More Rubin on Pollock, Part II, *Art in America*, 68, no. 1 (October, 1980): 57-67. Replies from J. Sandler, D. Rubin, E. Langhorne, and finally W. Rubin, in counter reply.
- 101 Krauss, op. cit., p. 289.
- 102 Steven Naifeh and Gregory White Smith, *Jackson Pollock an American Saga* (New York: Clarkson N. Potter, 1989), "Celebrity," pp. 574-592, "Breaking the Ice," pp. 593-612.
- 103 Krauss, op. cit., p. 289.
- 104 J. Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, op. cit., see especially "Writing and Man's Exploitation of Man," pp. 118-140. See also p. 103.
- 105 For a balanced summary of Greenberg's criticism of Pollock see K. Varnadoe, op. cit., pp. 42-47.
- 106 For example, Norman Bryson's influential polarity of the Gaze and the Glance operates as a generative principle creating and bifurcating the "essentials" of all western art from nearly all Asian art. (Norman Bryson, "The Gaze and the Glance" in *Vision and Painting: The Logic of the Gaze*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1913. Pp. 87-131, esp. pp. 93-95.) For my critique of this and other implicit idealism in *Vision and Painting* see my "Fracture, Painting, and Norman Bryson," op. cit. n. 4.
- 107 On the Hegelian underpinning of Marxist art history see David Summers, "Form, Nineteenth Century Metaphysics and the Problem of Art Historical Description," *Critical Inquiry* 15, (Winter 1989): 372-406.
- 108 On these spatial categories and especially sculpture see David Summers, "Real Metaphor: Towards a Redefinition of the 'Conceptual' Image" in N. Bryson, M. A. Holly, and K. Moxey eds. *Visual Theory* (New York: Harper Collins, 1991) pp. 231-259. Derrida's term "spacing" as an aspect of *différance* would be an ideal place to start a critique of Derridean language and its appositeness to painting, sculpture or architecture. In particular a phenomenological analysis of the adequacy of "spacing" to the complex constructions of virtual space in any tradition of painting would expose the verbo-centric bias of Derrida's term and

its sweeping generality.

109 Jacques Derrida, "The Spatial Arts: An Interview with Jacques Derrida," with Peter Brunette and David Wills, in *Deconstruction and the Visual Arts*, ed. Peter Brunette and David Wills (Cambridge, U.K., New York, N.Y., and Melbourne, Australia, Cambridge University Press, 1994), p. 20.

Why Women Can't Paint

Stephen Newton

All the portents point to the closure of the patriarchal era, an era in which the definitive male is crucified and later resurrected in a rebirth. Throughout this era, painting has been a keystone of patriarchal religion, not only *reflecting* the parable of death and rebirth, but actually *embodying* this possibility intrinsically within the very materiality of the paint substance. That is to say the painter, engaged in a *communion* with the painterly creative process, can experience an ecstatic conversion in which the mind is forever irrevocably transformed.

It is this innate potential within the very constitution of painting that iconoclasm throughout many centuries was really attacking. The image breaker, who smashed religious and icon paintings, was not attacking the surface figurative symbols of saints or deities, but rather this intrinsic power within the formal dynamics of painting to access another dimension beyond the boundaries of everyday 'reality'.

Recently it has been shown that the splattered and dripped areas of painterly marks occurring on panels near to, or actually within the scenes of religious icon paintings, embody this pure painterly creative process with its inherent transformative power. Such painterly areas have been directly compared to modern abstract expressionist works such as the 'drip' paintings of Jackson Pollock.¹ In Pollock's abstract expressionist paintings, the painter's conscious cognitive self is fragmented and dispersed into an infinite space, in a psychic dissolution prior to a psychic resurrection. That this creative process is truly the original prototype for the various narratives and religious parables convened to represent such experience, is validated by the Byzantine portable altars, for personal spiritual use, which consisted exclusively of 'all-over' abstract expressionist painting. The actual narratives of the icon painting only describe and explain what happens in a creative engagement with this deeper level of pure material form in the related panels and areas of abstract painting.

But if the patriarchal era *is* coming to a close, does this also mean that painting, with its archaic cultural and spiritual role, is also redundant? There are certainly plenty of today's postmodern pundits eager to proclaim the final demise of painting. One prominent critic recently conceded that there might always be painters, but only in the same way as there will always be Morris dancers.² But the New Age iconoclasts, whether they know it or not, are still really targeting the transcendental and spiritual essence at the core of real painting, an essence inevitably perceived in our politically-correct world as esoteric and 'elitist'.

Opposition to painting in the modern era really began with Marcel Duchamp, Dadaism and the inception of Conceptual art. Duchamp reacted negatively to the fundamental development of modern abstract painting, considering it to be vacuous in its superficial concern with the retinal and the optical. In fact, like many others, he missed its deep unconscious dimension and its revolutionary project to reinstate the archaic mystical *ekstasis* at the heart of the painterly dynamic. Modern abstract painting was arguably the most dramatic and radical development in painting since the Renaissance, and the first painting since early Byzantine religious icon painting to embody painting's essential transcendental, spiritual dimension. This is probably why it unconsciously aroused such vitriolic hostility.

Andy Warhol, for example, was envious of Jackson Pollock's cultural cachet and coterie of admirers. But being Duchamp's natural heir and the first *postmodern* painter, he didn't try to emulate Pollock's complex, subliminal 'all-over' abstractions, but rather to parody and belittle them. His 'yarn' paintings are banal simulations of the real thing, being totally devoid of Pollock's vital sexual energy and unconscious male psychic organisation which underpins patriarchal religion. Indeed, this was Warhol's homoerotically motivated ideological objective, to emasculate Pollock and to drain abstract painting of its spiritual energy in a symbolic castration.

His series of so-called 'piss paintings' in which he simply urinated on canvas, represent his caustic critique of authentic painting. He also masturbated on canvas to vent frustration and to desecrate Pollock's hallowed ground with an obscene, sacrilegious act. In the place of the mystical, authentic painting, he put the superficial, simulated decorative patterns which were the precursors of so much of today's postmodern art. Warhol's art, like a plethora of postmodern art, was spawned initially by the ideological *Anti-Art* stance of Duchamp's Dadaist conceptual art.

There are, of course, plenty of examples of anti-art nihilism and literalisation of the creative process in the 'neo-conceptual' contemporary scene. The residue of Warhol's semen and urine can be detected through Piero Manzoni's canned artist's shit into Ofili's elephant dung paintings. But the real point is that it no longer matters whether art is good or bad, or has any 'value' or indeed any point at all. It would in any case be elitist to suppose that someone had talent denied to somebody else. We are all artists now. Chris Ofili's dung paintings may be dressed up with some superficial decoration of pretty coloured dots, apparently lifted from his tribal ancestors and designed to confer the aura of genuine ethnicity, along with a simulated veneer of authenticity and aesthetics, but this doesn't make him a painter.

Nevertheless, this is easily enough to satisfy most people in this

soundbite culture where deep meaning is shunned in favour of the obvious crass interpretation that everybody can decipher. The earnest and meaningful visitors intently and reverently studying the exhibition by Gilbert and George consisting solely of large images of turds, were clearly blithely unaware of the joke being perpetrated upon them by the celebrated gay duo. As with their gay icon precursor, Warhol, the underlying homoerotic objective is to literalise male creativity, castrate it, and sanitise it in brightly decorated perspex posters.

Artists who once might have offered transformation, healing, even redemption, have given way to the media celebrity who will use any hype and gimmick to get publicity, and have become the performing poodles of the establishment institutions which determine the art which will represent our society and control its supply and demand. The ultimate objective of this New Age iconoclasm, as indicated, is to emasculate painting and to extract its life's blood, in an act of vengeance against patriarchy and the elitism of transcendentalism. It was the American critic Donald Kuspit who suggested that the person who razed the temple of Diana to the ground, only did it because he hadn't built it himself.³

In the vanguard of this ideological reaction is feminist art; the feminine has most to gain from the overthrow of patriarchal art. Since women's emancipation, feminism has searched for new forms to represent female creativity in its unique aspect. This has clearly resulted in much exciting and revolutionary neo-conceptual art, particularly in terms of installation, video and performance art, which have served to reflect the radical otherness of the feminine.

By contrast, painting has traditionally been a male preserve. Certainly social exclusion has been a factor in this and there have been proven cases where women painters have been airbrushed out of history and their work attributed to men to make it more saleable.⁴ Also this is not to ignore the fact that there have been many very prominent and unique women painters such as Paula Modersohn-Becker, Frieda Kahlo, Georgia O'Keefe and Lee Krasner, to name but four. But it still remains the case that painting is overwhelmingly a masculine medium, and indeed, its whole activity is connected with projection and expulsion, whereas the characteristics of the feminine might traditionally be more associated with an internalisation or introjection in an attitude of passivity. Jackson Pollock's 'drip' paintings, on one very primitive developmental level, can be viewed as reflecting a male orgasmic projection.

Perhaps it is this male domination of painting, with the spiritual and mystical kudos attached to it, which has so consumed some feminists. A feminist icon such as Germaine Greer conceded in her seminal work *The Female Eunuch*, first published in 1970, that women hadn't hitherto produced any great art, and underlying much feminist neo-conceptual art is an ideological

agenda targeted at real painting and so at patriarchal religion, which reflects male psychic organisation as its spiritual framework.⁵ Male psychic organisation is imprinted in the material substance of the paint medium, in a *transubstantiation*, as the mind is embodied in the paint, which acts in effect as a psychic mirror in a plastic arrangement of form analogous to psychic structure. If this imprint encodes the potential for psychic death and rebirth in the essence of the creative structure, then how does such a creative process differ in relation to the feminine?

In order to answer this fundamental human question it is necessary to penetrate the inner workings of the creative process in its essence and as it has been generally understood throughout human development and in contexts as diverse as the religious icon painting, or the African tribal ritual, or the modern abstract painting. That is to say, the creative process which offers some real psychic communion, authentic engagement or possibility of real transformation, as opposed to the watered-down version which has infiltrated the postmodern mentality and which embraces crafts and pastimes as well as the ideological and propagandist hype and gimmick which postures as much postmodern 'art'. Although some postmodern and feminist artists might claim that neo-conceptual art can embody the transcendental, its roots in the anti-art intellectual objectivity of Duchamp and the emotional detachment of Warhol, make such a possibility difficult to sustain.

Today it is not generally understood, or perhaps conveniently misunderstood, that the elemental and universal creative process can provide a template through which an individual can transform life by actually re-working it within the creative medium. The earliest human developmental sequences encountered by the infant can in reality be worked through again and reprogrammed. This is not simply regressive, because such sequences can be re-engaged throughout adult life in an evolving maturational process. It is this fundamental reprogramming of the psychic constitution that forms the foundation for the ideas of religious conversion, psychoanalytic therapeutic technique, and more archaic forms of healing and mysticism.

In its most essential form the painterly creative process initially involves a type of exorcism, in which isolated raw and fragmented paint marks are projected on to the canvas. For complex reasons these rudimentary marks can appear intolerable and generate anxiety in the painter. Subsequent phases in the creative process tend to develop a cohesive organisation; the exorcised projections are integrated in a type of support system, which makes a reparation. This happens purely at the abstract formal level, and in an infinitely complex series of intuitive, subliminal and unconscious responses to an imperceptible flux in the volatile and malleable paint medium, the psyche leaves an imprint.

As the mind and its reactions are confined exclusively within the

parallel universe of painting's creative dynamics and are actually externalised within the paint medium, it appears as if the mind vacates the body, inducing a momentary loss of consciousness, or trance in a psychic 'death'. Religion has labelled this experience an *ascension*, as the soul appears to float free from the body. It also constitutes the classic ecstatic conversion, the 'out of body' experience at the core of *ekstasis*. In effect it is as if the mind is removed, earlier developmental sequences re-organised, and the reprogramming internalised.

It is significant that this whole scenario is promoted by early anxiety, mirrored in part in the exorcism of initial fragmented marks. Painting can be very much about exorcising anxiety and confronting distress in order to relieve it. This is why psychotics so often have been known to experience a spontaneous creative phase and produce such weird imagery. It is also why Freud at times appeared to dismiss artists as neurotics and art as being little more than the attempted sublimation of neurosis.⁶ But it is in the catalytic role of anxiety in the creative process that there is a fundamental dichotomy with the feminine and a possible explanation as to why women would seem to have not had ready access to the male preserve of painting.

Much psychoanalytic theory supports the idea that fear, persecutory anxiety, guilt and general unease and dread in the face of reality, instigates the early urgency to displace such emotions on to other objects and so-called 'transitional phenomena'. This stimulates the creative urge and promotes the process of symbol formation. Melanie Klein, who worked extensively with children for many years, argued that a failure to negotiate these transitional developmental phases, sows the seeds of schizophrenia and psychosis in later adult life. Her approach differed from the earlier work of Freud in that she dealt with the pre-Oedipal infant in the earliest years of development.

Freud's analysis related to the Oedipal level of development, but his theory had also concluded that it is infantile anxiety and fear which initiate the creative urge and drive to symbolise. In papers such as *Inhibitions, Symptoms and Anxiety* and case studies such as that of 'Little Hans' in *Analysis of a Phobia in a Five-Year-Old Boy*, Freud argues that the imperative to displace threat results in a creative complex.⁷ His analysis of the phobia of Hans reveals the ultimate threat of castration as the root cause of his persecution anxiety and need to create an ambiguous abstract construction in order to dissipate such a threat. Freud also understood that it was within the *materiality* of the word and distortion of the language that Hans mediated his phobia; that is in sound, or homophony and in a type of ambiguous nonsense language, rather than in the narrative or meaning of the dialogue. From this infantile creative organisation it has been concluded that 'anxiety writes poetry'.⁸ It is important to recognise this fact, that the innate obligation to displace untenable anxiety was carried out in the purely *formal* and *material* dimension of the word and the dialogue, in order to avoid any possibility of a re-

conceptualisation by the conscious mind which is not equipped to handle such deep emotion. The formal dimension that I refer to here is that of *unconscious* form, or what Anton Ehrenzweig termed 'inarticulate form'. It is that type of form beyond conscious perception or representation; it cannot be premeditated or consciously copied; it is accidental, vague, ambiguous, and in terms of painting would be located in the uncontrollable striations within the paint mark, or in the 'bleeding' and drips at its edges, or perhaps in the irregularities and undulations of texture and impasto. That is in the anomalies of material *facture*, elements that cannot be consciously and deliberately executed, but are by-products of the creative process. Such effects escape conscious attention but they can be procured by the painter and subliminally and intuitively monitored.

Artists instinctively recognise that such elements have profound significance for the unconscious mind and that they generate the emotional vitality and force of painting. The mature painter engages in a sensitive dialogue with the painting to facilitate the development of its own peculiar inarticulate characteristics and associated emotional power and mediation of anxiety. The over-refined painting, in which those representatives of conscious engagement and deliberation in terms of surface shapes, pattern and decoration gain ascendancy, loses vitality and is emotionally diluted. Such works are ultimately the stuff of cliché and mannerism and their stylisation has often been employed by the postmodern conceptual painting to simulate, ironise and debunk authentic painting.

Whether in terms of music, poetry or painting, this is why the emotional power of art resides in its material form. Indeed, as I have indicated in reference to the dripped and splattered panels of 'inarticulate form' in the religious icon painting, the surface parables and narratives only serve to describe what is happening at this deeper level of the creative process. This is the archaic relationship between form and content which has been so misunderstood in recent times. It is the emotion embodied within unconscious inarticulate form, which determines the surface narratives, symbols and shapes of consciousness. This holds true for the dream, which forms a compromise between potentially overwhelming unconscious emotion and a conscious organising mind constitutionally incapable of containing it. The dream offers tentative conscious access through ambiguity and displacement. But it is the force of unconscious form that determines the character of the dream, just as the inarticulate dimension of the icon determines its symbols.

Similarly, it is the unconscious creative tension experienced in the creative trance and psychic 'death' of the tribal ritual that determines the form of analogous tension in the tribal sculpture or artefact, which in effect was designed to encode the creative tension and mystery of the transformative ritual for future generations. This is why in such a tribal context there was no

concept of aesthetic beauty in relation to such objects, always a source of perplexity to Western observers. The tribal artefact had a purely functional role to preserve the ritual experience at the heart of the culture.

Psychoanalytic theory acknowledges the key roles of anxiety and the dimension of unconscious form both in human development and in the initiation of creative displacement and symbolisation. Freud recognised that the threat of castration arouses the deepest dread and anxiety in the infant and whether or not such a threat is ever actually uttered by a parent it is nevertheless ever present. Threats of this nature are all the more powerful in the suggestible infantile mind where they are literalised. The parent who threatens the child with: 'I'll murder you if you do that again...' rarely understands that the infant can take such a threat literally. However, if castration is the most fearful menace then inevitably there will be an ultimate difference of degree experienced by the male or female infant.

The male child's urgent need to displace anxiety through abstract form is symbolised in the fable of *Jack and the Beanstalk*, where a long formal chain is fashioned so that it can be both climbed and descended; that is to say, the male child can regress through art's form in order to re-engage with earlier developmental sequences and return reborn. This is what led Pollock to claim: 'I am nature'. It can be shown that infants actually develop a purely aesthetic sense and the ability to perceive pure form during the dangerous Oedipal phase of development around 4-5 years.⁹ The aesthetic sense is very much a defence in displacing the threat implicit at this level of development. Freud said that 'the motive force of defence is the castration complex', and that 'ethical and aesthetic barriers' are created as a defence.¹⁰

In a short paper entitled: *Some Psychological Consequences of the Anatomical Distinction Between the Sexes*, written in 1925, Freud recognised for the first time that there was no parallel between the sexes in terms of psychology and sexual development.¹¹ In fact there were fundamental differences in relation to the castration and Oedipus complexes, and importantly, in the make-up of the inner conscience and what Freud had termed the 'super-ego', which he defined as the residue of parental discipline and authority. Crucially, whereas in the male infant the threat of castration destroys the Oedipus complex, in the female this threat actually initiates and consolidates it. That is to say the male obliterates the Oedipus complex under the threat of castration, and sublimates it, and incorporates the severity of this threat within a severe super-ego, conscience and morality. Accompanying this development is the displacement into the *anaesthetic* defence of abstract aesthetic form, and hence the intrinsic connection between ethics and aesthetics, or between beauty and truth.

In the case of the female, the urgent demand for the elimination of the Oedipus complex is lacking; there is no castration threat, as this is perceived to have been carried out already. The female is rather locked into the Oedipal

situation by her desire for compensation in the form of a baby, a desire initially associated with the father. Furthermore, as Freud points out: 'The fear of castration being thus excluded in the little girl, a powerful motive also drops out for the setting-up of a super-ego...' ¹² Again in relation to women: 'Their super-ego is never so inexorable, so impersonal, so independent of its emotional origins as we require it to be in men.' ¹³

Freud draws the somewhat erroneous conclusion from all this that the more benign conscience of women leads them to show less sense of justice than men. Perhaps to a degree we can excuse Freud's sexism as he was of course working in a much earlier unenlightened and less politically correct time. Nevertheless he did miss the opportunity to show that it is in fact the more severe conscience internalised by the male that paradoxically leads to the overwhelming preponderance of rapists and murderers in that sex. That is to say, a severe conscience cannot only lead to ethics, high moral ground and aesthetic purity, but in some cases the overly severe restraints of conscience can lead to more drastic and violent measures to break free from such paralysing restriction.

Just as a severely repressive political regime can often foment a revolutionary insurrection within its subjects, so too can a strongly repressive conscience and super-ego engender a violent ambition to eliminate it altogether. It has been an archaic role of art and ritual to mediate such issues. For centuries the tribal ritual facilitated the transition of the initiate through to adulthood. I have argued that within the manic trance, which forms the creative core of the ritual process and the essence of a *trance-formation*, the residues of parental control and conditioning internalised as guilt and conscience can be neutralised and overthrown, in a psychic rebirth into a more independent and adult frame of mind.

Through his worldwide research of such phenomena, William Sargant was able to conclude that the trance experience formed the basis of such transformative rites. He furthered acknowledged the findings of the Russian physiologist I.P. Pavlov in relation to the nervous systems of dogs. Pavlov had shown that under conditions of stress dogs could reach what he termed an 'ultraparadoxical' phase of behaviour, during which all prior conditioning was eradicated and often totally reversed. Such a complete psychic transformation (or rebirth) is akin to a brainwashing and Sargant also drew parallels with such conversion experiences encountered in religious fundamentalism and in revivalist gatherings. In such contexts where prolonged threats of eternal damnation and hellfire were absolutely believed, levels of hysteria and stress could be whipped up and the 'ultraparadoxical' state of brainwashing and 'conversion' could be induced. ¹⁴

So there are correspondences within such apparently diverse experience and the relationships that I have indicated between aesthetics in art,

ethics and morals that often find voice in religion, along with the clear parallels between creative transformation and religious conversion, testify to the connections between art and religion.

I have put the case that the creative tension or stress encountered in the transformative ritual, which ultimately can induce the manic, omnipotent trance in which conscience, guilt and restraint can be negated, is the same creative tension and stress that is the catalyst for a type of conversion experience encountered in the abstract painterly creative process. Such 'psycho-spiritual' painterly experience led many modern painters to instinctively recognise its 'spiritual' nature. Indeed, in the abstract painting, where the 'slate of reality' is wiped clean, there is the deep potential for an encounter with the 'ultraparadoxical' dimension of conversion where all prior conditioning can be eliminated.

In the paper "Guilt in Painting," published in 1998, I outlined how guilt and conscience can be dealt with in the material processes and dynamics of painting.¹⁵ The modern painter Philip Guston said that within the drama of the painting he was the prosecution, defence, judge and jury, and I show how in the parallel universe of the painterly medium, this happens. In effect, at the crux of the creative process those fragmented and unrefined projections of raw form, which exorcise anxiety, can be integrated with those clear and refined shapes and lines, which represent conscious deliberation and order. Such elements of clarity and order are used by agencies in the mind to ensure that rational organisation maintains dominance and to this end guilt feelings are induced if such surface cohesion and refinement is threatened. Hence the guilt and disgust attached to unrefined 'inarticulate form'. However, when these two types of form are integrated in the creative core, both anxiety and guilt are subsumed within the creative matrix and the painter can experience the momentary ecstatic freedom from all constraint and an omnipotent unchallenged control of all forms and what they represent in the mind.

Inside the dynamics of the paint medium, the painter can deal with the severity of conscience and guilt and effect a metamorphosis and transfiguration. It has to be within the material formal process because this is where the true language of unconsciousness is expressed and where the deepest emotions and vitality of art are located. It may involve a violent manic destruction of those defined forms, which represent order, law and conscience, and momentary trance 'death', as those representations are dissolved in a conversion. But such severe responses are only invoked by a deeply entrenched threat.

As Freud pointed out, in the case of the female infant, the urgent demand to eliminate the Oedipus complex is absent, and Germaine Greer's female eunuch will not have the desperate urge to paint, an urge which has formed the motivation for so many male painters. The intolerable conscience that in reality may lead to murder or patricide, in the creative process can be the

catalyst for great art. The healing and transformative power of art, whether in the ritual trance with its intrinsic power to transport the initiate on to a higher psychic plane, or the transcendental power of painting to effect a conversion and rebirth, has for countless centuries been recognised cross-culturally and universally. As I have already suggested, postmodern art often has an ideological objective to castrate authentic painting and to substitute in its place the facile superficial hype of much of today's 'art'.

I have said also that feminist art has unfortunately all too often been in the vanguard of this ideological reaction. But feminism risks 'throwing the baby out with the bathwater'. The feminine search for new and exciting forms of representation and creativity, should avoid getting embroiled in New Age sorcery and nihilistic opposition to forms of art which have stood the long test of time and which can genuinely offer healing and transformation.

Notes

- 1 Georges Didi-Huberman, *Fra Angelico: Dissemblance and Figuration*. (University of Chicago Press, Chicago and London, 1995), 30.
- 2 Donald Kuspit, *The Cult of the Avant-Garde Artist* (Cambridge University Press, 1993), 25.
- 3 Artemisia Gentileschi (c.1597-1651/3), daughter of Orazio Gentileschi, a follower of Caravaggio, is a case in point.
- 4 Germaine Greer, *The Female Eunuch* (Flamingo, 1993), 116.
- 5 Sigmund Freud, *Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis*. vol. 1, Lecture 23: *The Paths to Symptom-Formation*. Pelican Freud Library. (Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1981), 423. (SE 16).
- 6 Sigmund Freud, "Analysis of a Phobia in a Five-Year-Old Boy 'Little Hans,'" In Case Histories 1, vol. 8, Penguin Freud Library. (Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1990), 165-305. (SE 10). "Inhibitions, Symptoms and Anxiety." *On Psychopathology*, vol. 10, Penguin Library (Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1993), 227-315. (SE 20)
- 7 Geoffrey Hale, "'Little Hans' and the Poetics of Anxiety: Taking Analysis to Task." *American Imago*, 51, no.3 (1994), 276.
- 8 Anton Ehrenzweig, *The Psycho-Analysis of Artistic Vision and Hearing: An Introduction To a Theory of Unconscious Perception* (Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1953), 169
- 9 Sigmund Freud, "Inhibitions, Symptoms and Anxiety" in *On Psychopathology*, vol. 10, Penguin Freud Library. (Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1993), 269. (SE 20).
- 10 Sigmund Freud, "Some Psychological Consequences of the Anatomical Distinction Between the Sexes" *On Sexuality*, vol. 7, Penguin Freud Library. (Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1991), 323-343. (SE 19).
- 11 Sigmund Freud, "The Dissolution of the Oedipus Complex" *On Sexuality*, vol. 7, Penguin Freud Library. (Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1991), 321. (SE 19).
- 12 Sigmund Freud, "Some Psychological Consequences of the Anatomical Distinction Between the Sexes" *On Sexuality*, vol. 7, Penguin Freud Library. (Penguin,

- Harmondsworth, 1991), 342. (SE 19).
- 13 William Sargant, *The Mind Possessed, A Physiology of Possession, Mysticism and Faith Healing*, (Heinemann, London, 1973).
- 14 I discuss these connections in much greater depth in my latest book *Painting, Psychoanalysis, and Spirituality* (Cambridge University Press, 2001).
- 15 Stephen J. Newton, "Guilt in Painting," *Art Criticism* 13, no.2 (State University of New York at Stony Brook, 1998): 16-24.

Critique of Cynical Criticism

Mark Van Proyen

Who but a madman would suppose he cares to hear it said on Sundays, that the volunteer who plays the organ in the church, and practices on summer evenings in the dark, is Mr. Pecksniff's young man? Who but a madman would suppose it is the game of such a man as he, to have his name in everybody's mouth, connected with the thousand useless odds and ends you do? ...if that be possible, as well one might suppose...that Pecksniff traded in your nature, and that your nature was to be timid and distrustful of yourself, and trustful of all other men, but most of all, of him who least deserves it?

Charles Dickens, *Martin Chuzzlewit*¹

Today, the latent will to catastrophe on all sides has taken cover under the official respectability of the politics of peace. The mechanisms whose relatively brutal openness characterized the fascist style have sunk into the subliminal and the atmospheric under the masks of accommodation, good will and sincere sentiments. Naive stimuli have disappeared from the surface of consciousness. The increasing socialization of reactions represses open gestures; what is called democracy means, psychologically, an increase in self-control, which is probably necessary in dense populations. However, we should not be deceived by the calmed surface.

Peter Sloterdijk, *Critique of Cynical Reason*²

What's more, if you'll pardon my bluntness, it was you rhetoricians who more than anyone else strangled true eloquence. By reducing everything to sound, you concocted this bloated puffpaste of petty drivel whose only real purpose is the pleasure of punning and the thrill of ambiguity. Result? Language lost its sinew, its nerve. Eloquence died.

Petronius, *Satyricon*³

I

Thus far, the New Year's resolution which I originally made in 1998 continues to be successful, so I am hesitant to stretch the limits of my good fortune with any additional oath to the gods of self-improvement. Instead, I again content

myself with yet another renewal of an easily accomplished vow which is presented here as an injunction in service to the greater goal of good mental hygiene: *Don't confuse the banter that one hears at art dinners with the communications which take place in real relationships.* You know, *art dinners*; those strained, artificially festive occasions which take place after gallery openings, each an awkward ceremonial feast where the featured artist(s) breaks bread with friends, allies and investors for the sake of pretending that they have just conquered the known world. In my role as designated scribe, I am often invited to art dinners, no doubt because such events are supposed to be worthy of some immortalizing literary note. I occasionally accept such invitations, mostly for the sake of taking mental note, but not the kind that any of the assembled guests would ever want to see spilled onto the public page.

Take my fellow critic sitting across the other evening's table. At some point after the second glass of wine was poured, and well within earshot of both the featured artist and the gallery owner who was our generous if reluctant host, he announced that he saw "no career mobility (presumably for himself) in writing about northern California art," meaning in that particular instance, that the exhibition which we were celebrating would not be the recipient of any of his hallowed ink. In point of fact, it would not be receiving any of mine either, but that was because the featured artist was a personal friend whose previously exhibited work had already gained my favorable comment, and, unlike many of my brethren, I am not the kind of critic who writes repeatedly about the work of my personal friends – which may explain why I have so few of them. But the critic sitting to my right didn't know any of this, and seemed to assume that my enthusiastic review had already been written, and that I was consequently in dire need of some paternalistic (albeit poorly-timed) career advice.

In fact, it was he who was in dire need of career advice, and that advice is this: If your words were even half as concerned with their intelligence, relevance and real necessity as they were with the pecking-order status of who you were writing about, you wouldn't need to worry about your damned career mobility, because at that point your words would be actually worth reading, thereby making others worry about *their* lack of career mobility in the bargain. (There, I said it, and yes, I do feel better). But, as is almost always the case with blunt utterances however timely and prescient, there needs to be some follow-through which connects their immediate topicality to some set of larger issues, lest pompous sanctimony become the order of the day. So, as I proceed to link my art dinner anecdote to the heretofore unacknowledged transformations which have shaped and defined the practice of art and art criticism during the 1990s, I can be certain that the larger and evermore vexing issue which presently undergirds those practices is the now common artworld cynicism that refuses any differentiation between serious critical analysis and

a pervasive influence peddling whose embarrassing sycophancy and pathetic hypocrisy pretends so very poorly to proffer such an analysis.

Any insistence on maintaining such a differentiation is now said to be a form of "nostalgia" which is no longer relevant to the current situation of a New Globalist artworld of total marketing deployed as an meta-institutional instrument of total administration – all parading under an octopussian banner trumpeting the many attractions of an international industry called "cultural tourism." During the past decade, we have been regularly regaled by newspaper accounts of yet another opening of a satellite franchise of the Guggenheim, or of mega-mergers between art institutions, which more than anything else are reminiscent of the mania for leveraged buyouts which panicked Wall Street during the mid-1980s. Currently, the biggest news in the artworld remains the ongoing metastasis of international biennial exhibitions of contemporary art, which now number close to fifty as they span across the globe. Mirroring this new proliferation is a concomitant growth in the number of arts institutions and their administrators, and this growth seems to have bred an amnesia-of-convenience regarding the newly beleaguered circumstances of the individual artist. No matter, because the most notable artworld celebrities are now the directors and curators of museums, as well as those who have been chosen as the artistic directors of the big international biennials (presumably because they have already distinguished themselves in the recent growth industry of the little international biennial). Artists themselves have been relegated to making what amounts to the turnstile tokens and set pieces for this bureaucratic scramble up the fish ladder of art administrative importance – which is to say that their new role is that of producing the symbolic currency and valorizing ideological backdrop which does little more than decorate said scramble, making it appear momentous and eventful. And by the strictest standard of success, it all seems to be working exceedingly well, for we are told that audiences are attending museum exhibitions in record numbers, and there now is a great deal of private, corporate and third-sector money changing hands along the way. In short, the artworld of the late 1990s has once again become something of an overheated juggernaut, as was the case in the 1960s and again in the 1980s, albeit now at the behest of very different causes.

The crucial difference lies in how we must re-ascertain the idea of market-driven orthodoxy which now lies behind the new juggernaut, orthodoxy always being the *bete noir* of criticism's attempts at focusing attention on the most worthy accomplishments appealing to the most noble of psychomoral values. During the 1960s and again in the 1980s, that market was primarily found in the overheated private commerce in salable objects that took place between art collectors and art dealers, in large part subsidized by museums trading inflated tax benefits to those collectors in exchange for the eventual donation of said objects to their collections. But after the 1995-96

reconfiguration of the National Endowment for the Arts, this model changed rather dramatically; it was at this point that large institutions become the nexus of public arts funding (small institutions and individual artists were expressly written out of the equation), even as they also became the beneficiaries of an upsurge of corporate subsidy and subvention, which was supposed to take the place of declining public funds. The result of this shift in funding was that museums and other major arts-presenting institutions had no choice but to energetically engage in a practice called "marketing." These practices led them to take on the contours of what some architecture theorists have called "Urban Entertainment Destinations,"⁴ offering a country club atmosphere for attracting the corporate manageriat as a patron class while simultaneously providing a shopping destination for cultural tourists arriving from near and far. Following from these transformations, museums themselves began to believe in their own marketing boilerplate, taking it so seriously that they began to regard themselves as the primary focal points of symbolic meaning, relegating the works presented and contained within them to the synechdochal status of reliquary "nodes of meditation." Amidst this new marketplace mentality, these "relics" would reflect back on the cathedral-like totality of the museum experience, and of course, the superordinating authority of the administrators whose task is to orchestrate that experience. It is this authority and the powers that lie behind that authority (rather than any history of art, artist or artwork) that now keynotes the myths of credibility to which works of art must appeal so as to gain an identity in today's artworld of corporately-sponsored cultural tourism. And this leads us to the first important point: the unavoidable recognition that it is utility to the administrative cause (always understandable as administration-for-the-sake-of-administration) rather than in any persuasive artistic performance or demonstration of critical consciousness that now establishes the all-too-momentary "importance" of contemporary art.⁵

On the superficial face of things, this situation bears a good deal of inflated resemblance to the "alternative space" movement of the 1970s, which, like the present moment, also boasted its celebrity curators⁶ who loomed much larger than any dealer or critic – although, it must also be said that they worked very hard to keep the artist in the position of center stage *for the moment*. Instead of merely receiving works that were pre-certified by collector support, critical comment and/or government grant, curators who cut their professional teeth during the alternative space movement of the 1970s proactively certified artists through the exercise of their own curatorial prerogative, which almost always made a rather meretricious spectacle of eschewing "the market" as the site of an oligarchical elitism. To oppose that very real elitism, a countervailing force was necessary, which quite naturally engendered another kind of elitism. It came in the form of the development of theocratic rationales for so-called "advanced practices," and in the need for an alleged "democracy" of images

and practices to which noncommercial alternative space art could supposedly address itself. The need for a polemical *rapprochement* between these seemingly exclusive imperatives gave birth to a scholastic criticism that could simultaneously argue for "greater access for disenfranchised communities" as well as for the continued relevance and validity of an oxymoronic god called "the avant-garde tradition," which (as historical irony would have it) was already energetically engaged in making an anti-democratic spectacle of the esthetics of dehumanization (c.f. Chris Burden, Vito Acconci), indifference (Joseph Kosuth, John Baldessari), entropy (Robert Morris, Robert Smithson) and death (Bruce Nauman). In other words, a discourse addressing the pseudo-radical illusion of a democracy of images shrouded in so-called "difficult art" was marshaled into position to provide third-sector funding rationales for artists who short-sightedly and perhaps even cynically sought to substitute bureaucratic gamesmanship for the depredations of an art market that had suddenly appeared to be a club with a very finite number of members.

A mastery of the patois of bureaucratic rationalization was necessary so that funding criteria could be met, and this led to the artworld's first concerted sweeping of independent critical consciousness under the marketer's rug. Initially, that sweeping came in the form of a kind of conceptual art which, as Ursula Meyer put it, "eliminated the division" between artistic production and critical evaluation. As Meyer stated: "Conceptual artists take over the role of the critic in terms of framing their own propositions, ideas and concepts."⁷ Thus, at that early juncture, we already see a exegetical manqué of criticality being cynically substituted for criticism's more honorable role of providing a public inquiry into the value of a given subject. This emphasis was further advanced by the kind of criticism that was primarily published in *Artforum* during the years that John Coplans was the editor (1971-1977), later finding some degree of voice in *October*, *Avalanche*, and *High Performance*, among many other publications. As Coplans has stated: "It (i.e., the advent of a post-studio notion of "conceptual" artistic practice) was in the air, so to speak. And if you had your antenna out, you couldn't help but be affected by it, and I was affected by it. After all, the magazine was supposed to be about the art scene and what was going on. There were *issues*, important issues to be discussed, which weren't being discussed. I felt that it was necessary to deal with the infrastructure, as much as you were dealing with the art."⁸

Needless to say, twenty years later we can now see that many of the administrators of 1970s alternative spaces have since matriculated to the status of museum director and chief curator, and in large part they have done so by their continued finessing of the intractable dialectic of avant-garde piety and mock-democratic imperative. Their new corporate paymasters seem to both love and envy this fact, for it represents the fruition of a marketing calculus that they themselves have successfully emulated, repackaging it as the

new gospel of "resentment marketing." This new form of marketing is directed not only to the disposable incomes of impressionable youth, but also to an intellectually passive mass media who knows full well that it can garner easy attention with yet another callow exercise of *epater le bourgeois*, so long as there is no real *epater* of the corporate managerialiat involved.⁹ It almost goes without saying that said managerialiat has also done particularly well via its embrace of resentment marketing, given that profitability is ever more connected to quick turnover and the fickle truculence of commodity-addicted consumers seeking ersatz-satisfactions from a whirlwind of fetishized objects which are always destined to disappoint even as they always whet the appetite for more – much more – of the same. This is perhaps especially true of that class of "eventful" objects (or objectified events) called "cultural productions" or more quaintly, "works of art." Whenever these consumers might find their mind's ear replaying Peggy Lee's anthem to inevitable disappointment titled "Is That All There Is?", the marketers again shout the magical incantation of "New and Improved" from the rooftops, and, *mutatis mutandis*, consumers are frog-marched back into the ever-changing world of virtual pseudo-satisfaction. But here I digress from the crucial point, which is this: The past 20 years have born witness to a profound transformation of the contemporary art institution. No longer is it a mere refuge from the market; rather, it is now the engine that drives it, and that engine is in turn driven by an ensconced administriviat that has found it all-too-easy to sacrifice the political claims which it made for itself twenty five years ago in favor of shilling for their new friends – the corporations.

All of this explains why the most significant issue of the art world of the 1990s has been the changing status and circumstances of the institution. To a certain extent, this is by default, because it comes into the foreground by way of the post-Cold War era's chilling absence of other issues and contests, underscoring the fact that the realm of the institutional is (for the moment) the only game in town. Symptomatic of this new advent is the museum's inflated sense of self-importance, and this drives their changing sense of priorities. No longer do they see themselves as the devoted servants of art; rather, it is art that must of necessity serve them in the same manner that it served the pharaohnic priesthood, the Byzantine clergy or the French and British academies of the 18th century. And because of this advent, it no longer suffices to point to the machinations of the market as being the invidious epicenter of the current fever – in fact, the time for that is long gone. Instead, the art market as such is now best understood to be but the speculative epiphenomenon of an internally regulated institutional certification mechanism, jealously protecting its own long-term interests as the entrenched arbitrator of the financial and cultural value of the relics of its own decision-making processes. For the purposes of this essay, let us refer to the aggregate practices of this self-protected

system of certification-cum-arbitration as “administrativism,” and let us call its guiding ethos “adminidoxy”¹⁰ as a way of signaling its formal, concerted and strategic character. Adminidoxy is simply a marketing department’s simulation of an anti-orthodox orthodoxy (predicated on the routine idealization of rote gestures of shallow anti-idealism), cynically substituting superordinated changes in fashion for orthodoxy’s blind veneration of received opinion. The condition of adminidoxy stems from the very modern fact that fashion has proven itself far more effective in the manipulation of large urban populations than the old orthodoxies of institutionalized religion could ever have dreamt of being.

We see adminidoxy at work when we are forced to regard certain artworks as “art administrator art” – a work of art that only an art administrator could love (always for administrative purposes), and we also see adminidoxy at work when we read the cynical criticism that recognizes the unvarnished psychomoral truth of the situation, and takes as its mission the provision of discursive justification for the adminodox imperatives that are encoded into the aforementioned works of “art administrator art,” usually articulated without the slightest sense of intellectual shame. And here, let me be clear: I am not using the term “cynical” in the sublime and technical sense intended by Diogenes when he disavowed worldly vanity and went looking for an honest man. Rather, it is my intent to invoke the common and popular sense of the word implying an over-eager willingness to adjust one’s moral compass to the momentary exigencies of worldly power. In short, the cynic is a cast as an opportunist, flatterer and a sycophant; in Peter Sloterdijk’s words, a practitioner of “enlightened false consciousness...afflicted with the compulsion to put up with prestablished relations that it finds dubious, to accommodate itself to them, and finally even to carry out their business.”¹¹ Lacking a metaphysics of art or life, the cynic has no choice but to adopt the motto “to be dumb and have a job, that’s happiness!”¹² as a guiding mantra. One of the telling legacies of the 1990s is that it has provided an astounding abundance of cynical art criticism, which has come in a staggering variety of subtypes ranging from the scholarly to the promotional, which is to say, from the pretentious to the abjectly sycophantic. And if the current artworld of corporately sponsored disinfotainment seems to stink a moribund peace, then let us call that all-too-deceptive peace the *pax administrivia*, which can also be said to be a *pax exsanguinia* of art administrative gamesmanship sustained for its own self-perpetuating sake. Its most identifying characteristic is a programmatic overreliance on protracted rear-guard actions which now double as the new forms of esthetic fascism – one which rules not via the truncheons of authoritarian edict, but via the calculated deployment of euphemism, circular logic and a compulsive deferral of all necessary judgments based on persuasive rationale. By way of routine implication and occasional explication, cynical criticism can

be condemned for eagerly serving and servicing this new form of esthetic fascism-of-fashion, and that service now includes the occasional proclamation of itself as adminodoxy's loyal opposition – proclamations made of unpersuasive straw, offering weak and easily dismissed challenges to the all-encompassing status quo.

To lurch closer to the topic at hand, we can note that this renewed frenzy of artworld activity has bred its own unique brand of town crier to herald the unique momentousness of its rather sudden but wholly predictable consolidation of artworld and corporate power. This new breed of panegyrist practices the rawest form of cynical criticism that this essay proposes to critique, for in explaining its subjects exigetically rather than interrogating them from the vantage of well-conceived "metaphysics of art,"¹³ it only functions as a servile amplifier for the aforementioned pre-construction of "adminodox" opinion. For such flatterers, there is little difference between the genres of the catalog essay and the celebrity profile, in that both are seen as occasions for worshipful paean rather than the raising of serious and sometimes troubling questions. In fact, one could even say that the very existence of such orations represents a kind of strategic distraction designed to keep troubling questions away from the realm of public debate by drowning them out with cheerleader's rhapsodies that double as rationales and marching orders for low-level arts administrators seeking guidance on programming decisions that will elevate them to middle-level arts administrators.

But it should also be noted that adminodoxy owes its more elaborated construction not nearly so much to the eager simpletons who pen journalistic flattery as it does to more "respectable" writers who make something of a show of their supposed antagonism toward each other's "positions," although the cynical fact that must be reiterated here is that the antagonisms in question are almost always enacted between differing flavors of the most loyal of oppositions. Of these, much more will be said, but here we should remember that this circumstance is in no way new: as has always been the case with artists, critics too have been held accountable to the need for an idealized legitimization of a given moment's view of its own righteous self-dominance, in historical turns laundering the guilt of emperors, priests, and the captains of bourgeois industry with phrases well tuned to the exigencies of their times. What is new is that the institutional artworld now sees itself as having displaced those other entities (not to mention society in general) as being the central agency that determines the hierarchy of values to which art and its legitimizing narratives are now called to account. This is a new arrangement of power breeding a wholly new form of decadence, and I suspect that it will be around for a very long time, even as very few people will seriously care whether it lives or dies.

II

In the wake of the corporate juggernaut of professional arts administration which now calls itself the artworld, almost all public commentary – written or otherwise – is of necessity shepherded into one of several well-illuminated slaughter pens of noisy promotionalism. Or, failing that particular and dubious utility, it is then banished to the Arden forest of micro-communal obscurity, with makeshift clearings set aside for the subcategories of “the academic,” “the regional,” “the subcultural,” and “the down-(and-out)-trodden.” The fact that many of these clearings are starting to form quasi-autonomous and unadministered relations with one another via the internet thus far seems to be a factor of only limited importance to the art world’s conduct of its own hypermediated affairs—but it remains a fact which is now just starting to cast a gloomy shadow upon the fish ladder of career credibility which now comprises that world’s day-to-day operation, now rife with an anxious fealty to undeniably dead rituals of esthetic valuing. To state the same point in different terms, the contemporary artworld (still conveniently misunderstood as either an arena for the maintenance and protection of elite esthetic categories, or, in a more comic register, as a socially potent forum for “radical” oppositional practices) is on the verge of being rendered morbidly moot by the triumphal sweep of pan-capitalist history and the technology-driven arrival of a hypermediated post-urban society.

To its perverse credit, the artworld has made a fetish of very selectively misconstruing of this new advent, hoping against hope that it could repeatedly turn “art about the death of art” into the guiding theme of a house style (i.e. “staging the conflict between subject and object,” which is to actually say “stage-managing the administrative objectification of that conflict, thus insuring that it can never become an actual conflict”), all the while giving itself an inoculating dose of the very thing which threatened it. In effect, the artworld made itself over as that very thing in subtle historical increments, naively hoping to save itself from a seemingly inevitable catastrophe of self-inflicted irrelevance by “containing” (read: “contextualizing”) the specter of that irrelevance, lest the artworld be contained by it, which in fact will most likely be the unavoidable case. But, regardless of which imperative ends up containing the other, a state of impasse is perpetuated, and that state now calls loudly for the sacrifice of sacred cows – those being the (over in-)vested interests which the artworld still holds dear at a long-term cost still too great to be calculated. Herein lies the core problem: No one is now empowered with a sufficiently autonomous perspective or is allowed adequate amplification of what little autonomy they might have to call for that sacrifice. The only way to do so requires that one first apply to and then establish a bought-and-paid-for consensus (which will of necessity protect vested interests at any price), and

the health of the proverbial herd suffers accordingly. This set of circumstances is particularly devastating to younger artist's attempts to earn a serious reputation on their own terms, in that it is only the groupthink of fashion that has the power to give them their fifteen minutes of worldly identity, and that is not nearly enough to nourish serious artistic growth.

So perhaps we can see why so much of the critical writing of the 1990s has played its part so well with regard to advancing and sustaining adminodoxy's all-encompassing authoritarianism-of-fashion, allowing for different critical actors to come to the fore as the stock characters of its anesthetizing melodrama. In general, these come in two paradigmatic types, which I shall dub "the scholastic" and "the panegyrist." These are the cardinal cynicisms of contemporary art criticism, not the mere representatives of any differentiation of style or consciousness of values; rather, these categories designate the complex operating procedures which buttress adminodoxy from two seemingly opposed flanks. "Scholastic" cynical criticism accomplishes this not only by providing valorizing exegesis, but also by keeping the archive in a proper, institutionally agreed upon order, insisting that everything be understood as a function of an (institutionally pre-certified) set of historical predicates stemming from an idea of "the one true avant-garde practice." That practice is always said to be "oppositional" in character and compulsorily representative of progressive rather than reactionary values, as if this antique dialectic could still be said to have any real meaning – let alone relevance – in the post-Cold War world. But it does create the illusion of a kind of purposeful coherence to which "serious" artistic practice could aspire to, and for some that illusion seems to have been able to turn the trick of masking the pronounced clone fatigue that is so apparent in self-consciously neo-avant-garde artistic practices, such as those of Lawrence Wiener, Daniel Buren or Marcel Broodthaers, to cite a few frequently scholasticized examples. This scholastic masking insures a certain kind of stability of institutional values (which, by definition, are the nexus of the only things that can now be called "reactionary" values, despite the shrill character of their mock-progressivism) as well as a certain kind of imagined protection from those who might vote with their feet when questions of real symbolic value are concerned. Its goal is to sustain a canon of artists who pretend to be critical of the formulation of an artistic canon.

The most prominent example of scholastically cynical art criticism can be found in the odd blend of neo-Marxism and Lacanian psychoanalysis which continues to inhabit the pages of *October* magazine, bringing excessive diligence to the scholastic proof that all significant contemporary art must of necessity issue in some way from the work of Marcel Duchamp (whose "critique of pure modernism" has been recast as an exercise of modernism *in extremis*).¹⁴ Whether it be in Hal Foster's fanciful claim that

"Minimalism...contradicts its idealist model of consciousness,"¹⁵ or in Rosalind Krauss's claim that "The history of modern sculpture coincides with the development of two bodies of thought, phenomenology and structural linguistics, in which meaning is understood to depend on the way that any form of being contains the latent experience of its opposite: simultaneity always containing the implicit experience of sequence,"¹⁶ the limousine liberal's anti-elite elitism is everywhere in evidence in the pages of this oft-cited but not very well known journal. Of course, once one gets past *October's* typical rhetorical strategy of dogmatic cant giving way to solemn over-explanation, one finds that the rhetoric is mostly bluster masking anxiety, the anxiety in question no doubt being about the finite length of time that the dialectic between the textual holiness of selectively celebrated anti-relics and the psycho-symbolic needs of a democratic polity can continue to be finessed. For all of their display of labyrinthine complexity and sophisticated theoretical framework, *October*-style critical arguments seem to default to a single method, here well summarized by Irving Sandler's description of founding editor Krauss's "critical strategy":

Krauss...learned from (Clement) Greenberg how to acquire taste-making power: assume an identifiable position with a few identifiable premises, repeat them again and again until they seem 'natural,' and apply them to relatively few privileged artists, whose work...illustrates the art critical premise...*October* made the art theorist an interpretative genius, at the same time denying the existence of genius.¹⁷

Victory to the administrators! Krauss & Co. have gradually transformed Greenberg's deductive/reductive formalist premises (themselves the rhetorical forms of a scholasticized empiricism) into a updated *linguistic formalism* (echoing the theorizations of linguistic determination formulated by the Moscow and Prague linguistic circles of the 1920s). *October's* critical approach was initially based on Roland Barthes' notion of intertextuality and then was later updated by Jacques Lacan's notion of the operations of language as the exercise of the Name-of-the-Father which inevitably represses and negates the child's desire for union with the mother, and by introjected extension, any possible sense of self-totally. Only now, in the name of liberating the subject from said negation, we in fact see a worshipful fetishization of the powers of naming, "critically" displaced from the mythic father of some demonized bourgeois extraction and implicitly projected onto the supposedly androgynous institution (itself a dangerously idealized stand-in for the Jungian idea of a world parent by way of techno-bureaucratic society's supposedly experimental construction of "new men and women.") Thus, in *October*,

we see a new semiotic gloss applied to the old story of the authoritarian personality which has always been evident in the history of modern art. Characterizing that personality in 1974, Max Kozloff wrote "the habits of condescension and contempt have worked deep within him, and have been ingrained in his outlook ... Always suspicious and on-guard, this attitude is hopelessly at odds with its environment ... With his (i.e. Mondrian's) culture of determined relations, he estheticizes what would turn out in the world to be a most anti-democratic form of government indeed."¹⁸

This authoritarianism can be traced all the way back to Charles Baudelaire's call for "...a new kind of aristocracy...established on the most precious and most indestructible of faculties, on the divine gifts that neither work nor money can give."¹⁹ It is worthwhile to note here that for Baudelaire (as was the case with Oscar Wilde, T.S. Eliot and Ezra Pound – the other literary definers and expositors of "modernism"), the bourgeoisie was the despised embodiment of the collapse of an aristocratic notion of "culture" under the weight of the mercantile equation of the idea of "market" with that of "society." This led him to wishfully postulate an "aristocracy of the spirit" (i.e. a aristocracy of poets and artists) as heroically awaiting the historically inevitable redemption of a lost birthright. Needless to say, all of this is a rather exaggerated exercise in narcissistic overcompensation, so when we see Baudelaire taking up arms at the barricades of 1848, let us remember that it was not for the sake of removing the shackles of oppression from the limbs of the proletariat: Rather, it was because he thought the revolt would make a good pretext for an attempt to kill General Aupick, who was his hated stepfather – the uncouth and autocratic symbol of all that was bourgeois. This is important, because clear to the present day, the Marxist and Baudelairean notions of *epater le bourgeois* have been conveniently conflated with the now completely shopworn mythology of the institutional avant-garde artist – never mind that Marx and Baudelaire despised the bourgeoisie for diverse and perhaps even opposed reasons. Of course, the real issue here is not whether a given polemic is or is not representative of legitimately democratic values (everybody says theirs is so, nobody's is), but rather, it is to point to how semiological formalists have passive-aggressively updated this tradition of Baudelairean aristocracy into a kind of postmodern authoritarianism. Only here, we see the revolutionary's barricades displaced by a highly manipulated sociology of information that insinuates postmodern scholasticism into the ground floor of the administrativist temple of art to facilitate a climbing up to its controlling penthouse for the sake of inaugurating yet another anti-democratic culture of determined relations of its own perverse devising.

One of the central tenets of this new culture of administrativism is its rather obsessive focus on the question of "who gets to be an artist," repeated over and over to the almost complete exclusion of any meaningful inquiry into

the topic of what might constitute a successful work of art. Signaled here is the administrativist obsession with "identity," and its vulnerable relationship to any advent of metaphysical authority (inscribed into a consistent and allegorizable hierarchy of values), which is cast as the ideology of a disciplinary regime from which administrativism seeks to protect the aforementioned identity at all costs. Yet, the most vexing question remains: How can identity be protected from the administrativism that presumes to protect it from the world? Needless to say, such questions of potential exploitation and mutual accountability are never raised in *October*-style polemics, which tends to wave them off as the irrelevant mutterings of reviled populists whose own identities are hopelessly mired in reactionary systems of identity formation. Such a routine and high-handed dismissal of the view from the proverbial cheap seats always tells the tale of who is and who is not committed to real progressive values of egalitarianism and justice; it is interesting to note how widespread this programmatic displacement of questions of value (as accomplishment) with questions of identity (determined and privileged by carefully-selected administrativist pseudo-consensus) truly is. This progressive displacement is certainly not limited to toilers in the artworld's vineyards, but in fact operates in other realms of intellectual endeavor where political gamesmanship and serious inquiry collide. For example, in describing the contemporary study of the Classics, Victor Davis Hanson and John Heath have written:

Classicists, in the manner of the demise of the Maya, the Aztecs and the Mycenaeans, has now reached that penultimate tottering. The signs of the impending cataclysm of systemic collapse are all there:

1. An elite sect of copyists which transcribes official documents in obscure runes that are mere inventories and records read by no one outside of their minuscule circle.
2. Over-specialization, where clerk cannot fathom clerk.
3. The aggregate mass of capital and labor devoted to clarification, rationalization and self-promotion rather than construction and promotion.
4. Denial, where court toady and tenured scribe whisper in the ear of Pharaoh and Lord Master that everything is just fine, rumors of dissension mere talk among the whiney and unappreciative.²⁰

It would be hard to imagine a better synopsis of the machinations of institutional decadence (loyalty given primacy over ability), and its analogous applicability to the relationship between *October*'s pettifogging polemics and their stylizations of artworld adminodoxy should be obvious. But, given those polemics' encouragement of an environment where "scholastic clerk cannot fathom scholastic clerk," it seems doubly odd that the critical function so often

reverts to speaking on behalf of the name of the True Avant-Garde Father – Duchamp – who has been characterized by *October*-ist T.J. Clark as being “at the center of modernism, a figure of negation and nihilism, of endless centrifugal questioning of Art as a category and institution.”²¹ This establishes the core contradiction of *October*-style polemics: a servile and arguably uncritical embrace of an “anti-father father figure” who, like Lacan’s Name-of-The-Father, authoritatively intervenes in and negates the experience of “mother culture” for the sake of establishing an allegedly post-traditional system of determined relations that must nonetheless disallow any symbolization of self-totality. Once this is established, the critical task boils down to putting all other pretenders to the hallowed anti-throne in their proper place and then reciting their conflicted inter-relations as a kind of palace intrigue pretending hard not to be yet another enactment of a bourgeois family romance. This peculiar set of operations is odd in and of itself, but its obsessive engagement with the question of who should sit on the artworld’s throne also masks the fact that Krauss & Co. have elided a far more pressing question – the one which asks who now holds the deed to the whole palace, a subject upon which *October*-style writers remain remarkably mute, lest their dusty dialectic of progressive and reactionary positions implode into a morass of self-contradiction. Apart from this exceedingly vexing question, one could perhaps say that Krauss & Co. were only engaged in a harmlessly scholastic act of juggling tropes, genres and precedents. But to bring that question into the foreground necessitates seeing the more invidious implications of the *October* project. As Donald Kuspit has written:

The looming question is whether a new Robespierrean revolutionary art-critical dictatorship will be set up to replace the old art historical one, similarly if less obviously rigid and repressive in spirit.²²

Given the prominence that art institutions have accorded to *October*’s scholastic postmodernism (implicitly valorized in Krauss’ claim that the most serious intellectual study should be “turned toward the literary products of postmodernism, among the most powerful examples of which are the paraliterary works of Barthes and Derrida.”²³) the clear answer to Kuspit’s question is now a resounding “yes,” but a “yes” with a decidedly iconophobic difference. This is because the motives behind the linguistic formalism which animates *October*-style polemics should in the very least suspect of being not only irrationally and fascistically anti-mimetic, but in fact anti-art as well. Art always traffics in some sort of idealized consciousness, even when it is idealizing a stylized anti-idealism. And idealism always poses a danger to administrativism. Even more to the cynical point is the ritual antipathy of such polemics toward

any sense of art being understood as the crystallization of individual experience and volition. It is much more “managable” to view art as the (administrativist) “signing” of pre-digested codes for experiences that may or may not even exist until institutional positionality accedes to the fact, or invents them out of thin air. Any such emphasis – indeed, any sincere “allusion” to such a crystallization – inevitably draws the ritual disparagements of “idealism” or even worse, “traditional humanism,” the latter being a dead horse that is still feverishly whipped by *October*-ists for perpetually undisclosed reasons. An instructive example of this can be found in Benjamin Buchloh’s reappraisal of the work of Joseph Beuys, which “obviously risked appearing as an instance of formal obsolescence and epistemic quaintness, suffering already, by its attempts for *narrative* and *representation*, from a seemingly inevitable historical or structural deficiency within the continuously advancing discursive formations and institutions of contemporary art itself.”²⁴

Of course, the crucial truth about *October*-style scholasticism is this: for all of their labyrinthine complexity, the arguments on its pages boil rather quickly down to articles of a peculiarly insistent faith in discredited predicates stemming from an obsolete metaphysics of art. I would go so far as to describe that obsolescence as a naive faith in the necessary power of the institution misunderstood as a *code-driven sanctuary from the bourgeois values* equating identity with the prerogatives gained from market leverage. Two delusions are in play here: the first is the naivete that sees life in the aforementioned sanctuary as being something other than abjectly bourgeois, and the second is the obstinate *idée fixe* that breeds the facile equation of post-Cold War America’s corporate manageriat with the bourgeois shopkeepers of *La Belle Epoch*. While the latter can be fairly said to have practiced an ethos of extreme individualism, the former are far more complex, having mastered the moieties of an exclusionist and highly self-selected collective behavior, which, among other things, has effectively displaced any Marxist-derived idea of “class” (of producer) with the more precise categorical formulations called “demographics” (of consumer attitudes). In its highly self-selective (and highly differentiated) collectivism, corporate culture now embosses its priorities on the many forms of the art world’s legitimization circus, echoing more than anything else the values of those twenty first century entrepreneurs and middle managers who accrue stock options and art collections in direct proportion to their ability to formulate, enforce and then take maximum advantage of those invisible fluidities called “policy.” For these new swashbuckling entrepreneurs, “hair ravaged by wind, chest heaving, one boot up on the gunwale as they survey their vast sea of appointments on their palm pilots,”²⁵ life’s guiding truths are completely inscribed in the dark alchemies of demographics and spin control, and their post-bourgeois ascendance into the socioeconomic spotlight is testament to the fact that their new alchemy has completely and irrevocably dis-

placed the old taxonomy of class, which is now inoperative and obsolete.

But these changing economic circumstances do not exonerate neo-Marxists from the need to articulate a new taxonomy of class, and the fact that they have failed to even try to do so should in itself be taken as a telling index of their real cynicism vis-à-vis the obscured psychological politics of an all-pervasive administrativism. Instead, the locus of neo-Marxist examination and argument has shifted almost entirely away from *all* considerations of class, making the more bureaucratically quantifiable questions of ethnicity and gender their focal point. This not to say that there is not much of value to be learned from the intellectual engagement with various forms of Otherness, only that pretenses to such engagements are very susceptible to the easy reification of co-optation and institutional nullification by way of token inclusionism. This sort of inclusionism suggests that any structural injustice in society can be papered over by simply bringing highly visible tokens of ideologically acceptable "diversity" into its elite preserve – thereby indulging in a charade of identity fetishism to further confound the always vexing inequities inherent in the economic analysis of commodity fetishism. Cynicism supervenes when identity fetishism becomes the *lingua franca* of an opposition that only wants in, seeking to use a selective construing of the sociology of information as a substitute for the absence of any persuasive metaphysics of value.

The fact that neo-Marxism has had no choice but to turn its back on the proletariat is of supreme consequence, but to some extent this is true because the proletariat could never find its way to face and embrace Marxist truth – that is, it could never hope to see itself as a class with a shared interest in minimizing the manipulative circumstances which defined it. That is because what Marxists and neo-Marxists have chosen to call "circumstances" is experienced as "life" by those who live it, and, until a demonstrably better life is made tangibly available as more than a pie-in-the-sky promise, few are willing to give up the proverbial bird-in-the-hand, even if it is known to have been hatched from the egg of injustice. Neo-Marxism's most resounding failure is precisely around this score, for, even as it did a great job of displaying the grim realities undergirding the economies of sign and spectacle, it could not persuade anyone that it could improve those economies in any meaningful way. As Herbert Marcuse wrote in 1976:

In a situation where the miserable reality can be changed only through radical political praxis, the concern with esthetics demands justification. It would be senseless to deny the element of despair inherent in this concern: the retreat into fiction where existing conditions are changed and overcome only in the imagination.²⁶

Here we once again see the all-too-familiar avant-gardist call for a revolution "by other means," tacitly admitting to and perhaps even investing in the failure of revolution by revolutionary means. Ostensibly, Marcus's answer to the call for justification is simple: art should be the symbolic arena where the call to praxis could achieve its precise and most coherent formulation, the place where thought-experiments could be conducted and then evaluated in service to the clarification of necessary purpose. In short, art represents the imaginative space where the better world can be envisioned to the point of having its merits debated, and also where a symbolic enticement could be made sufficiently vivid to activate the latent praxis which could get us there, *for its own good rather than for the good of art*. In short, art could not only indict the systemic injustice of the status quo, but it could also reveal a picture of a more reasonable world free of systemic injustice.

But, neo-Marxists have nothing but high-toned scorn for this "vulgar" notion of art as persuasive enticement/incitement, and when the world responds to this scorn by failing to embrace their symbolic austerity programs (as if totally abstract art, free of all symbolic baggage, would make the need for revolution self-evident), neo-Marxists are suspiciously quick to carry their polemic marbles back to the safe shoals of the academy, even if that means scurrying double time past the boarded-up doors of the labor temple. It never occurs to neo-Marxists that the proletariat objects to their collective call to end artistic idealization precisely on the grounds that it in fact *does* want liberation – real liberation – which is to say that it doesn't want to be hectored into yet another fool's paradise of even more administration-for-the-sake-of-administration. Marcuse again:

The radical qualities of art, that is to say, its indictment of established reality and its invocation of the beautiful image of liberation are grounded on precisely the dimension where art *transcends* its social determination and emancipates itself from the given universe of discourse and behavior while preserving its overwhelming presence. Thereby art creates the realm in which the subversion of experience proper to art becomes possible: the world formed by art is recognized as a reality which is suppressed and distorted in the given reality.²⁷

Here, the terms that tell the tale are "indictment," "liberation," "transcends," "emancipates," and "subversion"; they are all terms of convenient disengagement and schizoid retreat from the exigencies of the all too social lifeworld, deployed in service to an undisclosed higher sanctimony which tacitly admitted that the real history of the real struggle for justice was always elsewhere, if it ever existed at all.

The reason for this retreatist discourse is simple: when Marxism became an intellectual fetish (the advent of which was the defining moment when “vulgar” Marxism became neo-Marxism), it became synonymous with the free-floating value of some allegedly transcendent virtue, displacing its earlier identity as a particular kind of analysis in loyal service to the explicit values of egalitarianism and enhanced social justice. Thus, neo-Marxist scholasticism was born, *as an established reality* with the institutional privileges of self-appointment to defend, come hell or high water, hypocrisies be damned. And because of this state of unearned (and thus, tenuous) privilege, it was and is just as vulnerable to the confusion of values and vested interests as is the inevitable case with any other ensconced constituency, because self-preservation within the status quo and real revolution against the status quo are exclusive propositions. It is in the construction of analyses that obfuscate this fact of exclusive proposition – manifested in the intellectual elitism and the fetishized semiotics of neo-Marxism that we see their conveniently self-negating cynicism. This form of scholasticism not only cares more for the status of the bureaucratic word at the expense of the dramatic summations of the image, it also prioritizes institutional positionality over the fate of real people. On this score, one cannot help but take note of Nikita Khrushchev’s famous pronouncement, “Comrades! We must abolish the cult of the individual decisively, once and for all!”²⁸

The motives for all of this seem clear: they reside in the need to orchestrate and contain human interaction in such a way that it can be “re-educated” to its new role as a constituent member of a manageable demographic, conveniently losing post-Cold War sight of the anti-capitalist rationales which were once at the polemic core of neo avant-garde art.²⁹ Now, it is the pan-capitalist institution itself that has the most to gain from any demise of the subject, and on this point we must be clear: the postmodern techno-bureaucratic institution is a pan-capitalist rather than anti-capitalist entity, which is to say that it is either a corporation or politically and economically beholden to corporate agendas, and has been so for much longer than has been commonly recognized. As such, it can be expected to exercise only minimal lip service to and have no real sympathy for the goals of social justice and economic democracy, however highly it might pretend to esteem those goals in its mission statements and promotional paperwork. And, I must hasten to reiterate, reeducational social orchestration is almost exclusively exercised in passive-aggressive terms which rely on euphemism and subterfuge to gain positions of leverage via the strategic manufacture of persuasive illusions of consent. In this important aspect, the *pax exsanguinia* of twenty-first century administrativism differs sharply from the explicit authoritarianism of twentieth century fascism. Here, I leave it to the reader to ponder the extent to which this is the only difference.

III

The excessive and misguided faith in the legitimate and redeeming power of the institution is not just the comfortable refuge of neo-Marxists pining away for a revolution that they know (and secretly hope) can never come. It is also shared by Arthur Danto, a well-known art critic and philosopher who was among the very first to campaign on behalf of the idea of art's needing an institutional hothouse to survive in any meaningful way. As a philosopher, he is a proponent of something called *The Institutional Theory of Art*, which he qualifies as being a *non-cognitive theory*, in that it confers and prioritizes identity on the basis of categorical rather than tangible attributes. As Danto has written:

The art world is a discourse of reasons institutionalized, and to be a member of the art world is, accordingly, to have learned what it means to participate in the discourse of reasons for one's culture. In a sense, the discourse of reasons for a given culture is a sort of language game, governed by rules of play, and for reasons parallel to those that hold that only where there are games are there wins and losses and players, so only where there is an artworld is there art.³⁰

Following from this, we have his vision of criticism practically applied:

...works of art are symbolic expressions, in that they embody their meanings. The task of criticism is to identify the meanings and explain their embodiment. So construed, criticism is the discourse of reasons, participation in which defines the art world of The Institutional Theory of Art: to see something as art is to be ready to interpret it in terms of what and how it means. Sometimes the meanings will have been lost and intricate exercises in archeology of the sort at which masters like Aby Warburg or Erwin Panofsky excelled are required to bring them to light, and to reconstitute what would have been transparent to the original art world for these pieces. There is, simply in the nature of their being symbols, a system of communication and an implied audience for the work, and we can identify that audience as the work's art world, in that members of it are conversant in the discourse of reasons that constitute that work as a work, and then as the work is.³¹

On the face of things, this explanation seems to put Danto on a similar theoretical footing to the Constance University *Rezeptionasthetic* theorists Wolfgang

Iser and Hans Robert Jauss: insofar as every work of art is a kind of self-narration addressing itself to an implied narratee, and insofar as both narration and narratee are fused by their location amid a shared horizon of expectations built on a common heritage infrastructure, then the critical task consists of deciding whether or not one is able to be the narratee that a given artistic narration calls for. But there is an important difference between Danto's position and that of the *rezeptiontheorists*. In the case of the latter, the "horizon of expectations" to which works of art address themselves is formed by fluid and non-professional "communities of desire," which are self-selecting through shared affinities. In Danto's formulation, said horizon is necessarily professionalized and exclusive, which is to say that it discards the idea of affinity-driven communities of desire in favor of a self-consciously professionalized discourse of reasons available to a limited coterie.

Although Danto tends to write more frequently about historical rather than contemporary art, he frequently displays a keen instinct for the dialectical interplay that exists between specific works and the larger horizons of expectation to which they address themselves, which is to say that Danto has proven himself capable of being many different kinds of critical narratee. He himself has written: "Monists, Duelists and Pluralists each have arguments and counter arguments, but none of them is decisive: The only defensible position is of tolerating them all, and living with the disjunction."³² Following from this, we must reasonably ask if Danto the art critic practices the pluralism that Danto the philosopher seems to be preaching. The answer is both "yes" and "no." It is "yes" when we observe the variety of media and artistic orientation that Danto attends to in his regular column in *The Nation*. Here, he consistently reveals a keen instinct for the archeological recovery of the conditions of experience which are encoded in various artworks, seeing those conditions as being grounded in the artist's experience of the world and asking for explanation. But the answer is "no" when we take note of the critical blind spot in Danto's oeuvre; the blind spot that centers around the work of various neoexpressionist painters that Danto has disparaged, apparently losing his grip on the pluralism as well as the archeological imperative that he so comfortably articulates when looking at other types of work. In a retrospective remark written in 1986, Danto states:

There was Neo Expressionism, which burst into the consciousness of the artworld after over a decade of what retrospectively seemed stagnation, when there was no particular direction to be discerned, but simply the ceaseless modification of existing forms and styles, minimal perturbations of the already accepted and already understood, where the only available or justifiable ideology seemed to be a benign pluralism...now abruptly, here is Neo Expressionism,

deliriously hailed as a breakthrough after all...it was my conviction that this picture of history was false. I thought: art does not have this kind of future.³³

But what future did Danto accord to art? His well-known view was that art had already fulfilled its historical mission in the manner prophesied by Hegel:

Is it possible that the wild effervescence of the artworld in the past seven or eight decades has been a terminal fermentation of the historical chemistry of which remains to be understood?³⁴

Danto answers his own question when he states:

Hegel's thought was that for a period of time the energies of history coincided with the energies of art, but now history and art must go in different directions, and although art may continue to exist in what I have termed a post-historical fashion, its existence carries no historical significance whatever.³⁵

If this is indeed true, why then do we read such shrill critical alarm about Anselm Kiefer's 1988 retrospective at the Museum of Modern Art?:

Aside from the overall perniciousness of Kiefer's crackpot message, he is in this respect no worse than Salle or Schnabel, both of whom early recognized the benefits of incoherence...The Aristophanic charge is to produce work that is dense, dark, prophetic, heroic, mythic, runic, dangerous, reassuring, accusatory, reinforcing, grandiloquent, too compelling for mere reason to deal with, fraught, fearful, bearing signs that the artist is in touch with powers that will make us whole, and is spiritual, oceanic, urgent, romantic and vast.³⁶

What real reason could Danto have for getting so worked-up about Kiefer's work, or about Neo-Expressionism in general? Could it be that it threatened to put the Aristophanic lie to Hegelian claims of a cosmic historical narrative by anthemically calling for an understanding of a lower-case notion of history, one that is understood as collective autobiography respirating forward and backward, always ongoing? And could it be that adminodoxy needed and still needs the Hegelian fairy tale of History and its (administrativist) End to suppress this highly unstable notion of collective autobiography, in part because it implies collective participation rather than passive consumption of institutionally superordinated meanings? And finally, could it be that the paintings created by these artists held within their own formal structures the exoteric key to their self-explanation, thereby challenging the idea that the work "needs an

explanation” and so challenging the viability of such explainers?

Danto himself gives a clue to how these questions might be answered when he muses:

...it is far from plain that we can separate art from philosophy, inasmuch as its substance is in part constituted by what it is philosophically believed to be. And its insubstantiation by its oppressor may be one of the great victories of political metaphysics.³⁷

This fit of disdain about Neoexpressionism seems odd for a critic who prides in himself such apparent catholicity of taste. Certainly, the archeological task of coming to terms with the intent of such works is not particularly daunting: this was art about panic in the age of Reagan, panic about what the looming end of the Cold War would mean for exemplary artistic subjectivity, and panic about no longer being able to pretend that the avant-garde model of artistic accomplishment was still intact. One would be right to expect that Danto should have found support for his famous thesis about “art at the end of art” in these works, and he should have been able to explain them accordingly. But Neoexpressionism violated another thesis that he holds almost as dear, that being an artwork’s *a priori* need for philosophical explication to bring them into the world of collective consciousness. This can be read as a serious symptom of cynical psychological politics, which is revealed in another statement illustrating an astounding lapse in logic for any thinker who would ascribe to himself the label of analytic philosopher:

A senator who appeared that day on the program (i.e. *The McLaughlin Group*) made the point that artists must be held accountable if supported, as anyone else must be, and my question then was how we distinguish censorship from accountability. The question could not arise save against an acknowledgment of artistic content...if we acknowledge content, and suppose formalist considerations subservient to it, then accountability really is censorship. The senator truly posed a paradox: we are, in the case of art, giving subsidy to something that we cannot, without forfeiting a deep freedom, call to account. We can then stop subsidy, but there is something willful in a government pledged to defend a freedom that it is unprepared to tolerate in art.³⁸

The lapse in logic is in the equation of subsidy with toleration, suggesting that an unsubsidized art cannot exist apart from its subsidization, a claim contradicted by history many times over. This lapse belies Danto’s institutionalist and adminidox loyalties, which, as has been suggested by both George Dickie³⁹ and Richard Wollheim⁴⁰ are far more about a discourse of entrenched preroga-

tives than they are a true discourse of reasons reflecting a real plurality of views.

IV

It seems fair to characterize Danto's critical and philosophical projects as being primarily driven by the attempt to finesse and equilibrate the evolutionary imperatives of Hegelian historical metaphysics with Analytic Philosophy's emphasis on making defensible statements. In other words, he seems to be laboring to make the advocacy of Hegelian metaphysics defensible in the sense of being a verifiably true (as opposed to false) proposition. This is nothing less than an attempt to naturalize what is essentially a theological project, one that must of necessity fail at being both: as theology, it gives no coherent basis for the exercise of decisions based on right reason, and as logic it can only presume a truth content which can never be demonstrated empirically. Pluralism holds the default position that survives this logical impasse, but Danto's institutionally simulated pluralism does a poor job of being truly and vividly pluralistic, fixated as it tends to be on praising a relatively narrow group of artists who came of artistic age in the 1970s. As is the case with the controversial "Institutional Theory of Art," this too reminds of the wag's remark that "philosophy was the art of proving to the powerful that they are right," that being the damning nutshell which has ever since encased the prosecution of scholastic reason. As time would pass, this little piece of common sense also became the basis for yet another common cynicism in art criticism.

As the artworld of the 1990s began to develop its own characteristic identity, it became clear that one of its guiding priorities was to advance a style of art criticism that could actively exonerate itself from the charge of scholasticism, which had almost no utility as a marketing tool. By mid-decade, an art-critical sea change was well underway, giving new emphasis to quasi populist accounts that were supposed to be less intimidating to general readers who presumably were frustrated by the intellectual tenor of more theoretical approaches. Reasons for this sea change are only now coming into a clarified light: the end of the Cold War and the concomitant restructuring of the National Endowment for the Arts created a situation in which it was apparent that the artworld's belated attempt at "outreach" and the building of new constituencies (read: multi-culturalism and identity politics) would not be able to turn the political tide in its favor. Furthermore, little help was coming in the form of various scholastic approaches, which had all but abandoned the world of art in favor of a field called "visual studies" which focused on various manifestations of popular culture. The call went out for a more vivid and accessible writing that could rebuild the public's flagging interest in art, writing which

could mask rather than reveal the ideological imperatives of its subjects. With this demand, the notion of critic as a spokesperson/panegyrist was reborn out of the 1970s idea that one could be an "art writer" without indulging in the untoward judgment mongering of "criticism." This approach has two seemingly opposite faces, which I shall dub the "passive" and the "aggrandizing." First the passive face, initially full of the kind of anxiety expressed by Eleanor Heartney in 1986:

Why do critics feel so dispirited? Twenty-five years ago, Clement Greenberg wielded the power to shape an entire art movement. Ten years ago, Lucy Lippard confessed that although she abhorred the system, she continued to write because it was a way of bringing forward the work of women artists. Today, critics seem fascinated with their own impotence. Are they simply being disingenuous, or are larger social, economic, and political forces conspiring to render their calling irrelevant? How do the circumstances under which criticism is done today affect the results? Is the cynicism of certain critics the logical consequence of such eighties phenomena as instant masterpieces, disco art and celebrity collectors?⁴¹

An answer to this anxiety comes in the form of Jeremy Gilbert-Rolfe's bleak statement of pan-Capitalist reconciliation:

The extreme timidity of today's criticism? The galleries are suffering skyrocketing rents which forces them to make increasingly safer choices in the art which they present. Artists are under ever-increasing pressure to provide that art and the magazines are under pressure to promote it. Writers want to get published, so they have little choice but to also fall into line.⁴²

And into line they do fall. Witness the impudent natterings of Mathew Collings, who brazenly plays the role of mouthpiece-in-residence for the London artscene so energetically marketed by advertising mogul Charles Saatchi. Or look through the pages of *Artforum* and *Art in America* and try to find instances where any writer goes out on even the smallest limb. Taking these paeans at face value would lead one to believe the artworld was producing an endless cornucopia of significant work. But this servile approach has another face as well, for when these so-called art writers matriculate to the position of newspaper critic, they often metamorphize into monsters of self-righteous self-importance motivated by a desire to overcompensate for the humiliations of their previous conditions of servitude. This is the aggrandizing face, which foregrounds the narcissism of the writer's self-account as the preferred alternative to passively fanning the artistic subject's narcissism.

It is interesting to consider the cynical relationship between art-writing-as-neutral-description and art-writing-as-pompous-pronouncement. It is really quite simple: writers start by working for magazines doing descriptive articles, and some graduate to newspaper jobs, at which point the frustration of a long apprenticeship of descriptive cow-towing comes to a head, and they explode into monsters of comic self-importance, knowing that they are backed up by “the power of the media.” Of course, the media only has the power to dictate the-next-big-thing-that-will-change-everything-for-the-next-five-minutes, so some degree of bet hedging is required – hence a constant obsession with career mobility, because those who live by the power of the media are particularly prone to die by the power of the media. The career of Jed Perl offers a good example of this self-aggrandizing style of quasi-autobiographical art writing. Perl initially learned the art critic’s craft at the knee of his mentor, Hilton Kramer, while writing for Kramer’s Olin-foundation-sponsored *New Criterion*. During the 1990s, he served as the regular art critic for the neo-Conservative *New Republic*, where he has consistently bemoaned the artworld for its denigration of “the stand-alone values” of works of art (not exactly code for the antique doctrine of Greenbergian autonomy, but close enough) because we have been seduced into celebrating context-determined trivia by a satanic army of opportunistic packagers. So far, so good. Why then do we care that the installation of Bill Jensen’s paintings at Mary Boone is “too spare,”⁴³ or that the Metropolitan Museum’s installation of the work of Camille Corot “comes dangerously close to turning him into a broken-down nineteenth-century period piece”⁴⁴ And for that matter, how can one even attempt to describe anything whose essential value is said to lie in how it “stands alone”?

On the other hand, Perl’s *New Republic* work does offer many momentary flashes of clear and worthwhile perception: “Then Warholism and Reaganomics fell into bed together. Then their love child, Robert Mapplethorpe, was transformed from a clever aesthete into a martyr at the alter of political correctness.”⁴⁵ Here we can see that Perl’s ability to turn a clever phrase is enviable. The problem is that he doesn’t know how to run very far with those moments of insight, and thus fails to weave the warp-and-weft of circumstance and observation into a sufficiently elaborate narrative of consciousness, or to transmute it into a generative perspective. Instead, he opts to dump his trite “ad verecundiam” misgivings into his reader’s lap, as if their “free-standing” self-importance were of some automatic consequence. And this is the rub: a critic working during a time of downward spiraling artistic decadence must do more than huff-and-puff – and pump the fortunes of artists who are acknowledged as his personal associates – he or she must also detail the trajectory and velocity of the fall, and take careful Petronian note of the complex scenery which passes while perdition looms ever larger. Who, apart from a trained psychoanalyst, would guess that the man who most loudly reviles the philis-

tines is himself a philistine? Certainly not the editors of the *New Republic*.

Of course, the distance between the overly demonized philistine and the laudably democratic populist is an exceedingly short one, and very few critics have made any serious effort to address their remarks to the slippery space that exists between the two positions. The most noteworthy example of such an effort resides in the work of Dave Hickey, which has come to an unlikely prominence during the second half of the 1990s. Hickey, coincidentally, has also mourned the passing of the mythical condition of "standing alone."⁴⁶ Hickey came into artworld prominence with the 1993 publication of his book *The Invisible Dragon: Four Essays on Beauty*. Certainly, this was a startling title and topic for a book of art criticism written during the first half of the so-called "politically correct" 1990s, and one suspects that this was so for calculate effect, because the real substance of the four essays had much less to do with any attempt to articulate the character and contours of a post-modern theory of beauty⁴⁷ than it had to do with an attempt to advance demurring questions about the real motives of arts institutions during the post-Cold War era. Much of the first and second sections of this essay owes a significant debt to the questions that Hickey advanced with such literary flair in that book, although fairness also reminds us that those questions were already well in play before *Invisible Dragon* was published.⁴⁸ Nonetheless, Hickey deserves much credit for challenging administrative self-congratulation in a vivid and persuasive way; in so doing, he also has done much to revive a general interest in contemporary art criticism.

Clearly, art institutions deserve all of the scorn that Hickey has heaped upon them (as well as some that he hasn't), but once Hickey's laudable anti-institutionalist agenda becomes transparent, another kind of easy cynicism begins to reveal itself, exposing the absence of a well-developed metaphysics of art. Hickey has stated that "saying the market is corrupt is like saying that the cancer patient has a hangnail,"⁴⁹ drawing a parallel between the bureaucratic institution's "monitoring of desire" with the market's "monitoring of appearances."⁵⁰ This is supposed to be true because the market allegedly allows for greater opportunities for symbolic subversion because it only cares for "how things look," rather than about "what it means,"⁵¹ but this is really true only if we allow Hickey his facile dichotomy of a virtuous market run by risk-taking art dealers (of which Hickey was one) vs. an infantilizing bureaucracy run by control-obsessed civil service workers. In other words, we are asked to assume that plutocratic oligarchy and bureaucratic theocracy are the only positions that can rightfully draw critical allegiance, and that oligarchy is clearly the preferable alternative. It is important to note here that no distinction is made between democracy and oligarchy, implying that Hickey thinks that a citizen's vote and his pocketbook are of the same egalitarian stripe, which is, of course, nonsense. As Minou Roufail has written, "Viewed in terms of the larger

American rage for markets, though, Hickey seems less like an innovative thinker, and more like the Fred Barnes of art criticism: In his universe, all things bad come from elite liberal institutions like government and museums; all things good emanate from ordinary people working through their trusted democratic medium, the free market."⁵²

But the real fact is that these two seemingly opposed engines of "art support" have operated hand-in-glove for at least four decades, so assuming that one can save the artworld from the other is wishful to say the least, particularly now that the so-called market is so deeply in the thrall of a corporate cash cow run by a new kind of patron called "the art consultant," one who evaluates visual experience solely in terms of how it serves the anesthetizing functions of boardroom ambiance and casino decor. When Hickey is delivering approbation about contemporary art (and it is remarkable how infrequently he writes about the work of living artists, preferring various pop cultural phenomena such as jazz, rock-and-roll and Las Vegas spectacles), we are left to wonder how these vivid declarations of personal preference are to be taken as being anything more significant than that. Perhaps they need not and should not be in the over idealized democratic universe that Hickey inhabits, for, as he has stated:

As for myself, I am a Southerner and no kind of Modernist, since the inheritance of European modernism is deeply imbricated with the German idea of cult, or culture, as opposed to the Anglo-French idea of civilization. All of my criticism, in fact, aspires to mitigate the power of culture by bringing its out-of-awareness permissions and prescriptions into a condition of social awareness. I am rigorously opposed to the idea of tribal believing and communitarian culture. I hate that mysterioso stuff. Any organic, extralegal idea of culture deprioritizes the body of the democratic citizen: it is the enemy of secular consciousness, the enemy of the intellectual anxiety of secular urban life in general.⁵³

Never mind that the "intellectual anxiety of urban life" *is* the dialectical friction that occurs between "oedipean" culture and the "sibling aggregation" called society, and never mind that the best art represents a dialectical finessing of the allegorical imperatives of the former with the documentary imperatives of the latter. This is precisely the fulcrum where a pragmatics of art fails to be a metaphysics of art, and for this reason we see Hickey pulling punches that need to be landed, for it is not the place of serious criticism to serve the blindly sensible intuitions of the market any more than it should serve the empty prerogatives of bureaucratic entitlement. Rather, criticism should see itself as being served by these agencies, and treat them with whatever scorn it deems necessary when they fail that role. In other words, we can acknowledge the

fact that it is an unavoidable given that works of art must of necessity be either commodities or tokens of bureaucratic gamesmanship, for those are the portals through which art enters the modern and/or postmodern world. The real importance of criticism lies in the way that it can insist upon and reveal how art can and should be something more than those things—meaning that, even though criticism can never be disinterested or disengaged, it should strive for its own independence of voice, one that encompasses, subsumes and transforms the experience of art into a durable symbol of exalted meaning. This is not an anti-democratic requirement: in fact, it is the opposite, for we should remember the adage that says that “art is news that stays news,” recognizing that there is no way to build an actionable democratic consensus around anything other than a resonant idea that lives eloquently in its own time and beyond that time as well. A pragmatics of art that eschews a metaphysics of art backs away from this fact, substituting the easy prerogatives of simple narcissism (Warhol: “Art is about liking things”) for the somewhat thornier advancement of a symbolically persuasive plan for collective action. Without appeal and recourse to this “cultural” fact of art, the stated preferences of any critic are about as worthwhile as the public announcement of his or her favorite flavors of ice cream.

Hickey’s theory of beauty seems to want to be this kind of metaphysics, but by virtue of saying everything, it says almost nothing. It elides the thorny issue of the relation of terror to the sublime (excepting for several politicized references to how it operates amid Gilles Deleuze’s dialectic of sadism and masochism), just as it remains hazy regarding the sublime’s relation to beauty as opposed to mere prettiness. In the end, Hickey’s valuation of beauty lies only in its ability to subvert an undifferentiated idea of order with an equally undifferentiated notion of desire: “...if our worlds change at all, they do so on those singular occasions when desire shatters the hegemony of taste. If we ever know ourselves at all, I suspect, it is only in those moments when we discover exactly what we want—when we encounter that one thing that we never could have imagined, that does everything, and nothing like it will do.”⁵⁴ Here, we see a good example of Hickey’s widely revered prosody in high grandiloquent mode; never mind that it conveys a rather obvious insight, and that it quickly drops its own line of reason without further elaboration. Here we would assume that Hickey’s reliance on the authority of the ostensive voice would place him in harmony with the Clement Greenberg, but apparently, this is not the case:

Take the example of Clement Greenberg. You have probably heard of him. He was an art critic from the postwar era whose practices and preferences were totally discredited and defunct by the time that I entered the artworld in 1967. Academic critics, however, by laying siege to Greenberg’s gutted and abandoned citadel for the

past thirty years, have invested his misty bullshit with such a disproportionate level of social value that the waning authority of academic criticism (due to bad investment) has occasioned a grass roots recrudescence of Greenberg's favorite stuff: color field painting, which, even as we speak, is being translated into money.⁵⁵

It sounds almost as momentous as Mark Anthony pronouncing eulogy over the corpse of Julius Caesar, but the facts that he takes for granted are easily debated. For example, it is true that the influence of Greenberg's formalism was waning in 1967, but it would be "at least" another full decade before it could seriously be said to have been discredited: witness its repeated revival in Frank Stella's *Working Space* (1986) and Michael Fried's *Absorption and Theatricality in the Age of Diderot* (1990). And any resurgence of color field painting that may have come and gone during the late 1990s (the work of Monique Prieto, for example) owes a much larger debt to the connotation-and irony-laced work of Peter Halley than it does to any resurgent cult of chromatic purity. Yet, it also opens up to another statement that is fraught with possibility, that Hickey would prefer "honest fakery to fake honesty,"⁵⁶ another false dichotomy that excludes the possibility of an honest non-fakery, but one not quite as glib as it sounds when given this elaboration:

Finally, we realize that Antonioni has transformed the visual language of Italian painting—of Guido Reni and Veronese—into a kind of music. And this is troubling to us because "serious movies" in our culture traditionally speak in the language of Rembrandt; they aspire to give us the invisible subtext, the inference of troubled interiority, the psychological truth made visible on the character's anguished face. Antonioni's characters, however, more closely resemble the figures on those antique paintings. Like the heroes and heroines in Tiepolo, Antonioni's characters are handsome and self-contained; they live completely in their bodies and inhabit compositions of similar elegance...this psychological opacity is routinely taken as a signifier of the characters' "shallowness."⁵⁷

And here, we see a glimpse of Hickey's other, less remarked-upon *bete noir*, which is subjectivism, forming the confusing shadow side of his flamboyant consternation for academies and institutions. This leads us to ponder what Hickey could mean when he states that "...the great subject of late-twentieth-century cultural speculation...[is] the historical relationship to secular power in the social realm."⁵⁸ Who or what is that power to be exercised over, if it is not the introspective subject striving for the autonomy of his or her own interiority? To seriously answer that question is to admit that "the" real great issue in post-Cold War art and art criticism is the articulation, dramatization and de-

fense of the prerogatives of the creative autonymic subject (whose self-experience forms the very definition of interiority), empowering it to withstand the administrativist forces of exonymic trivialization and objectification. It does not matter if those forces come from the chain-letter economy of the administered art market, or from the palace intrigues of neomonarchical institution, for on this score it is critical folly to content oneself to pick one's poison without striving for a persuasive third alternative.

These are vexing issues, and my intent in bringing them here is not merely the venting and fanning of a baseless *ressentiment* at recent art criticism's lapses in courage, sincerity and effort. Rather, my purpose is to hold critical feet to a critical fire in hopes that they will grow less cold in their quest for an Archimedian ground to stand upon. Just as Clement Greenberg found it necessary to cast aspersions on his colleague's efforts when he made the twin claims that Harold Rosenberg's work was "dogged by a fatality of nonsense...a fatality more properly called a comedy [of]...amphigoric art interpretation"⁵⁹ while castigating Lawrence Alloway's work for its uncritical embrace of "exaggerated newness,"⁶⁰ my own ax grinds toward the cynicism that begs to be saved from itself by new ideals. Just as Carter Ratcliff was able to identify a species of critics that he dubbed "Cassandra critics"⁶¹ all of whom "pronounces on the scene with outrage, sorrow and superior detachment,"⁶² I see another species flourishing at the end of another decade of a very different kind of flash and glamour, a cynical species that might best be called "Ganymede critics" as a way of indicating how they function as the rhetorical cup-bearers to the pan-capitalist gods of market and institution. Certainly, they can defend their positions by saying that they only seek understanding, and that judgement is an impediment to same. I counter that claim by saying that if we refuse to judge with our opinions grounded in cogent argument, we can be rest assured that determinations not to our liking will be made for us by forces much larger and more diffuse than ourselves. In any event, by calling attention to what I think is the cynicism of today's Ganymede critics, I hope to engender a space for the kind of thinking which will lead to a necessary uncircling of the artworld's wagons, pointing them toward a horizon which is marked by a recognition of (and renewed respect for) art's psycho-moral necessity. Art's necessity is in fact exaggerated by the emerging circumstances of post-urban life, rife as it is with the ever-growing conflict between the diverging imperatives of (too-much) information and (too few opportunities for real) experience. More than ever before, we need persuasive symbols that can connect and fuse these two polarities, and art criticism non-cynically understood remains the only possible force that can publicly engender and insist upon the fulfillment of that need. So, if a few sacred cows are left behind to feed buzzard and dust bin in the process of uncircling the artworld's wagons, this essay will gladly chalk the loss up to the unavoidable exigencies of the moment: a relatively small

venture gladly exchanged for the potential of a great gain.

Notes

- 1 Charles Dickens, *Martin Chuzzlewit*, (1844), edited with an introduction by P.N. Furbank, (New York: Penguin Books 1968) p. 75.
- 2 Peter Sloterdijk, *Critique of Cynical Reason*, (1983) trans. Michael Eldred, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987) p. 122.
- 3 Petronius, "Among the Rhetoricians" from *The Satyricon* (c. 64 C.E.) trans. William Arrowsmith, (New York: Mentor books, 1959) pp. 21-22.
- 4 The term "Urban Entertainment Destinations" (or "Urban Entertainment Centers") is taken from Louis M. Brill, "Entertainment in the Public Realm, *Funworld* (June, 1998): 43-47.
- 5 One imagines the inexorable growth of dutiful legions of art professionals all marching in thrall to the National Endowment of the Art's founding oxymoron: "To Support and Encourage the Diversity and Excellence of American Art" (1965). This boilerplate language lurks more or less verbatim in the mission statements of membership-driven professional organizations such as "The National Assembly of Local Arts Agencies, The National Association of Artist's Organizations," and "The National Council of Art Administrators," all eliding the fact that the categorical ideas of diversity and excellence are irreconcilable and mutually exclusive antagonists, even as they both resist precise definition apart from playing the other's opposite in a dialectic of decadent blame. This contradiction provides a great service to administrativism: if a given presentation can be said to be deficient in "excellence," then "the need for diversity" is marshaled as a legitimizing excuse, and if it were not as diverse as it could be, then its shortcomings could be explained away by an appeal to a perpetually undefined notion of "excellence." And, even presupposing that their intrinsic antagonism could somehow be finessed or overcome, it still would not answer the other question to the issue of contradiction which vexes the art of the past thirty years: how can one seriously defend the presumption of an "institutional avant-garde?"
- 6 Barbara Rose's blunt reminiscence of Harold Szeemann's *Documenta V* (1972) is worth noting here: "Ugh! The end of art. I think that *Documenta 5* is very important because art became an art rather than an object. So it was the triumph of total theatricality. And, also, it showed the incredible growing power of the curator—in this case, Szeemann. It was amazing: the whole artworld now followed *Documenta*. Critics no longer had any power to influence taste." Quoted in Amy Newman, *Challenging Art: ARTFORUM 1962-1974* (New York: 2000), p. 354.
- 7 Ursula Meyer, *Conceptual Art* (New York: 1970), p. 8. I am unaware of any detailed study suggesting conceptual art's displacement of production with interpretation. Such a study would inevitably point to the fact that conceptual art did not so much do away with what Joseph Kosuth called "the middleman" (i.e. the critic) as it created the opportunity for those theretofore underpaid middlemen to do away with the need for the overpaid (?) production of art.

(Kosuth's remark is quoted on page viii.)

- 8 Quoted in Newman, op. cit., pp. 365-366. Among the "issues" that Coplans referred to were the translation of critical analysis as the lingua franca of artistic success in a post-studio artworld and the questions pertaining to the extent to which advanced art had been co-opted into implied ideological service to the Vietnam War, and by extension, the Cold War as well. Max Kozloff, Associate Editor of *Artforum* during much of the Coplans period, stated: "John (Coplans), to be sure, shared certain attitudes with Phil (Lieder), most notably antipathy toward the material interests of the art world. But rather than (be) inclined to flee from them, or ignore them, he wanted to use them, and yet, eventually, to hold them to account" (p. 365). To a large extent, the intractability of such a reconciliation was initially signaled in an essay by *Artforum* founding editor Phil Lieder titled "How I Spent My Summer Vacation, or Art and Politics in Nevada, Berkeley, San Francisco and Utah (Read About it in *Artforum*!)," *Artforum*, (September, 1970). These questions later came to an explicit head when the magazine published Eva Cockroft's controversial essay "Abstract Expressionism: Weapon of the Cold War" (June, 1974): 39-41.
- 9 I write this in the immediate aftermath of the momentous multimillion dollar lawsuit against Philip Morris, and this has led me to remember how that multinational corporation was such an early and aggressive pioneer in the area of corporate funding for the arts in general and of the contemporary artworld in particular (going at least as far back as its 1969, when its European subsidiary single-handedly sponsored Harold Szeeman's landmark exhibition titled "When Attitudes Become Form," at the Basel Kunstmuseum. This exhibition, along with Szeemann's *Documenta V* of 1972, remains the single most important public presentation of so-called conceptual art, and remains a model of curatorial practice that infuses current Biennial-type exhibitions, especially the 1999 and 2001 Venice Biennials, both of which employing Szeeman as their venerable artistic director. Although Hans Haacke did pieces that at various junctures revealed the trustees of the Guggenheim museum as slumlords (Shapolsky et. al., 1971), as well as the invidious corporate motives of Mobil Oil's support of an exhibition of African Art at the Metropolitan Museum (*Metromobiltan*, 1985), he never bit the nicotine-stained hand that has so consistently fed the contemporary art world.
- 10 For an elaboration of my idea of adminodoxy in its relation to contemporary art criticism, see Mark Van Proyen, "Art Criticism: Where's The Beef?," *New Art Examiner* (July/August, 2001).
- 11 Sloterdijk, op. cit. pp. 5-6.
- 12 Ibid., p. 7.
- 13 Donald Kuspit has written: "For Baudelaire, 'there is never a moment when criticism is not in contact with metaphysics,' with a sense of 'the absolute.' This 'good' (of criticism) is that it knows and measures art by the profoundest standards of understanding and value. That criticism is the realm which protects and maintains absolute standards, applying them uncompromisingly, not only leads to the question, 'Does a given art measure up, and if not, why not?' but also to the more threatening, more urgent and hidden question, 'What is the good

of art?" ("Artist and Critic: Never the Twain Shall Meet," in *The Structurist*, No. 25-26, (1985-86): 31. Jeremy Gilbert-Rolfe recently echoed this sentiment when he discussed "the implicit and explicit purposes of criticism." The implicit dimension was "an evocation of a state of affairs that is yet to be "operating under the explicit guise of offering "explanation and analyses of specific works of art." (Quoted in Van Proyen, "Where's The Beef?") In other words, critics should use the particularized occasion of journalistic reportage to subtly argue on behalf of a more general and far-reaching metaphysics of art.

Kuspit again: "But there are critics who pick philosophical fights with art, as Baudelaire did. They always skeptically test the theoretical significance of the art that they admire—burdening it with weighty ideas, challenging it to lift them. Such critics test art by making explicit what is implicit in it, and feeding it back to the art." ("Artist and Critic," p. 33.) It should be noted here that to require a metaphysics of art for a non-cynical art criticism does not necessarily mean that such critics would be bound to be "partisan critics who challenge the authority of this art because they prefer that art." ("Artist and Critic," p. 34.) Indeed, it is preferable to apply one's metaphysics of art in a dialectical rather than dogmatic fashion; that is, to write as a way of staging the metaphysical conflict between the work of art understood as "a construction in ethics," and criticism's ontologically-driven sense of itself in the world. For an account of the procedural workings of dialectical criticism, see Donald Kuspit, "The Necessary Dialectical Critic" (1979) in *The Critic as Artist: The Intentionality of Art*, (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1984), 109-125.

- 14 As Joseph Kosuth has famously written: "In fact, it is Marcel Duchamp whom we can credit with giving art its own identity." Quoted in Thierry De Duve, "Echoes of the Readymade: Critique of Pure Modernism," in Martha Buskirk and Mignon Nixon (eds.), *The Duchamp Effect*, (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1995), p. 95.
- 15 Hal Foster, "The Crux of Minimalism," in *The Return of the Real* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1997), p.42.
- 16 Quoted in *ibid.*, p. 43.
- 17 Irving Sandler, *Art of the Post-Modern Era: From the Late 1960s to the early 1990s* (New York: Harper Collins, 2000), p. 341.
- 18 Max Kozloff, "The Authoritarian Personality in Modern Art," *Artforum* (May, 1974): 44-49.
- 19 Charles Baudelaire, "The Painter of Modern Life," (1863) in *Baudelaire: Selected Writings on Art and Artists*, edited with an introduction by P.E. Charvet, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1972), p. 421.
- 20 Victor Davis Hanson and John Heath, *Who Killed Homer?* (New York: 2000), p. 249.
- 21 T.J. Clark, "All the Things I Said About Duchamp: A Response to Benjamin Buchloh," in *The Duchamp Effect*, *op. cit.*, pp. 226-227.
- 22 Donald Kuspit, "Conflicting Logics: Twentieth Century Studies at the Cross-roads," in *Psychoanalysis and Contemporary Thought*, (Fall, 1999), p. 538. This restates a well-known point in Kuspit's thought, which has always sought to maintain a high level of criticality without succumbing to institutional—that is,

authoritarian—dogma. In “Artist and Critic: Never the Twain Shall Meet,” op. cit., p. 35), Kuspit goes on to explicate the basis of this view by stating that “The only reason for being an art critic rather than a psycho-social critic—a critic of the kind of psychology that exists in a given society—is that art seems a microcosm or alembic of the conflicts and tensions that are constituent of a particular kind of social self. There seems to be no other place where all the forces of the psycho-social creation of selfhood seem so concentrated: where the effort to consciously make a social product leads to as great a revelation of the unconscious as well as conscious forces that go into producing a certain kind of psychosocial being. In the work of art, the reason for being in a particular world is half-consciously and half-unconsciously inscribed—half-openly and half-obscurely revealed. This is the only reason art is special and the only reason for attending to it critically...Art remains one of the activities where a certain dream of reality and certain kind of self are most subtly articulated. In art the physiognomy of psychosocial dreams is shown with paradoxical subtlety, especially when art is made with high energy and great technical skill.” The important point here is that administrativism and the cynical criticisms which serve administrativist imperatives both seek to undermine and/or suppress this kind of artistic condensation and transmutation of experience, denying and/or displacing its identity as psychosocial dream with a pseudorealistic spectacularization of its triviality, be it the semiological triviality of its status as pseudo-historical relic or the triviality of an antisubjectivist decoration which makes a cynical fetish of the artwork’s architectural functionalism. In so doing, they undermine the only reason that art—and by extension, experience itself—requires any critical attention at all: “all the better to administer you, my dear!” As Kuspit has written, “Anybody can be creative and make interesting photographs or objects that would engage somebody or other, but not many people can make works of art that can make one critically conscious of the world...Critical consciousness is consciousness of society and its effect on one in order to survive and hold one’s own in it, and develop one’s being in all its humanness despite society’s inhumanity.” (*The Cult of the Avant-Garde Artist* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1993), p. 99.) A telling by-product of the will-to-administrativism in postmodern art is that, by programmatic if not outrightly intentional default, it tends to blithely and in fact enviously mirror the style and iconography of corporately sponsored mass entertainment, making that entertainment look much better than it actually is in terms of its ability to provide and distribute meaningful symbols of psychic redemption and “legitimate(?)” social critique, however cartoonish those symbols may in fact be. An instructive project would be to test this hypothesis by seriously comparing the real wit, trenchancy and sophistication of the social and political satires presented in animated television programs such as *The Simpsons*, *South Park* or *Dilbert* with the absurdly simplistic sloganism of “socially conscious” artists such as Barbara Kruger, Jenny Holzer or Robbie Conal.

- 23 Rosalind E. Krauss, “Post-Structuralism and the Paraliterary,” in *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1985), p. 295.

- 24 Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, "Introduction," in *Neo-Avant-Garde and Culture Industry* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2000), p. xxi.
- 25 Dennis Cass, "Let's Go: Silicon Valley," *Harpers* (July, 2000): 59.
- 26 Herbert Marcuse, *The Aesthetic Dimension* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1976), p. 1.
- 27 *Ibid.*, p. 6.
- 28 Nikita Khrushchev, "Speech to the Secret Session of the 20th Congress of the Communist Party," (1956) quoted in Tony Augarde (ed.) *The Oxford Dictionary of Modern Quotations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), p. 165. Jean Paul Sartre responded to the inhumane excess of this statement when he wrote (in 1960) "The fact is that dialectical materialism cannot deprive itself much longer of the one privileged meditation which permits it to pass from general and abstract determinations to particular traits of the single individual. Psychoanalysis...is a method which is primarily concerned with establishing the way in which a child lives his family relations inside a given society." Jean Paul Sartre, *The Search for Method*, trans. Hazel E. Barnes (New York: Philosophical Library, 1963), p. 61.
- 29 As Donald Kuspit has written: "the artist-re-educator argues that it (i.e. the world) can be changed into a higher world...The artist-re-educator takes his place among the twentieth-century's revolutionaries, visionaries who propose to destroy the given world—which no doubt has its miseries and problems—to proclaim a brave, new one, which, of course has trouble arriving, leaving us living in the wreck of the old world." "The Good Enough Artist: Beyond the Mainstream Avant-Garde Artist," (1990) *Signs of Psyche in Modern and Post-Modern Art* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1993), p. 292. The conflicted motives of the world-re-educator artist are further analyzed in "The Geometrical Cure: Mondrian and Malevich" in *The Cult of the Avant-Garde Artist*, pp. 40-52. We can learn much from Kuspit's characterization of the psychodynamic undercurrents of the high modernist geometrical idealism as it is found in the work of Kasimir Malevich: "Malevich's insular geometry seems to lay down the Procrustean law to the spectator. It is the cult object of the self-proclaimed leader, a coercive fetish, a geometrical bludgeon compelling obedience...Malevich's one-dimensional total geometry, with its rigid perfection, is the ideal metaphor for the narcissist's hermetic self-containment. Narcissism is a hollow universality" (pp. 51-52). I would assert that postmodern administrativism should be read as a logical extension of Malevich's "hollow universality," i.e. the hypocritical low-water mark of the avant-gardist embrace of art as "revolution by other means" — that is, revolution by passive-aggressive inculcation of the tropes of loss-of-impulse-control and narcissistic hyper-objectification of the self into the social sphere, "naturalizing" its lack of autonymic functionality into something resembling a virtue. By pointing to this extension, special emphasis is given to the insufficiently commented upon fact that the *agency* for this invidious project of naturalization has shifted from the realm of the artist-theoretician to that of the techno-bureaucratic *administrator-theoretician*, which now views the work of artists as supporting productions which can only gain social coherence when they are administered into social consciousness. Needless to say, this is a significant shift: significant because the

- real point to such efforts is to valorize and encourage a perverse infantilism that can be counted on to sustain a protracted dependence upon (and malleable identification with) the simulated specter of the institutional parent, owned and operated by administrativist protocols in the manner of a business.
- 30 Arthur Danto, "The Art World Revisited," in *Beyond the Brillo Box: The Visual Arts in Post-Historical Perspective* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1992), p. 46. For the early basis of Danto's version of an "Institutional Theory of Art," see Arthur Danto, "The Artworld," *Journal of Philosophy* (October 18, 1964): 573-589. Also note the effort that Danto puts into distancing his version of the ITA from the "creative misunderstanding" of it that has been advanced by George Dickie, who is less concerned about the art world's "discourses of reasons" than he is about holding of power to designate from within that discourse ("Dickie's Theory implies a kind of empowering elite and is a distant relative of the Non-Cognitive Theory of moral language" (*Art World Revisited*, p. 38). Dickie has subsequently disavowed the significance of the distinction: "Certainly, in many of his remarks Danto is not concerned with what is required for something to be a work of art, but rather just with what is required for someone to realize that a certain kind of thing can be a work of art." George Dickie, "A Tale of Two Artworlds," in Mark Rollins, ed., *Danto and His Critics* (Oxford: 1993), p. 75.
- 31 Danto, *ibid.*, p. 41.
- 32 Arthur Danto, "Learning to Live with Pluralism," in *Beyond the Brillo Box*, p. 220.
- 33 Arthur Danto, *The Philosophical Disenfranchisement of Art* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), p. xiii.
- 34 *Ibid.*, p. 85.
- 35 *Ibid.*, p. 84.
- 36 Arthur Danto, "Anselm Kiefer," *The Nation* (January 2, 1989): 26-27.
- 37 Danto, *The Philosophical Disenfranchisement of Art*, p. 5.
- 38 Arthur Danto, "Censorship and Subsidy in the Arts," in *Beyond the Brillo Box*, pp. 176-177.
- 39 See George Dickie, "A Tale of Two Artworlds," in *Danto and His Critics*, *op. cit.*, pp. 73-78. "I do not see how this (i.e. an inferential criticism based on Danto's idea of a discourse of reasons) could be right because the existence of works of art seems independent of the existence of critics. On the other hand, the existence of critics certainly seems to be dependent on the existence of works of art." (p.78)
- 40 See Richard Wollheim, "Danto's Gallery of Indiscernibles," *ibid.*, p. 28-38. "Thought experiments of the kind that Danto is so gifted in designing show us very effectively that a certain assumption can be transgressed in a particular case. They do so because they get us to envisage in a peepshow-like fashion the actual transgression. However, by the same token, in virtue of their stubbornly perceptual character, they have no power to show us the other side of the matter. They have no power to show us that the assumption cannot be universally transgressed, in the very respect in which the thought experiment shows that it can be transgressed in an on-off way. It is for this reason that I

- said that Danto thinks that his thought-experiments are more conclusive than they possibly could be." (p. 34).
- 41 Eleanor Heartney, "High Priest or Media Flak: The Art Critic in the Age of Hype" in *Critical Condition: American Art at the Crossroads* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1997), pp. 65-66.
- 42 Jeremy Gilbert-Rolfe, quoted in Van Proyen, "Where's the Beef," op. cit.
- 43 Jed Perl, "Born Under Saturn," in *Eyewitness: Report from an Art World in Crisis*, (New York: Atheneum, 2000), p. 89.
- 44 Jed Perl, "Painting is a Woman," in *ibid.*, p. 216.
- 45 Jed Perl, "Artists and Audiences" in *ibid.*, p. 25.
- 46 Dave Hickey, "Unbreak My Heart, An Overture," in *Air Guitar: Essays on Art and Democracy* (Los Angeles: Art Issues Press, 1997), p. 9.
- 47 In "Enter the Dragon: On the Vernacular of Beauty," in *Enter the Dragon: Four Essays on Beauty* (Los Angeles: Art Issues Press, 1993). Hickey states that "Beauty was the agency that caused visual pleasure in the beholder" (p.11). He later gave this grand generality some shape when he stated "...for more than four centuries subsequent to the rise of easel painting, images argued for things – for doctrines, rights, privileges, ideologies, territories and reputations. For the duration of this period, a loose, protean collection of tropes and figures signifying 'beauty' functioned as the *pathos* that recommended the *logos* and the *ethos* of visual argumentation to our attention" (pp. 17-18). "Now it seems, that lost generosity, like Banquo's ghost, is doomed to haunt our discourse about contemporary art – no longer required to recommend images to our attention or to insinuate them into our vernacular – and no longer welcome to try...One must suspect, I think, that we are being denied any direct appeal to beauty, for much the same reason that Caravaggio's supplicants were denied appeal to the Virgin: to sustain the jobs of bureaucrats...The priests of the new church are not so generous. Beauty in their domain is altogether elsewhere, and we are left counting the beads and muttering the texts of academic sincerity" (pp. 20-21). Moving back in the direction of generality, he later stated that "Beauty is the optimum bodily experience of the world, during which we become aware, in a positive way, of our out-of-awareness cultural responses to the world. Ugliness is its contrapostive, making us aware of our bodily dread, so the difference between them is moot... Without one or the other, however, or some commingling of both, there is no 'experience of art' for me. I must add the caveat that I am not much interested in works of art that simply assert the status quo, that portray what we all agree is beautiful beautifully, or vice versa." Quoted in Mark Van Proyen, "A Conversation with Dave Hickey, Critic" in *Artweek* (April, 1996): 13.
- 48 See Robert Hughes, *The Culture of Complaint* (New York: 1993), which was published earlier that same year of the Whitney Museum's infamous "Politically Correct" Biennial. For an earlier challenge to the institutional orthodoxy of the "politically correct," see Donald Kuspit, "Art and the Moral Imperative," *New Art Examiner* (January, 1991), pp. 18-25 and "The Good Enough Artist," *Art Criticism* (Spring, 1990). "What originally represented an attempt to articulate, in an artistic way that seemed appropriate to the modern world, a universal

existential problem, has become an avant-garde mandarinatone," leading to the conclusion that "Avant-Gardism, as a doctrine, is a form of madness." See "The Good Enough Artist," *Signs of Psyche in Modern and Post Modern Art* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1993), pp. 293, 298. At the 77th Annual Meeting of the Collège Art Association held in San Francisco in February of 1989, there was a session devoted to the idea of a Moral Imperative in Art featuring papers given by Amy Baker Sandback, John Baldessari, Luis Camnitzer, Suzi Gablick, Jeff Koons and Robert Storr. These papers were published in *Art Criticism* 7:1 (Spring, 1991): 3-41. For an interesting contemporary antecedent to Hickey's theory of beauty, see Kenneth Baker, "A Use for Beauty," *Artforum* (January, 1984): 65-66. Following Wiliam S. Wilson's reading of Northrop Frey's idea of art as "the transfer of imaginative energy," Baker writes, "...the beauty of a work of art proves itself as an increase in the available "reality," in the enlarged area of experience that can become common ground when people try conversationally to reach agreement about what qualifies a work as 'beautiful'" (p. 65). "Beauty in works of art is rarely a matter of style. It is not present in the same sense as art objects are since it interacts with our attention and our words in ways that objects themselves do not. The beauty of a work of art is a responsibility passed from artist to spectators through a medium. The artist does not have to strive for beauty to find it manifest in his or her work, for it is not a matter of decoration, design, or technique. It is a matter of getting things right, whatever that happens to involve" (p. 66).

49 Hickey, *Enter the Dragon*, p. 14.

50 *Ibid.*, p. 16.

51 *Ibid.*, p. 16.

52 Minou Roufail, "The Poetry of Commerce," in *The Baffler* (Spring 2001): 46-47.

53 Quoted in Van Proyen, "Interview with Dave Hickey, Critic," *op. cit.*, pp. 13-14.

54 Dave Hickey, "The Real Michelangelo," *Art Issues* (January-February 1998): 13.

55 Dave Hickey, "Dealers," in *Air Guitar*, *op. cit.*, p. 111.

56 Dave Hickey, "A Rhinestone as Big as the Ritz," in *Air Guitar*, *op. cit.*, p. 52.

57 Hickey, "The Real Michelangelo," p. 13.

58 Dave Hickey, "Moving Pictures," *Bookforum* (Summer, 2001): 7.

59 Clement Greenberg, "How Art Writing Earns its Bad Name" (1962) in John O' Brian ed., *Clement Greenberg: The Collected Essays and Criticism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), pp. 136, 138.

60 *Ibid.*, p. 142.

61 Carter Ratcliff, "Dramatis Personae, part 1: Dim Views, Dire Warnings, Art-World Cassandras," *Art in America* (September, 1985): 9.

62 *Ibid.*, p. 9.

The Psychoanalytic Construction of Beauty

Donald Kuspit

I think the best way of understanding the basic difference between the psychoanalytic approach to beauty and the traditional approach is by beginning with two quotations, one neatly summarizing the traditional approach, the other stating the essentials of the psychoanalytic approach. The first quotation is from an essay by the novelist, literary critic, and philosopher William Gass, the second, as you might expect, is from Sigmund Freud, the founder of psychoanalysis. Rather touchingly and defiantly in the present situation, in which art seems to have become the servant of ideology, at the expense of beauty, Gass, in an essay called "The Baby or the Botticelli" – the original title "Goodness Knows Nothing of Beauty" is more to the point – declares:

I think it is one of the artist's obligations to create as perfectly as he or she can, not regardless of all other consequences, but in full awareness, nevertheless, that in pursuing other values – in championing Israel or fighting for the rights of women, or defending the faith, or exposing capitalism, supporting your sexual preferences or speaking for your race – you may simply be putting on a saving scientific, religious, political mask to disguise your failure as an artist. Neither the world's truth nor a god's goodness will win you beauty's prize.

Finally, in a world which does not provide beauty for its own sake, but where the loveliness of flowers, landscapes, faces, trees, and sky are adventitious and accidental, it is the artist's task to add to the world's objects and ideas those delineations, carvings, tales, fables, and symphonic spells which ought to be there; to make things whose end is contemplation and appreciation; to give birth to beings whose qualities harm no one, yet reward even the most casual notice, and which therefore deserve to become the focus of a truly disinterested affection.¹

Contrast this rather idealistic statement with Freud's more down to earth statement, in "Civilization and Its Discontents" (1929), in the context of a discussion of happiness:

... consider the interesting case in which happiness in life is predominantly sought in the enjoyment of beauty, wherever beauty presents itself to our senses and our judgement – the beauty of human forms and gestures, of natural objects and landscapes and of artistic and even scientific creations. This aesthetic attitude to the goal of life offers little protection against the threat of suffering, but it can compensate for a great deal. The enjoyment of beauty

has a peculiar, mildly intoxicating quality of feeling. Beauty has no obvious use; nor is there any cultural necessity for it. Yet civilization could not do without it. The science of aesthetics investigates the conditions under which things are felt as beautiful, but it has been unable to give any explanation of the nature and origin of beauty, and, as usually happens, lack of success is concealed beneath a flood of resounding and empty words. Psychoanalysis, unfortunately, has scarcely anything to say about beauty either. All that seems certain is its derivation from the field of sexual feeling. The love of beauty seems a perfect example of an impulse inhibited in its aim. 'Beauty' and 'attraction' are originally attributes of the sexual object. It is worth remarking that the genitals themselves, the sight of which is always exciting, are nevertheless hardly ever judged to be beautiful; the quality of beauty seems, instead, to attach to certain secondary sexual characters.²

What Freud means by "secondary sexual characters" is clear from an earlier statement in "Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality" (1905). Remark- ing that "seeing...is ultimately derived from touching," Freud asserts:

Visual impressions remain the most frequent pathway along which libidinal excitation is aroused; indeed, natural selection counts upon the accessibility of this pathway – if such a teleological form of statement is permissible – when it encourages the development of beauty in the sexual object. The progressive concealment of the body which goes along with civilization keeps sexual curiosity awake. This curiosity seeks to complete the sexual object by revealing its hidden parts. It can, however, be diverted ('sublimated') in the direction of art, if its interest can be shifted away from the genitals on to the shape of the body as a whole. It is usual for most normal people to linger to some extent over the intermediate sexual aim of a looking that has a sexual tinge to it; indeed, this offers them a possibility of directing some proportion of their libido on to higher artistic aims.³

What Freud means by diverting sexual attention from the genitals to the body as a whole is quite clear when one studies the history of the representation of the female nude. From such ancient representations as the *Venus de Milo*, ca. 150 B.C. to such Renaissance representations as Botticelli's *Birth of Venus*, ca. 1482 and Titian's *Venus of Urbino*, 1538, the genitals of the goddess have remained hidden, whether by her hand or drapery. This apparent modesty is not what it seems, for it directs attention to the rest of her body, which becomes sexually charged. Even Titian, perhaps the greatest painter of female flesh, rarely reveals the genitals of Venus, however much he suggests them,

which is what the fur hiding them in *Venus with a Mirror*, ca. 1555 does. When he does, as in *Venus and the Lute Player*, ca. 1555, he gives that flesh a kind of pudendal richness, in effect transferring the most visible aspect of the female genital to the female body as a whole, making it all the more seductive. Rubens carries this to greater extremes in his Venuses, which seem like fleshy vaginas turned inside out. In *The Toilet of Venus*, ca. 1613, the folds of the exaggerated flesh seems to follow the contours of a vagina, a no doubt all too speculative idea for art historians.

If interest is not shifted to the body as a whole, but “restricted exclusively to the genitals,” then, as Freud writes, “the pleasure in looking [scopophilia] becomes a perversion.”⁴ This seems to occur in Goya’s *Naked Maja*, 1800, who brazenly puts her hands behind her head, making no attempt to hide her genital, thus calling attention to it. Marked by pubic hair, the Maja’s genital is all the more perversely fascinating. Interestingly, one of the standing nudes in Picasso’s *Les Femmes d’Alger (O. J. R. Version O)*, 1907 also puts her hands behind her head, but her genital remains draped – none of the nudes has exposed genitals – indicating that even in this perversely modern work traditional sublimation continues to operate. Clearly Goya was more daring than Picasso, as was Courbet in *The Origin of the World*, ca. 1867. Picasso remains bound by the idealistic tradition that declares the genitals can be suggested but not directly shown – evoked, but never enough to provoke. As Otto Kernberg writes, “a naked body may be sexually stimulating, but a partially hidden body becomes much more so.”⁵ This is a form of “sexual teasing,” typically linked to “exhibitionistic teasing,” which is “frequently interwoven with the character style of women.” If “the wish to tease and be teased is [a] central aspect of erotic desire,” then Titian and Picasso, however unconsciously, reveal woman’s desire, even as they consciously show their own.

Now if one looks at Gass’s statement from a historical perspective, one sees that what he calls the “truly disinterested affection” with which one regards beauty is essentially the same as what Kant calls “entirely disinterested satisfaction.” Here is the full quotation, from the sixth section of the *Critique of Judgment*. Defending the assertion that “the beautiful is that which apart from concepts is represented as the object of a universal satisfaction,” Kant states that “this explanation of the beautiful can be derived from the preceding explanation of it as the object of an entirely disinterested satisfaction.”⁶ The preceding explanation deals with taste, which Kant defines as “the faculty of judging of an object or a method of representing it by an entirely disinterested satisfaction or dissatisfaction. The object of such satisfaction is called beautiful.” For Kant, disinterested satisfaction is always universal:

For the fact of which everyone is conscious, that the satisfaction is for him quite disinterested, implies in his judgment a ground of

satisfaction for all men. For since it does not rest on any inclination of the subject (nor upon any other premeditated interest), but since the person who judges feels himself quite free as regards the satisfaction which he attaches to the object, he cannot find the ground of this satisfaction in any private conditions connected with his own subject, and hence it must be regarded as grounded on what he can presuppose in every other person. Consequently he must believe that he has reason for attributing a similar satisfaction to everyone.⁷

Kant is moving toward the idea that beauty is an objective rather than subjective quality, that is, a recognizable property of an object rather than the private taste of an individual. He distinguishes between "material aesthetical judgments," which "assert pleasantness or unpleasantness," and are thus "judgments of sense," and pure or formal aesthetical judgments, which "assert the beauty of an object or of the manner of representing it," and "are alone strictly judgments of taste."⁸ Comparing the beautiful with the pleasant, he writes:

As regards the pleasant, everyone is content that his judgment, which he bases upon private feeling and by which he says an object pleases him, should be limited merely to his own person... The case is quite different with the beautiful. It would (on the contrary) be laughable if a man who imagined anything to his own taste thought to justify himself by saying: This object (the house we see, the coat that person wears, the concert we hear, the poem submitted to our judgment) is beautiful for me. For he must not call it beautiful if it merely pleases him. Many things may have for him charm and pleasantness—no one troubles himself at that—but if he gives out anything as beautiful, he supposes in others the same satisfaction; he judges not merely for himself, but for everyone, and speaks of beauty as if it were a property of things. Hence he says 'the thing is beautiful'... Here, then, we cannot say that each man has his own particular taste. For this would be as much as to say that there is no taste whatever, i.e. no aesthetical judgment which can make a rightful claim upon everyone's assent.⁹

As he says, "the judgment of taste" postulates "a universal voice... and thus the possibility of an aesthetical judgment that can... be regarded as valid for everyone."¹⁰ Hammering home the difference between the judgment of taste and the pleasure of sensations, which have only "private validity,"¹¹ Kant declares "that taste is always barbaric which needs a mixture of charms and emotions in order that there may be satisfaction, and still more so if it makes these the measure of its assent."¹² Kant lets the cat out of the bag, as it were,

when he asserts that "In painting, sculpture, and in all the formative arts – in architecture and horticulture, so far as they are beautiful arts – the delineation is the essential thing; and here it is not what gratifies in sensation but what pleases by means of its form that is fundamental for taste. The colors which light up the sketch belong to the charm; they may indeed enliven the object for sensation, but they cannot make it worthy of contemplation and beautiful."¹³

Kant associates delineation with form and color with sensation, and argues that "we can abstract from the quality of that mode of sensation (abstract from the colors...)" to realize "pure" form, which is not "troubled and interrupted by...foreign sensation."¹⁴ It is "a common error and one very prejudicial to genuine, uncorrupted, well-founded taste" to suppose that "the charm of the object" can augment "the beauty attributed to the object on account of its form." In the debate between line and color – a debate which has now become academic – Kant comes out on the side of line, and builds a whole theory to justify his taste.

I will tell you in a moment why I have quoted so extensively from Kant, but first I want to note that the scientific, religious, and political interests that art often serves, to the detriment of its beauty, and even to hide its lack of beauty, as Gass suggests, are, from a Kantian point of view, part of its charm, and as such have nothing to do with its form. They make it sensational, as it were, to the extent that we no longer bother to ask whether or not it is beautiful. The scientific, religious, or political aspect of a work of art makes it interesting for people who are interested in science, religion, and politics, but this does not mean that they find disinterested aesthetic satisfaction in it—that they appreciate and contemplate it as pure art. Indeed, to the extent art presents definite scientific, religious, or political concepts, and thus takes a scientific, religious, or political stand, it is not strictly speaking art. As Kant says, artistic representation involves "cognition in general," by which he means "the free play of the imagination and the understanding (so far as they agree with each other...)," rather than "definite concept[s]" that limit "the cognitive powers...to a definite rule of cognition."¹⁵ If we understand a work of art in terms of the science, religion, or politics implicit in it, and sometimes quite explicit and transparent, we limit our understanding of it as art, for we are seeing it in an all too definite rather than imaginative way. If it is truly art, it is not making a scientific, religious, or political statement, however much it seems to, but playing with scientific, religious, and political ideas to achieve a certain aesthetic effect. It does not involve precise scientific, religious, or political cognition, but general cognition of the world – a certain imaginative sense of things, which involves the aesthetic awareness of their forms – which may have scientific, religious, or political implications, or rather arouse scientific, religious, or political "sensations."

Now for Freud this whole line of reasoning is beside the psychologi-

cal point. For him there is no such thing as disinterested satisfaction. It is always sexually interested. Disinterested satisfaction is an illusion created by sublimation – by the displacement of sexual curiosity from the genitals to the body as a whole. But even the contemplation of a beautiful body – the body as pure form, as Kant would say – does not afford disinterested satisfaction. Sexual satisfaction always lurks in pure form. Similarly, taste, however pure, always has a sexual aftertaste. Sexual excitement and pleasure are implicit in beauty, however unacknowledged, and however repressed by pure judgments of taste. They are never pure for Freud, but ingeniously impure, for they always involve infantile sexual feelings, however muted by sublimation. The taste for beauty is rooted in one's sexual tastes and wishes, which means in one's experience of one's body. Kant's theory of beauty is in effect a desperate attempt to play down the importance of sensing and feeling – bodily sensation and sexual feeling – in the experience of beauty. Indeed, for Kant the contemplation of beauty is not exactly an exciting experience. It is striking, at least from a Freudian point of view, that Kant never connects pleasure with sexuality – never speaks of sexual pleasure, as though the pleasure of the senses have nothing to do with it. No doubt sexual sensations would be the most foreign, charming, corrupting, tasteless, and barbaric of all for him – especially because they are the most colorful and intense – and as such irreconcilable with beauty. It is disembodied in principle for Kant, however much the material body may be its vehicle. All satisfaction has to do with the body, and it was the body and its libido that Kant got rid of with such abstractions as disinterested satisfaction, pure form, and objective beauty.

These are supposedly conveyed by line. But for Kant the intellectual definiteness of line exists to suppress the emotional indefiniteness of color. It is all too charming for him – too seductive and libidinous, and thus impure or foreign, and as such corrupting of beauty. We are not supposed to be attracted to beauty – not supposed to desire it – and yet, as Freud makes clear, it doesn't come into its own – even truly exist – without our desire for it. There is an ancient story of a young man so taken with the beauty of a statue of Venus that he kissed its buttocks. From a Kantian point of view this is a gross misunderstanding of it – not exactly the right kind of appreciation. But perhaps the young man understood beauty better than Kant did – understood it instinctively rather than intellectualized it away. He recognized that beauty was part of sexual foreplay, and as such had a polymorphous dimension to it, which seduced one for all one's pretense of contemplative detachment. Unless one is drawn to beauty, and takes deep pleasure in it, it has no point, except, no doubt, an abstract one. Beauty's place on the heights of thought is quite different from beauty's place in the lowdown senses.

In a sense, Freud restores everything that Kant denied, even trivialized – certainly repressed – in the contemplation of beauty, namely, sensation, the

body, and above all sexual feeling, which Kant ignored altogether. It was taboo to connect beauty and sexuality, and it is exactly this taboo that Freud broke, and that makes his aesthetics revolutionary. It is worth noting that Kant never spoke of the love of beauty. Indeed, the contemplation of beauty is the dispassionate antithesis of the passionate love of beauty. For Kant, contemplation replaces love, and is preferable to love, which supposedly is blind, that is, understands nothing about its object, in contrast to contemplation, which can understand it completely because it is entirely detached from it, that is, emotionally uninvolved with it. Kant could not imagine that emotional engagement with an object could give one a deeper understanding of it than abstract contemplation of it. It could be understood from the inside – from its own point of view – rather than the outside, from some general point of view. Kant did not realize that contemplation, because it was emotionally disengaged, was blind to the inner beauty of the object.

Even more important than Freud's remarks about the sexual aetiology of beauty is the fact that they occur in the context of a discussion of happiness. For Freud the overriding issue is whether or not beauty makes us happy. His examination of happiness makes it clear that for him beauty only affords what might be called secondary happiness – the happiness of compensation, that is, consolation for suffering or unhappiness, rather than the primary happiness that comes from sexuality. In other words, beauty is a rather minor, limited, even trivial happiness – unless, of course, one is fixated upon it in contemplation, which is no longer happiness, but obsessional neurosis. Aesthetic pleasure is poor compensation for living in a painful world, in which aesthetics plays a superficial role. Indeed, it seems to mask scientific, religious, and political interests, rather than the other way around, as Gass thinks. What is missing in the traditional theory of disinterested satisfaction advocated by Kant and Gass is acknowledgement of the dissatisfaction that life invariably brings. To acknowledge it would be to make beauty less transcendental than they think it is. Beauty is little more than a temporary respite from life's unhappiness – a way of forgetting it for the moment, which is hardly the same as rising above it once and for all. Beauty is indeed skin-deep, as conventional wisdom insists. Beauty is an inadequate band-aid, covering the wounds life inflicts but hardly curing them. One bandages one's wounds to hide them from the world, and to make a proper social appearance, but the wounds remain and continue to fester. The world does little or nothing about them, because it is one of their causes. Freud writes:

One feels inclined to say that the intention that man should be 'happy' is not included in the plan of 'Creation.' What we call happiness in the strictest sense comes from the (preferably sudden) satisfaction of needs which have been dammed up to a high

degree, and it is from its nature only possible as an episodic phenomenon. When any situation that is desired by the pleasure principle is prolonged, it only produces a feeling of mild contentment. (Or, in the case of the obsession with beauty – an attempt to sustain contemplation beyond the point when it fades into mild contentment – pathology.) We are so made that we can derive intense enjoyment only from a contrast and very little from a state of things. Thus our possibilities of happiness are already restricted by our constitution. Unhappiness is much less difficult to experience. We are threatened with suffering from three directions: from our own body, which is doomed to decay and dissolution and which cannot even do without pain and anxiety as warning signals; from the external world, which may rage against us with overwhelming and merciless forces of destruction; and finally from our relations to other men. The suffering which comes from this last source is perhaps more painful to us than any other. We tend to regard it as a kind of gratuitous addition, although it cannot be any less fatefully inevitable than the suffering which comes from elsewhere.¹⁶

Clearly from Freud's psychoanalytic perspective, beauty is a small happiness indeed, although, no doubt, the happiness it affords can be sexually stimulating, and thus function as a fore-pleasure to a greater happiness – a deeper satisfaction than disinterested satisfaction.

Freud's remarks are somewhat pessimistic, but later psychoanalysts are less pessimistic about beauty, and in fact think there is a deep emotional need for it, rooted in infantile experience. But for them it is not a matter of infantile sexuality, but of infantile relationships – the most intimate of all relationships. Indeed, even Freud suggests as much, if Robert Fliess is correct in stating that "Freud saw the origin of the experience of 'beauty' in the infant's perception of the milk overflowing the breast,"¹⁷ that is, in the infant's relationship to the mother at her most giving and nurturing and dependable – the infant's experience of the bounty of the mother.

Certain poets have been aware of the fact that the sense of beauty originates in a loving relationship with a loving mother, as Mallarmé suggests in the last stanza of his poem "The Windows." He writes: "And I die, and I love – whether the glass be art or mysticism – to be reborn, wearing my dream, like a diadem, in the earlier heaven where Beauty flowers." The "earlier heaven" is of course childhood, more precisely, infancy, the earliest heaven, as it were. Art and mysticism are ways of recovering it. Like Wordsworth, for Mallarmé poetry is childhood – the beauty of childhood and the childhood where Beauty flowers, that is, where the mother's breast blossoms with milk – recovered in mystical tranquility.

In mystical experience – and artistic experience at its best is mysticism at one remove or mysticism in disguise – one merges with the divine, that is, the mother of one's being. To be reborn thus means to become an innocent infant again – an infant innocently and happily nursing at the beautiful breast of the divine mother. The good breast – the nurturing, satisfying breast – is the first object of beauty, as Melanie Klein suggests. It gives us our first idea of beauty. Perhaps even more than the mother's breast, her body is experienced as beautiful. Donald Meltzer and M. H. Williams think that "the infant's love for mother... is expressed by idealizing the surface of her body and, by introjection of the mother's love expressed in her idealizing the infant's body, by identifying with her in this self-idealization. Such idealization would give rise to the earliest sense of aesthetic value, of beauty."¹⁸ When Mondrian insists that a straight line is preferable to a curved one – he's even stricter than Kant, that is, more uptight or, if one wishes, austere – he is trying to liberate himself from the mother's breast and body. In a sense, his abstract art is an attempt to prove that beauty can be found in the straight lines of the grid – most ambitiously in the late paintings he produced in New York, in which color and line fuse – but the effort to do so seems forced, and in the end unconvincing, however subliminally dynamic. Gass, then, is clearly wrong from a psychoanalytic perspective: goodness and beauty are one, at least as long as they are one in the breast.

In short, Mallarmé yearns to be in heaven with the beautiful, divine, mothering breast, full of satisfying milk. Need one say that the mother is always beautiful and sacred – they are in emotional effect one and the same – to the infant? Mallarmé in effect infantilizes himself by writing poetry in order to restore a state of childhood intimacy with his mother. It is a happy state of pure being, just as his mother is the best of beings. Indeed, Mallarmé's famous ineffability and marvellous obscurity are infantile in import, if one recalls that the word "infant" means not to speak or to be unable to speak. Ironically, Mallarmé achieves the illusion of speechlessness by his sophisticated language – a kind of speechifying which seems sophisticated but is primitive, for it involves the use of words as though they are concrete objects rather than symbols for them – a further irony.¹⁹ Clearly, art and mysticism are wish fulfillments – dreams come emotionally true – for Mallarmé.

Even when the mother is uncaring she remains beautiful, if also destructive – terrifying. That is, her emotional absence or indifference or stupidity arouses terror – the feeling of impending annihilation. The famous lines that begin the fifth of Rilke's *Duino Elegies* convey this annihilation anxiety: "For Beauty's nothing but beginning of Terror we're still just able to bear, and why we adore it so is because it serenely disdains to destroy us." And yet it is about to destroy us. Rilke's contradictory feelings about his mother – she's beautiful but she's bad, she's a higher being but she's dangerous – remind me

of Fairbairn's remark that a child would rather stay with a mother who is bad than have a new mother however good, because the old mother will always be more beautiful than the new mother. This suggests that beauty involves a deep feeling of attachment, which precedes the feeling that the mother is good or bad, although it may be reinforced by the experience of her as good. Rilke's problems with his rather grandiose, controlling mother are brilliantly conveyed in an astonishingly direct poem, which is remarkable for its psychological insight and sophistication:

Alas, my mother will demolish me!
Stone after stone upon myself I'd lay,
and stood already like a little house round which the day
rolls boundlessly.
Now mother's coming to demolish me:
demolish me simply by being there.
That building's going on she's unaware.

The poem ends with the lines:

No warm wind ever blew to me from her.
She's not at home where breezes are astir.
In some heart-attic she is tucked away,
and Christ comes there to wash her every day.

Rilke's cold mother was too self-absorbed – and there is corroborating evidence for her awesome narcissism – to be much of a mother to him. Her milk was sour, to say the least, and Rilke never lost “his fundamental antagonism to her,” as Donald Prater writes in his biography.²⁰ As Rilke wrote, she plucked all the flowers out of his life, in effect annihilating him. “Works of art,” Rilke wrote, “are always the result of being at risk,” and Rilke was clearly at great risk in his relationship with his mother.²¹ Freud, in fact, in his obituary for Lou-Andreas Salome, who was involved with Rilke, noted his general helplessness in life, which Salome, a kind of surrogate mother, could not mitigate. As though to confirm Rilke's feeling of being annihilated by his mother, Melanie Klein notes that “one root of the constant concern of women (often so excessive) for their personal beauty” is their “dread that this...will be destroyed by the mother,” along with their “capacity for motherhood.”²² Among other abuses, Rilke was treated and dressed as a little girl by his mother – her first child, a girl, died at birth, and Rilke was a poor substitute for the lost child – which is perhaps one reason why his father tried to make a man out of him by sending him to military school.

What post-Freudian thinking about beauty suggests is that it makes one feel good about life – that it concentrates in itself a sense of the value of

living and the goodness and happiness possible in living. It is the grand alternative to the feeling of being annihilated and humiliated – belittled – by life. I think the difference between the Freudian and post-Freudian approaches to beauty can be understood in the difference between Freud's and Klein's ideas about happiness. Freud writes: "The feeling of happiness derived from the satisfaction of a wild instinctual impulse untamed by the ego is incomparably more intense than that derived from sating an instinct that has been tamed. The irresistibility of perverse instincts, and perhaps the attraction in general of forbidden things, finds an economic explanation here."²³ In contrast, Klein writes:

the happiness experienced in infancy and the love for the good object which enriches the personality underlie the capacity for enjoyment and sublimation, and still make themselves felt in old age. When Goethe said, 'He is the happiest of men who can make the end of his life agree closely with the beginning,' I would interpret 'the beginning' as the early happy relation to the mother which throughout life mitigates hate and anxiety and still gives the old person support and contentment. An infant who has securely established the good object can also find compensation for loss and deprivation in adult life.²⁴

Whether happiness comes from the mother's mirroring, as Kohut calls it, or the sense of value conferred upon one at birth, as Fairbairn describes it, or the experience of reciprocity with a good enough, facilitating mother, as Winnicott argues, the point is that one's sense of beauty derives from the goodness or badness of one's relationship with one's mother. That is, one's mother, in her good aspect, is beautiful, and in her bad aspect is ugly – annihilative, more particularly, annihilative of one's sense of being and having a self. It is selfhood at its most integrated that the harmony of beauty conveys.

In fact, wherever there is beauty, there is ugliness. There is never one without the other, however hidden the other might be. A comprehensive psychoanalytic theory of beauty necessarily involves a comprehensive psychoanalytic theory of ugliness. In the end, it is their relationship that matters more than one or the other. If the beautiful object is narcissistically gratifying, as the post-Freudians think, as well as sexually gratifying, as Freud thought, then an object is ugly when it is narcissistically as well as sexually unsatisfying – when it sabotages one's sense of self as well as one's sexual feelings. Ugliness is annihilative, indeed, it terrifies us because it represents annihilation of the self, and with it the loss of vitalizing libido, while beauty seems transcendental because it represents a self that is so well and seamlessly constructed – so perfectly harmonious – that it seems able to withstand any threat of annihilation, indeed, to be completely immune to death. It thus represents salvation

and immortality, just as ugliness represents damnation and death. In other words, ugliness and beauty are manifestations of what Freud called the death and life instincts – thanatos and eros. We want to possess beauty – cathect it and unite with it, in a kind of erotic embrace – while ugliness repels us, indicating its power to decathect, that is, its hateful anti-life character. The ugliness evident in so much modern art suggests its destructiveness, necrophilia, and hatefulness – and to regard the ugly as beautiful is a kind of perversion – while the beauty that we find in traditional art is biophilic, all the more so when it holds its own against ugliness. This is represented in the tension and final victory of the youthful St. George over the age-old Dragon or in the image of a beautiful woman terrorized by a dragon. (From a Kleinian point of view, beauty and the beast are opposite sides of the same coin, that is, a representation of the unresolved conflict between the good and bad mother in the infant's psyche.)

As Ella Sharpe says, ugliness means “destroyed, arrhythmic, and [is] connected with painful tension” – all rather unhappy phenomena. One might add it is the opposite of what Michael Balint calls the “harmonious mix-up” that occurs in love, that is, the sense of attunement and intermingling between the lovers. In contrast, Sharpe equates beauty “with the experiences of goodness in rhythmic sucking, satisfactory defecation, and sexual intercourse.”²⁵ For John Rickman, beauty equates with “the whole object” and ugliness with “the fragmented, destroyed one.”²⁶ Indeed, since antiquity beauty has meant harmony and wholeness, and ugliness the complete absence of harmony and wholeness. This conception of beauty re-appears in modern science, as Heisenberg's essay on “The Meaning of Beauty in the Exact Sciences” indicates: “beauty is the proper conformity of the parts to one another and to the whole.”²⁷ This is the sign of truth, as he says. A true theory is one whose complex parts form an exact and simple harmony. The reconciliation of truth, associated with the reality principle, and beauty, associated with the pleasure principle, is one of the great ambitions of civilization. One is gratified to know that science finds it immanent in being – that it finds beauty hardwired into reality.

Hanna Segal, building on Sharpe and Rickman, writes that “ugliness is what expresses the state of the internal world in depression,” while beauty conveys “an undisturbed rhythm in a composed whole [which] seems to correspond to the state in which our inner world is at peace.” But for Segal the crucial point is that aesthetic experience is not just the experience of beauty, but of the tense relationship between ugliness and beauty. Creativity consists in articulating this relationship, more particularly, in creating beauty that can contain ugliness – that can balance ugliness with beauty. Taking classical tragedy as “a paradigm of creativity,” she writes:

...the ugly is largely in the content...including [the] emotionally ugly – hubris, treachery, parricide, matricide – and the inevitable destruction and death of the participants. There is an unflinching facing of the forces of destruction; and there is beauty in the feeling of inner consistency and psychological truth in the depiction of those destructive forces of conflict and their inevitable outcome. There is also a counterbalancing of the violence by its opposite in the form: the rhythm of the poetry and the Aristotelian unities give a harmonious and particularly strictly ordered form. This form contains feelings which might otherwise be uncontainable.²⁸

Segal quotes Rodin, who says something similar:

What we call 'ugly' in reality, in art can become great beauty. We call 'ugly' that which is formless, unhealthy, which suggests illness, suffering, destruction, which is contrary to regularity – the sign of health...We also call ugly the immoral, the vicious, the criminal and all abnormality which brings evil – the soul of parricide, the traitor, the self-seeker...But let a great artist get hold of this ugliness; immediately he transfigures it – with a touch of his magic wand he makes it into beauty.²⁹

It is worth noting that Segal's account of the dialectic of beauty and ugliness can be found in St. Augustine. In Meyer Schapiro's words, Augustine held that "beauty is a compound of opposites, including ugliness and disorder," and that "God is an artist who employs antitheses of good and evil to form the beauty of the universe."³⁰

What Segal calls "an unflinching facing of the forces of destruction" is the moment of creative inspiration, which is always a moment of courage. What Rodin calls the "magic wand" that "transfigures" ugliness into beauty is not only his artistic labor, as Segal says, but his identification with what Wilfried Bion calls the container-breast which transforms raw, concrete, primitive sensations and feelings (Bion calls them beta elements) into symbols so that they can be stored as memories (Bion calls them alpha elements) and eventually be understood. In other words, the artist identifies with the mother, and to identify with the mother is to wish to create life as she can, and even to be able to so – not literally, in the case of the artist, but symbolically. The artist becomes pregnant and gives birth, but at one remove, as it were. I think this is what Otto Rank means when he says that the artist "needs only to create and not to beget."³¹ Also, when Rank writes that the artist's creativity begins "with the self-making of the personality into the artist" – her first work is in effect herself as creative artist – he neglects to say that this self "appointment to the genius-

type," as Rank calls it, comes about through her identification with her mother, more particularly what Bion calls her ability to perform the alpha function. The artist's identification with her mother's capacity for containment makes her an artist. The artist's activity is one of creative containment – of creating a form that is beautiful enough to contain an ugly content – creating beauty that is strong enough to withstand, endure, and finally neutralize and tame destructiveness.

The only philosopher I know who regards beauty as strength is Whitehead, and he neglects to say that it is the mother's strength, the strength to be able to contain without being destroyed by what she contains, which is what makes her sublimely good. More particularly, her goodness consists in her ability to encompass the destructively anxious self in a capacious womb of care, thus calming the self so that it can grow and develop and have its own strength. To be an artist is to be a good mother, and good mothers have always been regarded as divine – no doubt in part because they seem relatively rare, as their idealization and apotheosis in myth suggests, and mothers are not always predictable in their goodness or good effect – which is why artists have come to be thought of as peculiarly divine. They are adjuncts to the goddess – the mothering muse. The mother is indeed the first and last divinity – in the Christian legend, the entire existence of Christ is predicated on and contained by her presence, as the Nativity and Pieta indicate, implying that she is more sacred than he is. Indeed, she created him by containing him, from the beginning to the end of his life. The mother is always virginal to the infant, who in the unconscious is married to her for life, and continues to be after death, as her ascension into heaven – Mallarmé's heaven – suggests.

The distance from the traditional objective conception of beauty, as represented by Kant and Gass, to the revolutionary modern psychoanalytic conception, with its emphasis on the unconscious meaning of beauty – the subjective reasons we experience an object as beautiful – is enormous. It seems impossible to bridge the distance. And yet even in tradition there was a thinker who realized that something was amiss in beauty. When Francis Bacon declared that "there is no excellent beauty that hath not some strangeness in the proportion," he seemed, at least from a psychoanalytic perspective, to be calling attention to the fact that there is something uncanny about classical beauty – something unclear and indistinct in what seems so clear and distinct, or, as we might say, something unconscious and anxious in what seems so self-conscious and self-assured. It is this sense that beauty represses more than it expresses – that there is something barely under control in what seems so controlled – that is the link between the contradictory conceptions. Beauty becomes objective only when it satisfies subjective needs, especially the need for narcissistic gratification and for instinctive satisfaction. As Segal emphasizes, this means the satisfaction of destructive urges as

well as sexual impulses. The feeling that there is something strange or peculiar about beauty is the unconscious recognition that it is informed by inescapable needs, and that it satisfies them, however indirectly. The strangeness that Bacon experienced in beauty is the strangeness of our own needs to ourselves, as they come back to us contained by beauty.

In short, the peculiar lack of proportion Bacon perceived in the harmony of beauty suggests that it is as inwardly troubled and precariously balanced as we are. It signifies the emotional ugliness and powerful sexuality we struggle to control and contain, but which make themselves unconsciously felt, making us feel strange. Indeed, it is the strangeness of the unconscious – the unexpected presence of unconscious forces – in our consciousness of beauty that Bacon is acknowledging, however unwittingly. He unconsciously realized that the disinterested satisfaction beauty affords is tainted by all kinds of emotional interests, which are as universal as beauty itself, and in fact may lend beauty its universality beyond its different cultural appearances. From a psychoanalytic point of view what Gass calls disinterested affection – a contradiction in terms, suggesting ambivalence – is sexual lust tamed into sentimental irrelevance. Similarly, what Kant intellectualizes as contemplation is containment of desire for the seductive object—the object that promises complete satisfaction, and is thus strongly cathected. Bacon recognized, without understanding, the psychodynamic underpinning of beauty, which could not help make itself evident as a feeling of strangeness, that is, a kind of parapraxis and imperfection within the practice of perfect beauty.

Notes

- 1 William H. Gass, *Finding A Form* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1997), pp. 291-92
- 2 Sigmund Freud, "Civilization and Its Discontents" (1929), *Standard Edition* (London: Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psycho-Analysis, 1961), vol. 21, pp. 82-83
- 3 Sigmund Freud, "Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality" (1905), *Standard Edition* (London: Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psycho-Analysis, 1953), vol. 7, pp. 156-57
- 4 *Ibid.*, p. 157
- 5 Otto F. Kernberg, *Love Relations: Normality and Pathology* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1995), p. 27
- 6 Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgment* (New York: Hafner, 1951), p. 45
- 7 *Ibid.*, pp. 45-46
- 8 *Ibid.*, p. 59
- 9 *Ibid.*, pp. 46-47
- 10 *Ibid.*, p. 50

- 11 Ibid., p. 51
- 12 Ibid., p. 58
- 13 Ibid., p. 61
- 14 Ibid., p. 60
- 15 Ibid., p. 52
- 16 Freud, "Civilization and Its Discontents," pp. 76-77
- 17 Robert Fliess, *Ego and Body Ego* (New York: International Universities Press, 1961), p. 255
- 18 Kernberg, p. 25
- 19 Hanna Segal, *Dream, Phantasy and Art* (London and New York: Tavistock/Routledge, 1991), pp. 36-38 distinguishes between "concrete symbolization," in which no distinction is made between an object and a symbol, and "true symbolization," in which such a distinction is made, so that the symbol can be used independently of the object, for it is understood to be separate from it, that is, not the same as it. Mallarmé's poetry seems to be in a process of regression from true symbolization to concrete symbolization, that is, from exoteric language, publicly comprehensible and communicable, to the private use of an esoteric language. His poetry seems to construct a private language of reverie or self-communication out of a public language of communication to others, which in a sense is to deconstruct language. The move from a shared to an all but unshareable language is at the defensive core of modernist poetry. Ironically, it requires all one's imaginative sophistication to regress to a primitive state of self-identity or self-sufficiency, that is, a state in which one is totally identified with the mother, and thus deluded into believing that one is sufficient unto oneself.
- 20 Donald Prater, *A Ringing Glass: The Life of Rainer Maria Rilke* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), p. 5
- 21 Quoted in *ibid.*, p. 148
- 22 Melanie Klein, *Love, Guilt and Reparation And Other Works 1921-1945*, (New York: Free Press, 1984), p. 194
- 23 Freud, "Civilization and Its Discontents," p. 79
- 24 Melanie Klein, *Envy and Gratitude and Other Works 1946-1963* (New York: Free Press, 1984), pp. 203-204
- 25 Segal, p. 90
- 26 Ibid.
- 27 Quoted in S. Chandrasekhar, *Truth and Beauty* (London and Chicago: University of Chicago, 1990), p. 52.
- 28 Hanna Segal, "A Psychoanalytic Approach to Aesthetics," *The Work of Hanna Segal* (Northvale, NJ and London: Jason Aronson, 1981), pp. 200-201
- 29 Segal, *Dream, Phantasy and Art*, p. 90
- 30 Quoted in *ibid.*
- 31 Meyer Schapiro, "On the Aesthetic Attitude in Romanesque Art" (1947), in *Romanesque Art, Selected Papers* (New York: George Braziller, 1997), vol. 1 p. 26, n. 10

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Printed in the United States
4078

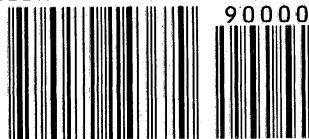




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Stony Brook, NY 11794-5400

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ISBN 0-97014-367-2



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