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Art Criticism

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Art Department
State University of New York at Stony Brook
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I.R.I.S.: The Artist's Intent and Proliferation of Meanings

Seymour Howard

> Not all who perceive with eyes the sensible products of art are affected alike by the same object, but if they know it for the outward portrayal of an archetype subsisting in intuition, their hearts are shaken and they recapture memory of that Original.
>
> —Plotinus II.9.16

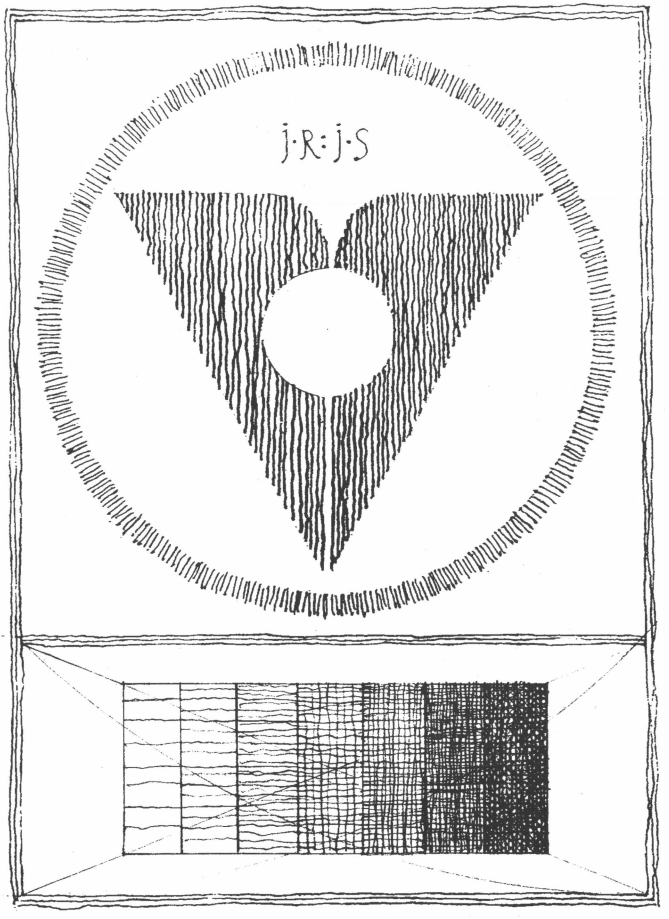
Varied meanings arise through connotation and implication in the minds of both the maker and the perceiver of any work or act commonly called *art*. This ancient and "Zen" truism, memorably illustrated by Kurosawa in *Rashomon*, is continually evident in iconological studies, clinical responses to word association or Rorschach and Thematic Apperception Test (TAT) images, familial arguments, or courtroom testimony.

Upon sustained examination, any *single* accepted meaning or traditional iconographic explanation proves to be a reductive sign in a closed denotative system. Such restriction enables groups to play agreed-upon "games," by rules that are arbitrary but useful in their artful universe.

Whether *Ur* meanings arise like Socratic memories from inherited archetypes or are inherent in the forms and the structure of the mind itself is, naturally, a matter beyond the scope of this paper.

As an example, I have listed many of the meanings intended or subsequently "discovered" in one of my own strongly reductive ideogrammic designs, *I.R.I.S.*, and its identifying inscription. This work, a purple monochromatic linear rendition for an exhibition poster—subsequently keyed with a rainbow spectrum, here transcribed with line into tonal equivalents—recapitulated ideas and shapes used in previous sketches, paintings, and a video dealing with Duchamp's *With Hidden Noise* (*Conjunctions*, 1986).

Initially, the image was designed to be a sign and seed for known and latent meanings associated with the iris flower and also to serve as a "metamorphosed" analogue to the Greek goddess Iris—the messenger announcing the birth of Athena in Phidias' East Pediment of the Parthenon. That Athenian sacred narrative symbolized the birth of Western Hellenic



Seymour Howard, I.R.I.S., 1991, graphite drawing and electrophotographic reproduction. The original rainbow color hues (yellow, orange, red, green, blue, violet, purple) are here transcribed with line into tonal equivalents.

patriarchal thought and wisdom from the head of Zeus (in a compensatory projection of his *anima*, effected by ego-centered parthenogenesis).

Iris, I subsequently learned, was a sign-symbol for the female transformer-illusionist-trickster, the mother of Hermes Psychopompus, and the equivalent of the Vedic goddess Maya-Kali, mistress of illusion, dance, and the death of the old and birth of the new, an instrument of metamorphosis.

Iris as a graphic motif simultaneously referred to the female genital matrix (and implicitly to its male complement), explicitly established thematically as a Salon subject by Courbet's *Source*, Rodin's *Iris*,

Messenger of the Gods, and Duchamp's *Given: 1. The Waterfall, 2. The Illuminating Gas.* These related, successive, and influential French visual essays share an ancient Mediterranean ancestry that celebrates the primordial crux of female generativity as a font-arena for oceanic cathexis.

Associations to an obvious but semi-covert eye (and to vocal, verbal referents) in the design, which perhaps indicate another underlying self-reflecting power of this imagery (and word), came to mind later.

Before, during, and after its making, my readings and meanings of *I.R.I.S.* grew to include, in a mushrooming and overlapping counterpoint, the following associations elaborating upon the above-mentioned major themes:

1. *The spirit*: a winged messenger-angel from the gods, as well as the swift (arrow-like) dawn-twilight, rainbow, and aura-aureole of the news, message, and messenger; a measured radiating revelation joined to vibrating "wings" in flight and rest; an anima-spirit-victory and angel of generation with petal-wings, vaginal enfoldings, and a dome-egg-receptacle-arena; a rudimentary breast and funnel with the teat of a "grand teton" mother goddess, illustrated in both section and elevation.

2. *The flower*: the delta triangle, as genital sign, letter, and land form, implying regeneration; the female pudendum with its exterior and interior appearance, apparatus, and apertures: mons pubis-veneris, hair, labia, vagina, uterus, fallopian tubes, ovaries, and egg; the valentine heart, sweet-heart with labial frill-lace, center, crux, and cleft; the purple flower petals denoting a royal flush of fertile venal blood.

3. *The eye and voice*: profile lips and also profile and frontal eye, instruments of communication and recognition; the resonating center of vocalizing in the throat chakra (sounded *siri*), above the heart chakra (sounded *satnam*) and the other chakras known before enlightenment (*satori*), sited near the eyes (sounded *wha!*); implications of throat and lips, voice box, vocal cords, and resonating vibrations communicating in a rudimentary apparatus; the lips and eye whispering and seeing in doppler-like reverberations of sound and sight; the never-ending and never-beginning rings residing within a rational square and its semi-rational Pythagorean frame; a full and empty center with rainbow emanations (tinted in by hand) of light-energy; a waving triangle of sound-sight-water-hair in a dynamic delta; the dilating manifestations of the Muse, music, joy, and lust; the eye-flower as a perceived and perceiving source.

4. *Syntheses*: The inverted image implies the male genital complement, which when overlapped with the original form makes a Solomon's Seal, the Tantric, Hermetic, and Cabalistic sign of conjunction; a matrix-"patrix" manifest in the shapes and spaces of the core forms; dawnings and twilights of generative power in recent women's and men's emancipation move-

ments; mixed and contrapuntal views, in plan, elevation, and section, of the ascending and descending lines about a circular, phallic channel in a full and empty space-place, with a *bindu* dot (the Cabalist *yod-pintel* point) signifying the fertilized seed or egg as the potentially flowering universe and life; a core and perimeter bubble of "no thing," air, sound, sight, word, thought, idea—expressing enlightenment and transcendence.

Post Hoc Confirming and Enlarging Dictionary-Based Definitions of Iris

Iris as deity: Greek rainbow goddess, descended from the Indo-European Maya-Kali (destroyer, illusion), pre-Vedic mistress of the rainbow and veils of perceptible (hence visual) reality—a crystal essence and iridescence. Iris-Maia is the virgin mother of Hermes (and Buddha), a midwife-deliverer. Like Hermes, whose winged cadeucus she holds, she acts as the agent of Zeus (and Hera), hurrying on gold wings swift as the wind over and under the world. She bridges heaven and earth, male and female, tai chi, yin and yang polarized principles as a rainbow gradient of hues (emotions). Iris' other attributes include seven colored veils or stoles (the seven chakras of consciousness and their colors) and the jeweled necklace and rainbow colors of Ishtar, Isis, and Salome. She is the many-colored controlling, rainbow-promising mother, the sleep-death of liars, and gatherer of women's souls.

Iris as blossom: The many-colored androgynic orchid-like flower of field and garden.

Iris in vision: The colored radiating shutter of the eye—the ocular iris.

Iris as aura: Iridescence, a rainbow-like range and interaction of colors.

I.R.I.S. as a Formal and Symbolic Structure: Geometry as *Idea* (Gk., "Form")

A Tantric, Zen, Cabalistic, and Alchemical conjunction of the square, circle, and equilateral triangle (the squared circle), whose quintessentially pure and symmetrically balanced geometry appears traditionally in mandalas and yantras used to inform and heal the spirit.

Equilateral triangle: delta as everted and inverted flow and condensation, as tissue and issue of man, woman, and nature in Stone-Age and Bronze-Age imagery. A primordial eye of chthonic animals.

Concentric rings of cornea, iris, and pupil. The full-circle polychrome rainbow with a *bindu* point, the empty-yeasty radiating center of the cosmos within a cosmos.

Triangle and aureole, encased by the rational staid square of the ego, are set in the magical and mystical Pythagorean rectangle, rationally and

irrationally generated from the square's diagonal projected into a one-to-the-square-root-of-two figure (completing 1:2:3:4 relationships); the lower part contains an annotating "text," a graphic "rainbow" commentary on the ascendant figure.

The square, circle, and triangle are projectible as cube, sphere, cone, and their "shadows" in other dimensions.

The free-hand linear quasi-parallel strokings create a hirsute texture with sensual resonance.

Purple is the fully saturated apex of pigment and nadir of chakra lights.

Decodings of the I.R.I.S. Inscription

I : ego; self; eye
IR : I are-is-am; split self
IRI : eerie, ira-ire-anger (quick-tempered, colored, lively); [IRS: ?]
IRIS : flower; god; eye; rainbow (Greek, also "bend," "bow," and "curve")
IR:IS : I are : I is
R : Duchamp's French "art": Rrose Sélavy (love is life); air, shit, etc.
RI (re) : about, as to
RIS : rice, seed
IS : be being becoming
I IS : I am-be; I is
S : ess, ass, cul, cull (see Duchamp, *L.H.O.O.Q.*)
[With retrograde, inverted, and J orthography:]
SI : yes, see, see-eye, see I
SIR : gentle-man (*kalos kagathos*), mentor; master; seer, sear; serie(s)
SIRI: communication chakra, mantra sound; s[p]iri[t]
JR : junior, once removed
JRS: juris, justice, prudence
JS: Jesus, etc.

Viewers' Perceptions of *I.R.I.S.*

Like other enquiries into meanings (such as word association or Rorschach and TAT tests that elicit projected perceptions—a phenomenon noted long before Plotinus and after Goethe's insights about graphology), viewers' brief responses to *I.R.I.S.* reveal personal as well as communal associations triggered by visual and verbal imagery. Most of the over two hundred randomly solicited responses—recorded mainly in university art classes—were single identifications—a word or phrase, often attached to one detail or closure, but they could be readily expanded by open-ended dialogue.

Themselves artistic productions, the identifications naturally reflect

their authors' character, intellect, experience, and preoccupations (of the moment and longer), displaying generosity, restraint, and defenses and ranging from the lyric to the literal, from the obsessive to the indifferent, and from the objective to the idiosyncratic. Viewers who were interested in others' identifications or in the "validity" of their own responses were often astonished to learn how differently others viewed and identified the image; their reactions—especially in the context of this study—give further insight into our affective investment in personal interpretation.

Eventually most of my intended and discovered meanings were independently identified and enlarged by cogent extension and unforeseen gestalts. Explicit genital identifications were comparatively rare, but such perceptions are often transformed by aestheticizing sublimation and invention.

Responses: abstraction, accuracy, angel, apocalyptic unity, approaching airplane and propeller above rainbow, arrow, arrowhead, back to the future, balance-direction-focus-quest within a whole, beak, bindu dot, bird, bird skull, black hole sucking in spectral light below, both sexes, broken heart, cauldron with buttocks for mixing and joining, Cesar Chavez eagle, chart for measuring sex organs and butterfly, child's toy, cliffs in telescope, color prism and spectrum, color spectrum giving mathematic value to equation J.R.=J.S., color scale, compass, confronted faces-birds-eagles, correct value, cross, crucifix, cryptic emblem, cyclical symmetry, deaf eye, depth below, doodle, eagle decal for U.S., eagle head, eagle or hawk, Egyptian wings, Egyptian arrowhead, eye, Eye of God, eye pupil and flying bird, female sexual symbol, feminine sex, flattened perforated bird, flower, flower petals, fox head, full and empty, gay and lesbian rights symbol, geometric flower, geometric heart, geometrically united parts, Goethe's frontispiece to *Farbenlehre*, happy rainbow, harmony, heart, heart with falling center, heart with wings, heraldic harps, I like it: a female delta, iconic symbol of belief, I'm suspicious about the hole in the condom, Indian bird symbol, INRI (Jesus of Nazareth King of the Jews), intense below, inverted pyramid and rainbow, iris, iris in an eccentric eye, iris of eye, lips, logo for IRIS plywood (from Japan), male, Masonic-like symbol, military patch, mixed view of human body, moustached-goateed pubes, musical instruments and strings, My God!: female genitalia and a singleminded weird butterfly, mythical moth-eye-wings, *Nike* of Samothrace, no thing, nose-to-nose figures, open heart yantra, patriotic symbol, peace, peace flight, peace-suicide-anger, pen nib, pendulum in tunnel, perspectival balance, pinwheel, precious desirable medal, promise, rainbow, rampant eagle, razor blade, religious symbol, Renaissance perspective, rings, robotech (robotic) insignia, Rodin's *Iris*, rose window, satisfying space related to a larger circle, scale relation, Seal of Solomon, sexual female, solar, space

ship, spectrum, spectrum of *chakras*, split heart, stare of a one-eyed feminist, Startrek image, sun and its spectrum, symbol, system of systems, Taoist mandala, technicolor vagina, third eye=all knowledge, Tolkein image, trinity, TV test pattern, two people kissing, unity symbol, universe with outer reaches and some limits to infinity with mankind (male and female) in the dark triangle and beginning of all things in the dot: eternity, upside down hieroglyph, uterus muscle-wedding band-target, valentine, victorious stretch-winged bird, victory, victory-Nike, virgin, vision, Walt Disney-General Dynamics-mechanisms logo, warm gold heart, whale tail crest, window, winged heart, wings, woman surrounded by sperm and controlled, woman's sex, word play: I are : I is : eye is, "Looks like ideas about ideas" (John Cage).

Explanation as Process

Even using all the above explanations and their serendipitous afterthoughts, *I.R.I.S.*, like any thing, can never be fully explained, translated, or exhausted. *Ekphrasis*, or describing and interpreting the graphic arts, is itself an art form and, as such, another (intervening and elaborating) step in an endless journey into the possible meanings of any work of art.

How much is latent or witting, communal or accidental, implied or censored by artists, even psychoanalysts and other masters of discovering intention can't reveal or test *completely*, although they cultivate empathy and learn by sensitively listening with a fine-tuned and practiced self. Think only of the uninvestigated yet possible extensions of meaning that might be found in *I.R.I.S.* as an introduction to the eye as a camera or hermetic chamber, with its magic and mechano-morphically driven shutter, lens, vision, and apparatus for registering memory in a cybernetic extension and reinvention of the "modern" communal mind.

I find that what others perceive, "see," and recreate naturally depends on *their* apparatus and experience, whatever the reductive simplicity at play with latencies and implications in this and other of my ideogram images. Each perceiver's re-creation extends the seed meanings of works in our ever-expanding-changing-recycling universe.

Ultimately, language, as communal understanding bred of its own internal structure, continually "explains" itself in our usage and interpretations. Meanings are vested in the thing itself and, by extension, in things as envisaged in the "eye of the beholder," which, again, reflects and selects from all it sees.

To repeat, ultimately (as initially), the explanation, or "answer," of a thing is the thing itself, a cosmos in cosmos. Meaning, which is potentially infinite, is what has meaning: "Art," beauty, and meaning are in the beholder's eye.

This Tantric and Buddhist "truth" of relativism, repeated in hermetic religions as well as contemporary astronomy and particle physics, recognizes the temporal nature of the pursuit and evaluation of the worldly illusions of Maya by means of norms or "standards," alerting us to their ubiquity and impermanence.

Reason, rationalism, communal and personal style, the hard-won yet arbitrary creations that bestow a sense of self, separation, and definition effecting a man-made constancy, give cohesion and strength to our civilization, as well as helping to generate its discontents.

Summary-Abstract

Traditionally circumscribed meanings notwith-standing, the beholder's eye finds many connotations in a work of art. An array of perceptions and responses to an ideogrammic design (*I.R.I.S.*) by the author are listed, illustrating the proliferation (and constancy) of meanings possible in a simple yet highly overdetermined image.

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Reexamining Greenberg's Impact: An Inquiry into His Lack of Reception in Germany

Christine Mehring

In the United States there is little doubt that Clement Greenberg is one of the most important and influential critics of art and culture—if not the central figure in the post-World War II art world. This is manifested in the ever-expanding secondary literature on Greenberg,[1] as well as in his continuing influence on contemporary art critical thinking. Critics like Michael Fried who developed the formalist position or Lucy Lippard who defined her concepts in explicit opposition to Greenberg, show that Greenberg has continued to be an important point of reference for art critics since the 1950s. Given his status in the United States, it thus seems astounding that Greenberg has not been received in several Western European countries. Is this simply because, in the 1940s, the international art center switched from Paris to New York? Or are there broader historical reasons for his absence, such as the impact of World War II? Or, finally, is there perhaps something inherent in Greenberg's theories that caused his surprising lack of reception in Western Europe? These questions need to be answered from the particular perspective of each country in which Greenberg failed to establish an audience. In the following, I will examine the specific case of Germany.[2]

Greenberg's lack of reception in Germany can be easily demonstrated.[3] There are no significant German contributions to the secondary literature on Greenberg's critical activity, nor are there frequent references to him during the past forty years in German art magazines like *Kunstforum* or *Das Kunstwerk*.[4] Greenberg's work is also missing from the curricula of German art academies of the 1960s, as well as from the syllabi for present-day modern art classes at German universities. Even more significantly, none of Greenberg's writings have been translated into German—neither his key essays "Avant-Garde and Kitsch"[5] and "Towards a Newer Laocoon,"[6] nor his own compilation of essays in *Art and Culture: Critical Essays*.[7] This lack of German translations, however, did not cause

Greenberg's lack of reception in Germany. Rather, Greenberg's absence from the German cultural scene as an important critic of art and culture is a consequence of a more complex set of reasons—reasons which can be found rooted in Germany's cultural history. By examining these reasons I will ultimately suggest a new perspective on both Greenberg's writings and his position in the post-World War II art world.

By its very nature, art criticism can only exist alongside its visual counterpart, the art object, which, as much as it is itself made significant by criticism, in turn brings criticism about and makes it significant. Thus, the relevance and success of Greenberg's art critical writings from the late 1930s on—for the *Partisan Review*, *The Nation*, and various art magazines—depended on the presence of the Abstract Expressionist art to which he referred, for example, on the exhibitions of the art of Jackson Pollock and David Smith in the New York galleries and museums.

Abstract Expressionist art, however, was not available in major German cities at that time. National Socialism censored expressive abstraction as degenerate in favor of propagandistic art like Werner Peiner's realism and Arno Breker's heroic idealism. And even after 1945, Abstract Expressionism was not immediately shown in Germany; in part because the cultural infrastructure was considered last during the reconstruction period (*Wiederaufbau*). And even when the cultural infrastructure was finally restored, the German audience had to catch up with the development of the previously banned European modernism before it could turn its attention to contemporary international art.[8]

A closer look at the first Documenta in 1955 may serve to illustrate this point. Even though its curator, Arnold Bode, explicitly established the exhibition as a forum for international art, his understanding of "international" art remained restricted to Western Europe. Instead of showing the US-American Abstract Expressionists, Bode concentrated on such established Europeans as, for example, Kandinsky, Miró, Mondrian, and Picasso. The dominance of European art at the Documenta exhibitions ended only in 1964 with the sudden emergence of US-American Pop Art in Documenta III.[9] Group exhibitions of the Abstract Expressionists in Germany began to take place only slightly earlier in the late 1950s. The major Abstract Expressionist exhibitions were not organized by German curators, but rather by the Museum of Modern Art, whose show, "The New American Painting," traveled to Berlin, among other European cities, during 1958-59.[10] Pollock's first small solo exhibition in Germany was in 1958; David Smith's work appeared only in 1966.[11] The absence of Abstract Expressionist art in Germany may also be illustrated by looking at collections of museums which acquired Abstract Expressionist paintings starting in the mid 1960s. In 1964 for example, the "Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen" was the first German museum to

purchase a painting by Pollock.[12] Likewise, the first German survey of 20th century art to include some Abstract Expressionist painters was published only in 1955.[13] One can therefore safely conclude that Abstract Expressionism began to be noticed in Germany only in the late 1950s. By then, it had achieved the status of an accepted and institutionalized art movement which no longer needed Greenberg's art criticism to promote it. Already included in the canon of Western art, Abstract Expressionism could come to Germany on its own, without the aid of an interpretative discourse to prepare its reception.

In addition to the fact that Greenberg's art criticism was not received in Germany, his cultural criticism, most prominently exemplified by his essay "Avant-Garde and Kitsch" of 1939, also appears to have found no audience in Germany. Again, the historical context of National Socialism suggests itself as a likely explanation. Given Greenberg's overt attack on Hitler's totalitarian system through his linking of the notion of kitsch to National Socialist instruments of propaganda, Greenberg's cultural criticism had as little chance to enter Germany before 1945 as the art he advocated. Yet it is precisely this attack on totalitarianism by a US-American critic that could also lead one to expect Greenberg to become popular among post-World War II German intellectuals. After all, these intellectuals tried to cope with their country's immediate past by attempting to understand the mechanisms that had brought about and supported Hitler's totalitarian system. Curiously, however, Greenberg was not popular with German intellectuals after World War II. Why not? In order to answer this question, Greenberg's notion of kitsch, and in particular its relation to totalitarianism, will be examined in greater detail.

As the title and structure of "Avant-Garde and Kitsch" suggest, Greenberg defines kitsch, as exemplified by the Russian Realist Ilya Repin, through its relation to avant-garde art, as represented by Pablo Picasso. Furthermore, in his section on kitsch, Greenberg implicitly separates the analysis of its form from the analysis of its content.

Whereas kitsch is explicitly opposed to avant-garde art in terms of its content, kitsch is subtly connected to avant-garde art through imitation on the level of form. According to Greenberg, kitsch uses the outmoded or academicized styles of yesterday's avant-garde as its material, or, in other words, it constantly recycles the old new. Developing this notion of the genesis of kitsch out of the outmoded avant-garde, Greenberg suggests that kitsch possesses two further formal characteristics. First, kitsch has a mechanical quality. "Kitsch," Greenberg notes, "changes according to style, but remains always the same."[14] That is, kitsch alters with regard to the respective old avant-garde forms, but—through this very alteration—adheres to the same standardized principle of constantly recycling the old new. Secondly, kitsch is deceptive. Recycling once innovative styles,

kitsch often successfully pretends to be avant-garde while it really is not.

Greenberg disconnects the content of kitsch from its form. In the first place, for him, kitsch's content is always realistic. Looking at Repin's pictures, for example, the viewer "recognizes and sees things in the way in which he recognizes and sees things outside of pictures."[15] This continuity between art and life, in contrast to the discontinuity between art and life pursued by avant-garde art, enables the viewer to identify with what is represented. Secondly, Greenberg refers to the content of kitsch as synthetic—as generating "self-evident meanings" through a narrative structure.[16] The content of kitsch is thus the equivalent of its realistic subject-matter, rather than derived from it. The amount of effort that the viewer has to expend in order to understand a work is one way to determine if that work is avant-garde or kitsch. The "reflected effect"—from an avant-garde point of view, the result of a reflective process on the part of the viewer—is already included in the work by the producer of kitsch. "Repin," according to Greenberg, "predigests art for the spectator and spares him effort, provides him with a short cut to the pleasure of art."[17]

For Greenberg, only the pleasure and diversion provided by kitsch allow it to be used for totalitarian ends. Even this connection, however, is left vague. A quote from the last section of "Avant-Garde and Kitsch" devoted to the function of kitsch in totalitarian systems may serve to illustrate this crucial problem.

> Where today a political regime establishes an official cultural policy, it is for the sake of demagogy. If kitsch is the official tendency of culture in Germany, Italy and Russia, it is not because their respective governments are controlled by philistines, but because kitsch is the culture of the masses in these countries, *as it is everywhere else*. The encouragement of kitsch is merely another of the inexpensive ways in which totalitarian regimes seek to *ingratiate* themselves with their subjects ... they will *flatter* the masses by bringing all culture down to their level ... The main trouble with avant-garde art ... is ... that it is too difficult to inject effective propaganda into them, that kitsch is more pliable to this end.[18]

According to Greenberg, kitsch is thus always and everywhere the culture of the masses. The masses, in turn, are not unwilling consumers of kitsch, but instead actively demand it: "the ... masses set up pressure on society to provide them with a kind of culture fit for their own consumption."[19] Thus kitsch is not inherently totalitarian, but it may be easily used for totalitarian ends. A totalitarian system such as German National Socialism simply declares kitsch, an already existing culture, its official culture. Since kitsch provides diversion and pleasure, and thereby draws the attention of the masses away from their actual dissatisfaction, the

system gains the favor and support of the majority of the people.

Unfortunately, Greenberg's analysis of the connection between kitsch and totalitarianism only goes this far. He leaves it to the reader to determine precisely how kitsch can be used directly as "effective propaganda." Thus Greenberg fails to clearly connect his analyses of the nature of kitsch to their possible function. His conclusion, which is on the totalitarian potential of kitsch, does not necessarily develop out of his argument. This logical flaw in "Avant-Garde and Kitsch" has a strong impact on the issue presented. The reader is left with the impression that kitsch does not have any other totalitarian potential than to veil the dissatisfaction of the masses by providing them with pleasure and diversion. In comparison with other culture critics, Greenberg thus underestimates the power that kitsch may actually have in totalitarian systems. If Greenberg's essay had been read in post-World War II Germany, it is likely that German intellectuals would not have found a satisfying answer to one of their largest questions: what was it that made Hitler's strategy of using culture to support his totalitarian system so successful?

In a recent interview on "Avant-Garde and Kitsch," Greenberg excused the essay's simplified political dimension as follows.

> Its Marxism was too simplistic and maybe too Bolshevistic. I was going along with the times, being trendy. Most of my friends were Trotskyites, or nearly. The piece was smug and badly written; sophomoric.[20]

The essay, however, seems too sophisticated to be simply dismissed as "trendy." One might think further why Greenberg's analysis of the relation between kitsch and totalitarianism is as simplified as it is. Although Greenberg seemingly examines the political functions of avant-garde and kitsch in totalitarian systems in the concluding section of his essay, it is doubtful whether these political functions were his primary concern. It is likely that Greenberg used the simplified connection of kitsch to totalitarianism as merely a rhetorical means of amplifying the threat that kitsch supposedly represents to the avant-garde. For this reason Greenberg closes his essay with the warning that "today we look to socialism *simply* for the preservation of whatever living culture we have right now."[21]

Given the shortcomings of his analysis of the interrelationship between kitsch and totalitarianism, Greenberg's lack of reception in Germany as a culture critic no longer seems that surprising. By raising the issue, however, Greenberg nevertheless does contribute to the post-World War II German cultural investigations into how culture had supported Hitler's totalitarian system. Still, as the following will show, the limitations of Greenberg's analysis of the totalitarian potential of kitsch prevented him from competing with German thinkers pursuing similar interests in a more

complex way. These thinkers were Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno.

Referring to Horkheimer and Adorno's essay "Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception" (*Kulturindustrie: Aufklärung als Massenbetrug*) of 1944,[22] contemporary aesthetic thought in the United States often rashly lumps the two authors together with Greenberg. Especially in postmodern theory, the three are often discarded as modernists who theoretically established and defended the elitist distinction between high and low art.[23] To an extent, this characterization holds true for Greenberg, who, in even the most politically-engaged stage of his career, still deemphasized anti-totalitarian concerns in order to rescue high art from the threat of its lower counterpart. Horkheimer and Adorno's thinking, on the other hand, cannot be reduced to a point of view that merely sets high and low in opposition—this terminology is not even part of their vocabulary. For Horkheimer and Adorno, the relation between culture industry products and art is much more complex than one of simple antagonism.[24]

Even more significantly, in the culture industry essay, Horkheimer and Adorno hardly refer to art at all.[25] In contrast with Greenberg, Horkheimer and Adorno's original concern—highly respectable for the time—is to thoroughly analyze the culture industry as a phenomenon in itself.[26] They thereby manage to show not only its different forms, contents, and functions, but also their powerful interconnections. The absence of a discussion of these interconnections in "Avant-Garde and Kitsch" is Greenberg's weakest point. To disclose the surreptitiously hidden totalitarian potential of the culture industry was one of Horkheimer and Adorno's primary concerns at the time.[27] From their complex web of thought, only those that relate to Greenberg's concept of kitsch and totalitarianism will be extracted.

The examples that Greenberg uses in "Avant-Garde and Kitsch," as opposed to those chosen by Horkheimer and Adorno in the culture industry essay, are significant. Probably because he wished to emphasize the threat that kitsch presented to avant-garde art, Greenberg selected his examples of kitsch primarily from within the history of art itself; namely, from Russian Realism. He only briefly mentions such popular culture examples as Hollywood movies or magazine covers. Horkheimer and Adorno's examples, on the other hand, extend over a much wider range of fields, encompassing city planning, pornography, apartment housing, comics, radio, and pulp novels. They are drawn from various parts of society and thereby signal the omnipresence of the culture industry in all stratas of human existence.

For Horkheimer and Adorno such omnipresence has a totalitarian touch to it. This is the case, first, because the omnipresence of the culture

industry is a practical precondition for its effective use as totalitarian propaganda, and secondly, because its omnipresence foreshadows the unified front of totalitarian politics.[28] Omnipresence not only characterizes the culture industry as a whole, but also its different branches. For example, Horkheimer and Adorno argue that the omnipresence of the radio as a means of propaganda during National Socialism bestowed Hitler with a quasi-divine charisma.[29] Radio's omnipresence, along with its free-of-charge-availability, gives it an "illusory form of disinterested, impartial authority which suits fascism perfectly."[30] The omnipresence of the culture industry, as a whole and in its branches, makes it obtrusive since there is no escape from it. There is no freedom of choice on the part of the consumer; and, if there is a demand for culture industry products, this demand is artificially produced by the culture industry itself and thus part of it.[31]

A comparison of Horkheimer and Adorno's analysis of the culture industry with Greenberg's account of kitsch shows that Greenberg's restriction of kitsch to a single field is problematic. Greenberg conceives of kitsch as a product for the masses. Yet, at the same time, because it is associated exclusively with recycled avant-garde art, kitsch is confined to the museum. Hence kitsch is received more deliberately than culture industry products, which pervade the environment and are received both deliberately and non-deliberately. Thus kitsch appears to be a less radical and effective means of disseminating totalitarian propaganda.

That the culture industry possesses multiple forms and pervades different fields is reflected in Horkheimer and Adorno's understanding of form in a specific sense, i.e., in their understanding of the form of a single culture industry product. The form of a culture industry product, in contrast with that of kitsch, has totalitarian connotations in itself. It incorporates—or put more precisely, conquers—different media and their strategies, thereby attaining a unity that Horkheimer and Adorno correlate with totalitarianism. They make this correlation of the formal unity of the culture industry product with the forced social and political unity of the totalitarian state because the culture industry product has a Wagnerian overwhelming force, and because it disregards and thus destroys the particular, in this case the specific medium.[32]

A disregard for the particular is also involved in the second formal principle of culture industry products, namely their use of stereotypes. Horkheimer and Adorno treat stereotypes as forms. The fact that stereotypes are stereotypes is as important as what these stereotypes contain. This is evident when Horkheimer and Adorno insist that the culture industry does not completely exclude the new. The culture industry's newness is to be found in its exclusion of the new. It constantly reproduces the same thing, whether one thinks of standardized types like

a sketch or a short story,[33] or whether one thinks of the reuse of details like "the short interval sequence which was effective in a hit song, the hero's momentary disgrace ... the rough treatment that the lover gets from the strong male star."[34]

At first sight, Horkheimer and Adorno's notion of the stereotype seems similar to Greenberg's notion of kitsch's recycling of the old new—its reuse of the forms of yesterday's avant-garde. Horkheimer and Adorno's understanding of stereotype, however, is broader than Greenberg's understanding of the old new. Their notion of stereotyping is not limited to the recycling of avant-garde art. Furthermore, it is connected to totalitarianism in two ways. First, because stereotypes constantly reuse certain particulars, they make all particulars interchangeable and replaceable. Where stereotypes are dominant, the purpose of the particulars does not lie within them, but is assigned to them by the respective context in which they are put. The parts are subordinated to an imposed order and affirm the whole to such an extent that they lose their identity and are destroyed.[35] Secondly, the constant reproduction of the same evokes the impression that nothing changes and that the existing state of things has the status of an absolute. The stereotype "serves to confirm the immutability of circumstances."[36]

The totalitarian significance of the culture industry's forms—i.e., its emphasis on the unity of the whole and the use of stereotypes—lies in the culture industry products' subtle formal relation to reality, which is never simply analogical. If the formal characteristics of a culture industry product were merely analogous to the formal characteristics of totalitarian society, then the culture industry product would be a mere metaphor for this society. As such the culture industry product could not function as effective propaganda, and would be useless for totalitarian ends. Rather, for Horkheimer and Adorno, form must be understood as something that recapitulates itself and continues in reality. As the consumers get accustomed to perceiving the forms of the culture industry products everywhere around them, the formal structures of the culture industry products become part of the consumers' mode of perceiving the world, as well as their own position in it.[37] The consumers thus ultimately accept that their individuality is to be subordinated to and destroyed by a totalitarian system, because they have been taught by the culture industry that the stereotype is what the system values and that the formal whole will inevitably control the particulars.[38] Important for the impact of the culture industry is that it aims at this conformity and loss of individuality with every means at its disposal, i.e., not only on the level of form, but also on the level of content.

With regard to content, Horkheimer and Adorno emphasize the realism of the culture industry product. Reminiscent of Greenberg's claim that

kitsch is characterized by a continuity between art and life, Horkheimer and Adorno argue that the culture industry's realism generates a continuity between the culture industry product and life. For example, Horkheimer and Adorno refer to film technology as the perfection of the duplication of empirical objects. Like Greenberg, Horkheimer and Adorno see this continuity as the precondition for an identification of the viewer with the viewed objects.[39] However, while Greenberg's analysis ends at this point, Horkheimer and Adorno go further, showing the totalitarian potential of such an identification.

The viewer's identification with the viewed objects culminates in imitation, and as such can be used to totalitarian ends in two ways. First, the imitation of stereotypical characters, for example heroes, frees the viewer from the effort to construct his individual personality. Given that everybody imitates the same stereotypes, everyone becomes the same, and thus replaceable in his function to support the system.[40] Secondly, the viewer adapts the role of the conformist. "Donald Duck in the cartoons and the unfortunate in real life get their thrashing so that the audience gets used to its own punishment." Breaking the resistance of the individual becomes the accepted condition for living.[41]

In addition to encouraging identification, the content of the culture industry is characterized by evident meanings. Again reminiscent of the notion of kitsch, Horkheimer and Adorno's conception of evident meanings surpasses Greenberg's understanding because of their emphasis on the potential totalitarian function of these meanings. Contrasting the culture industry to Kant's more active formalism, Horkheimer and Adorno hold that the consumers no longer have to exert their own energy to relate the manifold of particulars to fundamental concepts or meanings. Instead, the culture industry does it for them.[42]

The conclusion Horkheimer and Adorno draw from this predetermination of everything's meaning by the culture industry's products differs from the conclusion which Greenberg draws from the evident meanings of kitsch. For Horkheimer and Adorno, the predetermination of meaning implies a totalitarian prohibition of independent thinking that continues in real life. The consumers' ability to think and imagine is "paralyzed." Whereas Greenberg concludes that the evident meanings of kitsch grant the viewer pleasure and diversion, the culture industry product, a much more controlling force, does not allow the viewer even this kind of limited freedom. Even though its consumption does not require actual thinking, the culture industry product demands alert concentration to grasp all the "facts," thereby forestalling associative or independent thought.[43]

Given this nuanced correlation of the culture industry with totalitarianism, it can be concluded that, compared to Greenberg, Horkheimer and Adorno give a more complex and thus more satisfying answer to the

major question of post-World War II German intellectual circles; namely, what was it that made Hitler's strategy of using culture to support his totalitarian system so successful? Based on what we know today about the National Socialist strategies, it is clear that they were not as simple as Greenberg's argument makes them. The National Socialists did not simply ingratiate themselves with the population by showing them Arno Breker's nudes instead of Degenerate Art. Rather, they employed advertisements, radio, television, film, newspapers, music, theater, and architecture according to strategies that were as complex and refined as Horkheimer and Adorno present them to be. Both the form and content of National Socialist culture were teleologically organized towards totalitarian ends.[44] It is likely that Greenberg's shortcoming in this regard, especially because of the existence of Horkheimer and Adorno's more successful attempt, prevented him from establishing a crucial position in the German cultural scene.

There is perhaps an additional reason for Greenberg's lack of acclaim in Germany. Especially when compared to Horkheimer and Adorno, Greenberg's simplistic and rhetorical writing style often has authoritarian connotations. Not only does Greenberg consider his own point of view "superior,"[45] but, throughout "Avant-Garde and Kitsch," his tone is absolute, continuously using expressions like "never" and "by no other means." In addition, Greenberg frequently tells the reader what to think with verbs like "must" and "should." Moreover, Greenberg writes with an inclusive "we," which appears to be almost intended to force the reader to identify with Greenberg's thoughts. Greenberg's writing style thus fulfills two of his own criteria for kitsch: first, it conveys evident, simplified meanings, and secondly, it engenders identification rather than independent thinking. Language of this kind was certainly shunned in the post-World War II German intellectual scene which was extremely sensitive to it due to the immediate totalitarian past with its use of similar authoritarian language.[46]

Finally, Horkheimer and Adorno may have been preferred to Greenberg since their dialectical method is rather open, often discontinuous, contradictory, or enigmatic, and thus engenders a more active thought process on the part of the reader. Adorno, it is noted, scrupulously avoided allowing his own work to fall into the trap of the culture industry, and thereby promote totalitarian tendencies. As Susan Buck-Morss writes,

> Adorno didn't write essays, he *composed* them, and he was a virtuoso in the dialectical medium. His verbal compositions express an "idea" through a sequence of dialectical reversals and inversions. The sentences develop like musical themes: they break apart and turn in on themselves in a continuing spiral of variations. The phenomena are "overdetermined," so that their

> contradictory complexity needs to be disentangled through interpretation. But there is no affirmation, no "closing cadence." The contradictions are unraveled; they are not resolved.[47]

In sum, the examination of Greenberg's lack of reception in Germany leads to an investigation of Abstract Expressionist art's arrival in Germany, and to a comparison of Greenberg's notion of kitsch with Horkheimer and Adorno's concept of the culture industry. I have shown that the impact of Greenberg's criticism on the international scene was considerably less strong than might be assumed by a US-American art critical audience, which even today focuses heavily on Greenberg's work, albeit in both a positive and negative sense.

With regard to Greenberg's art criticism, one may conclude that its success and influence depended as much on the art to which it referred as vice versa. As noted, Abstract Expressionism began to slowly enter Germany only in the late 1950s, after it had found an established place in the Western art historical canon. For this reason, Greenberg's art criticism was no longer needed to prepare Abstract Expressionism's public reception in Germany. Although his writing did much to originally place Abstract Expressionism in the canon, once the art was there, Greenberg's criticism was no longer required reading for the German audience.[48]

With regard to Greenberg's culture criticism, the comparison with Horkheimer and Adorno has shown that Greenberg's account of the relationship between culture and totalitarianism would have been superfluous in Germany. This relationship, only alluded to in "Avant-Garde and Kitsch," is drawn in much finer and more convincing detail by the two German critical theorists. As was argued, Greenberg's notion of kitsch has a limited totalitarian potential for two reasons. First, its field of activity is restricted to art history. Secondly, its totalitarian effect is limited to the level of content, where it simply provides pleasure and diversion. Horkheimer and Adorno, on the other hand, analyze much more closely the multiple fields through which reactionary cultural production may arise. Furthermore, through their expanded concept of form, which treats form as inherently meaningful and thus potentially the carrier of totalitarian significance, Horkheimer and Adorno demonstrate that the totalitarian potential of mass produced culture extends far beyond its overt content. Through their understanding of the stereotype and the domination of particulars by the formal whole in the culture industry product, Horkheimer and Adorno convincingly argue that the totalitarian potential of the culture industry expands beyond the offering of mere pleasure and diversion. In comparison with their more penetrating analysis, Greenberg's account of the dangers of kitsch is sadly inadequate. The anti-totalitarian concern of Greenberg's culture criticism seems forced and artificial. In his own words, it is perhaps a "trendy"

framework that the later Greenberg, who became exclusively devoted to art criticism, rejects.[49]

Notes

I would like to thank Matthew Biro, Donald Kuspit, and David Raskin for conversations and comments on an earlier version of this manuscript.

1 See for example the comprehensive bibliography on Clement Greenberg included in *Clement Greenberg: The Collected Essays and Criticism, Volume 1: Perceptions and Judgments, 1939-1944*; *Volume 2: Arrogant Purpose, 1945-1949*; *Volume 3: Affirmations and Refusals, 1950-1956*; *Volume 4: Modernism with a Vengeance, 1957-1969*, ed. John O'Brian (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1986-1993).

2 The term "Germany" will be used in the following to designate former West-Germany and contemporary Germany after the unification. Because in most cases the term will refer to both, the currently correct terminology will be given preference.

3 It has to be noted that Greenberg's lack of reception in Germany is only one example for the curious still unexamined ignorance of German academics toward US-American art criticism and theory, which has been noticed only recently. Promising efforts to publish US-American art criticism and theory in Germany have been pursued by Stefan Germer and Isabelle Graw, editors of the new art magazine *Texte zur Kunst*, established in Cologne in 1991.

4 Greenberg's exclusion from Udo Kultermann's recently published historical survey of the discipline of art history illustrates this lack of German secondary literature on Greenberg well. See his *Geschichte der Kunstgeschichte: Der Weg einer Wissenschaft* (Munich: Prestel, 1990). An exception to the lack of German secondary literature on Greenberg is the profound comparison between Habermas and Greenberg's concepts of modernism by Ingeborg Hoesterey, "Die Moderne am Ende? Zu den ästhetischen Positionen von Jürgen Habermas und Clement Greenberg," *Zeitschrift für Ästhetik und Allgemeine Kunstwissenschaft* 29 (1984): 19-32. An uninformed, polemical statement on Greenberg's concept of the objective nature of taste is Willi Bongard, "A propos Clement Greenberg: De gustibus est disputandum!," *Kunstforum* 11 (October/November 1974): 110-112. An interview with Clement Greenberg appeared as "Gespräch mit dem New Yorker Kunstpapst Clement Greenberg: 'Wir brauchen wieder Maßstäbe wie bei Raffael'," *Die Welt* (March 3, 1977). In some other articles Greenberg is casually referred to within a sentence or paragraph, yet usually in an explanatory way which clearly shows that the average German art magazine reader is not expected to be familiar with him.

5 Clement Greenberg, "Avantgarde and Kitsch," *Partisan Review* 6 (Fall 1939): 34-49. The page numbers for all following quotes from this essay will refer to the reprint in *Clement Greenberg: The Collected Essays and Criticism, Volume 1*, 5-22.

6 Clement Greenberg, "Towards a Newer Laocoon," *Partisan Review* 7 (July/August 1940): 296-310. Reprinted in *Clement Greenberg: The Collected Essays and Criticism, Volume 1*, 23-38.

7 Clement Greenberg, *Art and Culture: Critical Essays* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1961).

8 For a detailed study of this phenomenon see Walter Grasskamp, *Die unbewältigte Moderne: Kunst und Öffentlichkeit* (Beck: Munich, 1989).

9 See the collection of documents for the first four Documentas by Dieter Westecker, Carl Eberth, Werner Langemann, Erich Müller, *documenta—Dokumente 1955-1968: Vier internationale Ausstellungen moderner Kunst, Texte und Fotografien* (Kassel: Georg Wenderoth Publishers, 1972).

10 The Museum of Modern Art, *The New American Painting: As Shown in Eight European Countries, 1958-1959* (New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1958). For a detailed exhibition history of post-World War II US-American art in Europe see *Amerikanische Kunst von 1945 bis heute: Kunst der USA in europäischen Sammlungen*, eds. Dieter

Honisch and Jens Christian Jensen (Cologne: DuMont, 1976), 9-23, 212-314.

11 Ibid., 297, 303.

12 Ibid., 177.

13 Werner Haftmann, *Malerei des 20. Jahrhunderts* (Munich: Prestel, 1955).

14 *Clement Greenberg: The Collected Essays, Volume 1*, 12.

15 Ibid., 16.

16 Ibid.

17 Ibid., 16-17.

18 Ibid., 20. (My italics.)

19 Ibid., 12.

20 Saul Ostrow, "Avant-Garde and Kitsch Fifty Years Later: A Conversation with Clement Greenberg," *Arts Magazine* 64 (December 1989): 56.

21 *Clement Greenberg: The Collected Essays and Criticism, Volume 1*, 22. (Italics are part of the original text.)

22 The essay is part of Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialektik der Aufklärung: Philosophische Fragmente* (1947; reprint ed., Frankfurt am Main: S. Fischer Verlag, 1969), 128-176. For the English translation see Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialectic of the Enlightenment*, trans. John Cumming (New York: The Seabury Press, 1972), 120-167. Page numbers of this English translation will be given in brackets following the page numbers of the German reprint edition. All translations quoted here are my own.

23 See for example their treatment in Thomas Crow, "Modernism and Mass Culture in the Visual Arts," in *Modernism and Modernity: The Vancouver Conference Papers*, eds. Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, Serge Guilbaut, David Solkin (Halifax: Press of the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, 1983), 215-277, or in Andreas Huyssen, *After the Great Divide: Modernism, Mass Culture, Postmodernism* (Bloomington/Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1986), vii-43.

24 For example, culture industry products can be destructive to art, they can borrow and transform elements of art, they can share characteristics with art, and they are even defined as abolishing the opposition of serious and easy art.
An example for the culture industry being defined in opposition to art is that art denies the fulfillment of desire in a negative way, it sublimates desire, whereas the culture industry produces desire that is not fulfilled, thereby ultimately suppressing it. Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialektik der Aufklärung*, 148 [139-140].
A culture industry product can be destructive to art, for example, in that its totality, i.e., its integration of all parts into a whole, brings an end to the liberating dissonance of art, i.e., its disintegration of parts and whole. Ibid., 133-134 [125-126].
A culture industry product can borrow or transform elements of art. For example, it transforms the concept of "tragic," in art originally a mode of resistence and liberation, into a concept of "tragic" as a means of restriction and menace. Ibid., 160 [151-152].
A shared characteristic between art and the culture industry is that they both define their language as anathema. Ibid., 136 [128].
Even though the culture industry is also able to reveal truth, its abolishment of the opposition between serious and easy art is one point where Horkheimer and Adorno see it as false. By uniting the two, the culture industry destroys the negative truth that was revealed in their former opposition, i.e., the corresponding actual differences of class and life standard within a society. Ibid., 143-144 [135].

25 Some of Adorno's crucial concepts of art are already alluded to in the culture industry essay, such as the idea of suffering and dissonance. Yet his aesthetic theory becomes much more complex, culminating in his unfinished work, *Ästhetische Theorie*, eds. Gretel Adorno and Rolf Tiedemann (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1970). For the English translation see Theodor W. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, trans. C. Lenhardt, eds. Gretel Adorno and Rolf Tiedemann (London and New York: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1984).

26 Apart from the essay in *Dialectic of the Enlightenment*, Adorno in particular devoted several extensive sociological studies to specific phenomena of the culture industry. See for example his detailed analysis of the astrology column of the *Los Angeles Times* entitled, "The Stars Down to Earth: The *Los Angeles Times* Astrology Column: A Study

in Secondary Superstition," in *Gesammelte Schriften Volume IX*, eds. Susan Buck-Morss and Rolf Tiedemann (1952-53; Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1975), 14-120, or his analyses of pop songs in "Schlageranalysen," *Anbruch* 11 (1929), 108-114. Susan Buck-Morss points to the respect that Adorno treats the culture industry with, when emphasizing that he applied the same analytical method in his jazz articles as in his interpretations of Husserl, Kierkegaard, and Stravinsky. Susan Buck-Morss, *The Origin of Negative Dialectics: Theodor W. Adorno, Walter Benjamin, and the Frankfurt Institute* (New York: The Free Press, 1977), 109.

27 The culture industry essay is written at the same time that Adorno is working on a study of the kind of personality that is inclined to subjugate itself to an authoritarian other. Theodor W. Adorno et al., *The Authoritarian Personality: Studies in Prejudice*, eds. Max Horkheimer and Samuel H. Flowerman (New York: Harper & Row, 1950). Adorno is also working on strategies of fascist propaganda in "Anti-Semitism and Fascist Propaganda," in *Gesammelte Schriften Volume VIII*, ed. Rolf Tiedemann (1946; reprint ed., Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1972), 397-407, and in "Freudian Theory and the Pattern of Fascist Propaganda," in *Gesammelte Schriften Volume VIII*, ed. Rolf Tiedemann (1951; reprint ed., Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1972), 408-433.

28 Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialektik der Aufklärung*, 131 [123].

29 Ibid., 168 [159].

30 "Dadurch gewinnt es [das Radio] die trügerische Form desinteressierter, überparteilicher Autorität, die für den Faschismus wie gegossen ist." Ibid.

31 Ibid., 129-130 [121-122].

32 Ibid., 130-132 [122-124].
One could argue in another context that Greenberg, even in his chosen approach to define kitsch in opposition to the avant-garde, is not consistent. Given that already in "Avant Garde and Kitsch" Greenberg's main criterion for avant-garde art is the emphasis on the characteristics of its medium, kitsch would have to be defined as denying these characteristics or adapting those of others. Greenberg, however, does not draw these conclusions.

33 Ibid., 142-143 [134-135].

34 "Die Details werden fungibel. Die kurze Intervallfolge, die in einem Schlager als einprägsam sich bewährte, die vorübergehende Blamage des Helden ... die zuträglichen Prügel, die die Geliebte von der starken Hand des männlichen Stars empfängt ...." Ibid., 133 [125].

35 Ibid., 133-134 [125-126].

36 "Daran wird die Unabänderlichkeit der Verhältnisse erhärtet." Ibid., 157 [148-149].

37 It has to be noted that this is only implicit in Horkheimer and Adorno's writings. While rejecting an analogy, they remain unclear about an alternative specific meaning of form. Their language is filled with images that have to be interpreted by the reader. The interpretation offered above is certainly justified if Horkheimer and Adorno write that "the whole world is made to pass through the filter of the culture industry." Ibid., 134 [126]. Similarly, Horkheimer and Adorno write in the introductory pages of the essay that "the striking unity of microcosm and macrocosm [in reality] presents men with a model of their culture: the false identity of the general and the particular." Ibid., 128 [120-121]. And finally, referring to Wagner's "Gesamtkunstwerk" strategy, Horkheimer and Adorno conclude that its unity of form expresses unity as its content. Ibid., 132 [124].

38 The emphasis lies on the acceptance of the loss of individuality. Horkheimer and Adorno do not assume that individuality can or did actually exist. In a way the culture industry reveals the truth that individuality is a part of the belief of the Enlightenment and never really existed. Ibid., 164 [155].

39 Ibid., 134-135 [126-127].

40 Ibid., 165 [156].

41 "Donald Duck in den Cartoons wie die Unglücklichen in der Realität erhalten ihre Prügel, damit die Zuschauer sich an die eigenen gewöhnen." Ibid., 147 [138].

42 Ibid., 132-133 [124-125].

43 Ibid., 134-135 [126-127].

44 For analyses of National Socialist propaganda see for example the collection of essays in *Nazi Propaganda: The Power and the Limitations*, ed. David Welch (Totowa, New

Jersey: Barnes & Noble Books, 1983), and Jutta Sywottek, *Mobilmachung für den totalen Krieg: Die propagandistische Vorbereitung der deutchen Bevölkerung auf den Zweiten Weltkrieg* (Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag, 1976).

45 *Clement Greenberg: The Collected Essays and Criticism, Volume 1*, 7.

46 This is a frequent issue in post-World War II, especially 1950s, German literature, for example in both the theoretical and literary writings of the Konkrete Poesie movement around figures like Helmut Heissenbüttel and Ernst Jandl.

47 *The Origin of Negative Dialectics*, 101. (Italics are part of the original text.)

48 Another issue to be examined in this context is why Germany has not really developed a strong critical infrastructure to internationally promote its own art in a convincing way. See for example the critique of German art criticism in Lothar Schmidt-Mühlisch, "Die Hinrichtung der documenta 6, oder: Die verstimmten Gralshüter der Avantgarde: Sechs Thesen zur Situation der Kunstkritik in Deutschland," *Kunstforum* 23 (August/September 1977): 21-26. This state of German art criticism may result from a lacking model, which Greenberg's art criticism provided in the United States.

49 An issue that remains to be examined with respect to a comparison between Greenberg and Horkheimer and Adorno is the impact Greenberg's "Avant-Garde and Kitsch" essay had on the US-American reception of Horkheimer and Adorno. More precisely, did Greenberg's strong dichotomy of high and low art predetermine the reading of the culture industry essay as a defense of high art?

Leo Steinberg's Criticism: Symptom of Formalist Crisis, Prophetic of Postmodernist Promise

Randall K. Van Schepen

> "Objectivity" leaves it to others to say why the matter in hand is being studied at all. But who are the others?
>
> Leo Steinberg, 1967

> The deepening inroads of art into non-art continue to alienate the connoisseur as art defects and departs into strange territories leaving the old stand-by criteria to rule an eroding plane.
>
> Leo Steinberg, 1968

Set in the environment of the nineteen fifties and sixties, Leo Steinberg's criticism was one of that era's strongest expressions of anti-formalist writing. By today's standard his criticism may lack a sophisticated understanding of its own presuppositions, but placed in its context, at the height of Clement Greenberg's formalist criticism, it must be admired for its display of fortitude and personal conviction. In the postmodern era of art criticism the cry against formalism has become so commonplace that "anti-formalism" is taken for granted and one can no longer see the unconventional nature of Steinberg's criticism, one can no longer clearly see it for what it was and is worth. Steinberg's anti-formalist writing has identifiable characteristics and one of the tasks of this essay is to lay out what these characteristics are. It is important to approach Steinberg on his own terms and also in terms of the success or failure of his own version of anti-formalist criticism. In addition, in the light of Steinberg's own avowed influences, particularly Freud, one can analyze to what extent Steinberg's criticism reveals any type of psycho-analytic or psychological insight, interest, or understanding of art.

Steinberg's criticism needs to be approached first in terms of his interpretation of art history, for it is his view of history that greatly shapes his criticism in a different manner than his contemporaries. The formalist critic looks to history primarily for visual examples which either lead to a modernist understanding of art or are anti-modern, anti-aesthetic.[1]

Greenberg's thesis is that the history of art is primarily a process of self-purification that eventually came to focus on issues that related only to art itself. Art becomes art in its truest sense when all extraneous things are eliminated, that is, all aspects which do not wholly belong either to its two-dimensional or three-dimensional character, e.g. illusionism or narrative content. Because Greenberg and other formalists accept the formulation of modern art as about this process of self-purification, for them the most significant shift in painting occurs in the late nineteenth century, when artists began to create paintings that were more "truly" two-dimensional, more honestly flat. By privileging late nineteenth century French painting Greenberg asserted that something unique happened at this time and in this place and even more specifically in the art of Manet. In the broad planes of Manet's paintings Greenberg saw the true self-defining modernist impulse forming. Allowing himself to say that something fundamentally different happened to art after 1860, Greenberg then dismissed art prior to Manet's fissure as being either inferior or simply about different, and perhaps not pertinent, aesthetic issues—namely representation.

Even early in Steinberg's writings, as in "Eye is Part of Mind" of 1953, he reacted to the modernist attitude about this supposed holistic entity called "representational" art. This anti-modernist art (if not anti-modernist, then at least in Greenbergian terms, "of poor quality") was, of course, the pre-1860 art that Greenberg dismissed as naïve, unselfconsciously created realistic art, but it was also the modern art that Steinberg covered as a critic, such as the work of Jasper Johns, Rodin, and late Picasso. Unlike Greenberg, Steinberg defined modern art in terms that were comprehensive enough to encompass both it and ancient art. Rather than seeing late nineteenth century French art as a rupture from previous artistic concerns, Steinberg saw art history as seamless and unified. The question running through Steinberg's mind then was not "What is different about modern art?," but "What is the same about modern and ancient art?"[2]

Ultimately, it is Steinberg's training as an art historian and his Panofskian humanist leanings that do not allow him to dismiss non-modern art out of hand. For him, history is seen as a backdrop against which we view contemporary art and by which we make sense of it. To dismiss historical art would be to say that the people who created it were fundamentally different from modern people. The main objection Steinberg has to formalists, however, is not what they discuss, for he admits to a need for studying the formal concerns of art, but he:

> ... mistrust[s] their certainties, their apparatus of quantification, their self-righteous indifference to that part of artistic utterance which their tools do not measure. [He] dislike[s] above all their interdictory stance—the attitude that tells an artist what he ought not to do, and the spectator what he ought not to see.[3]

Emotional, cultural and even literary aspects of art that have brought centuries of enrichment to the viewer were no longer legitimate concerns for the formalist critic. Rather, the art world, which in Steinberg's time was rather enamored with formalism, seemed concerned with increasingly "self" obsessed art—that is, an art dealing with itself and not the human subject.

Yet Steinberg's objection to the view that contemporary art is the only art to deal significantly with its own "artistic" issues is not that modern art does not do this but that great historical art has always dealt with its medium in ways that drew attention to itself. Steinberg suggests that this was done in numerous ways in historical art, for example through the use of visual quotations from other works of art (the artistic discipline's self-referentiality), large gilt frames (an individual artwork's self-referentiality), and careful use of the environment surrounding the work (a kind of "site specificity" that Michael Fried would call theatrical). Even Greenberg admits that "The Old Masters always took into account the tension between surface and illusion, between physical facts of the medium and its figurative content—but in their need to conceal art with art, the last thing they wanted was to make an explicit point of this tension."[4] Responding to Greenberg's understanding of Old Masters in his "Other Criteria," Steinberg quotes Greenberg's essay "Modernist Painting," noting that Greenberg's objection to Old Master painting relies, in the end, on the fact that "one *tends* to see what was in an Old Master before seeing it as a picture, [and] one sees a Modernist painting as a picture first"[5][emphasis mine]. While one can admit, along with Steinberg, that the distinction Greenberg makes between Old Masters and modernist art is seemingly subjectively based on what one's "tendencies" are, whether one sees a "picture" first or "objects" and "spaces," one might take issue with the next step that Steinberg took. He threw out any distinction between works that are primarily about their "pictureness" and works that are primarily representational. In his words, "the Old Masters always took pains to neutralize the effect of reality, presenting their make-believe worlds, as it were, between [stylistic] quotation marks."[6] The difference between modern art and historical art is only a matter of subjective degree.

Steinberg studies the manner in which historical works, ranging from Rembrandt sketches to the Sistine Ceiling, undermine their illusionistic character, in order to critically support his hypothesis that there is less of a difference between modernist paintings and Old Masters than Greenberg allows.[7] Steinberg posits that throughout the history of art there were artists whose works were undeniably "about" self-critical issues—about self-definition and artistic boundaries. This appeal to historical authority is typical of Steinberg, who, it seems, would rather stand on familiar

historical ground than on the slippery slope of modern culture. The stance he takes could not be called naïve, for his contemporary criticism is too insightful for that, but there seems to be great hesitancy on his part to admit that there are significant differences between modern and earlier people or art. Despite this general hesitancy, Steinberg, in his 1962 essay "Contemporary Art and the Plight of its Public," goes so far as to say that "Modern art always projects itself into a twilight zone where no values are fixed. It is always born in anxiety." There is apparently at least some recognition on Steinberg's part of societal differences between the mid-twentieth century and the Renaissance. However, his admission that modern art is "born in anxiety" does not translate into a need to deal critically with it in significantly different ways than historical art. As a corrective measure to Greenberg's formalism, Steinberg's openness is surely helpful, but hardly a definitive solution to the problem of understanding modern works of art as distinctly modern.

A more effective, yet ultimately unfulfilled, way in which Steinberg made his case against formalism was by using social and psychological methods of investigation to discuss modernist art. The very art that Greenbergian criticism hailed as purely modern and self-critical was the art which Steinberg analyzed in socio-psychological terms. Interestingly enough, the same painters that formalist critic Michael Fried picked as the prime examples of the new modernist painting for his show "Three American Painters," Noland, Olitski, and Louis, were discussed in socio-psychological terms by Steinberg. Rather than analyzing this painting in terms of flatness, relationship to frame, or handling of paint, Steinberg attempted to associate them with the culture at large. Thus, for Steinberg, Noland's "thirty-foot-long stripe paintings, consisting of parallel color bands, embody, beyond the subtlety of their color, principles of efficiency, speed, and machine-tooled precision which, in the imagination to which they appeal, tend to associate themselves with the output of industry more than that of art. Noland's pictures of the late sixties are the fastest I know."[8] Also, Steinberg can conceivably imagine "journeying through an Olitski,"[9] and Louis' veils of color are "visionary,"[10] not just visual.

Fried and Greenberg's paragons of flat modernist painting were discussed by Steinberg in terms that related them to things outside of the picture plane, a sacrilege for formalist critics. Speaking of modern art in these terms is very much in line with Steinberg's idea that "modern art has not, after all, abandoned the imitation of nature, and that, in its most powerful expressions, representation is still an essential condition, not an expendable freight."[11] This is equally valid for seemingly totally abstract works of art where, rather than perceptible reality, the modern painter may attempt to relay "trajectories and vectors, lines of tension and strain."[12] Rather than Greenberg's narrow definition of "representation" as

illusion and allusion to things outside the purely aesthetic experience of the work, Steinberg widens "representation" to mean any sort of content which relates to human existence, whether theoretical or physical.

Since for Steinberg every work is ostensibly realist in the sense that it deals with some aspect of the experienced world, every work "is to some degree a value judgment"[13] because it chooses one thing to explore over another. By noting the inherent "value judgments" in painting, Steinberg could allow, in a very practical manner, factors "outside of the picture." Instead of focusing on the hermetically sealed-off aesthetically experienced epiphany of the formalist, Steinberg freed himself from the bonds of the visual image alone, permitting himself to roam the less sure space of existence. In this respect he seems to have foreshadowed what have become postmodern concerns, exploring what is left out of the picture as well as what is put in. The idea of the "frame" currently enjoying critical popularity, that is, the boundaries of the text as well as what is explicit, seems implicit in Steinberg's concern for the value judgments that are necessarily present in the aesthetic process. The insight of Steinberg's remark is striking in comparison to a quote from Michael Fried: "The formal critic of modernist painting, then, is also a moral critic: not because all art is at bottom a criticism of life, but because modernist painting is at least a criticism of itself."[14] Therefore, the formalist critic sees morality only in terms of how the art deals with art, while Steinberg's remark is set into his understanding of art as pursuing the "social role of fixating thought in esthetic form, pinning down the most ethereal conceptions of the age in vital designs, and rendering them accessible to the apparatus of sense"[15]—exactly what Fried, with deleterious intent, calls a "criticism of life." For Steinberg, art must always be tied to a lived experience of the world and humanity in order to resonate with his sensibility.

It is doubtful whether anyone today would argue that Fried's form of art morality allows for a richer and more full understanding of the work of art.[16] However, on the "moral" level of assessing the value judgments inherent in the creation of art and in his psycho-social exploration of modernist "flat" paintings, Steinberg also leaves the reader wanting. The psycho-social explication of Noland, Louis, and Olitski's work, while promising, takes up little more than a page or two of Steinberg's writings. It can only be called a feeble stab at formalism rather than an indicting attack. Steinberg seems to whet the reader's appetite with the unequivocally strong use of non-formalist analysis for these works, but he fails to displace in any consequential way the formalist criticism of which he is an avowed enemy.

Likewise, the possibilities of exploring the moral dimensions of the works heralded by the formalists were extremely rich. The relationship between the artists and the larger culture with which Steinberg seems to

be attuned, the antagonistic attitude of the avant-garde, the cynicism of modern art, and the "politics" of art were all issues very alive at the time of Steinberg's writing. Yet they are not discussed in terms of the morality that he mentions as being present "to some degree" in every work of art. Admittedly, he does explore the marketplace of the art world in his writing, but not in terms of its influence on the artist's aesthetic choices, and the resulting forms of art, and not in terms of particular situations that would shed light on particular works. For example, in "Other Criteria" he begins with a stimulating discussion of the similarities between the art world and the investment world. His approach is not, however, art historical or art critical, but virtually purely sociological. Its exploration of the art community is without regard for how these market-like forces effect specific works of art. His analysis is not invalid, but the moral implications of art-making are not explored in the terms that seem to be demanded by Steinberg's interests. The allusions are often present in his writing, as in "Contemporary Art and the Plight of its Public." But again the stress is not on the moral choices that artists need to make, but on the "personal courage"[17] of the viewer. Steinberg's personal search for meaning in the process of interpretation and understanding seems to block him from any analysis of the contemporary artist's own moral judgments or pre-judgments. His plan to attack formalism by analyzing the same works of art that the formalists do, but using less restrictive terms and being open to the moral dimensions of the art, could be effective if the concepts were pushed to a more convincing degree.

The place where Steinberg's criticism comes into its own and leaves its defensive posture is in his critical writing on artists and works that were denigrated by formalist critics. This was his most effective way of combating formalist criticism, and it is here that Steinberg was his most prophetic. The artists he chooses to write about are instructive in themselves. Despite the necessity of comparing Steinberg's criticism to that of Greenbergian critics, it is only infrequently that he regarded the artists mentioned above—Olitski, Louis, and Noland (and Pollock)—as being paragons of modernist painting. He chose to evaluate art that was all but ignored by the formalists—art that they were unwilling to make judgments about. Thus, instead of following the lead of formalist criticism, Steinberg chose the less traveled path. In hindsight, it became the dominant mode of artistic production from his time on.

The art Steinberg most effectively treated was called "kitsch" by Clement Greenberg. Greenberg's influential essay on "kitsch" was scathing in its attack on art that represented elements from everyday life or visual culture. Rather than encouraging a refined aesthetic experience, Greenberg said that "kitsch art" reached down to the lowest common denominators of culture, be they the sexual unconscious, illusionism, everyday objects, or

media images. For Greenberg the most obvious artistic examples came from Dada and Pop; they seemed to have little regard for the "purely aesthetic" issues he was interested in. The art Steinberg championed was that of Robert Rauschenberg and Jasper Johns, and also Picasso's late works, criticized by formalist critics as being an aesthetic look backward. While it is true that Steinberg's attraction to Picasso's late works might have derived from his acceptance of the traditional art historical model of a master's final style unfolding in his old age, he added much that was new to the discussion of these important and sometimes disturbing works. But it is in his Johns essays, and to a certain degree in his Rauschenberg commentary, that Steinberg writes with the greatest depth and feeling. The Johns essays in particular are not emphatically anti-formalist, but in fact use Steinberg's skills in attending to form to create an empathic engagement with the work. It is here that he made his most valuable contribution to the field of art criticism, one that seemingly bridges the gap between form and content.

Having then chosen the artists who were seemingly beyond the grasp of the formalists, Steinberg, in his own inimitable style, approached this art with a professed "suspended judgment until the work's intention has come into focus and his response to it is—in the literal sense of the word—sympathetic."[18] What attracted Steinberg to Rauschenberg and Johns is that they "relegate[d] the whole maintenance problem of flatness to subject matter."[19] The resulting art was not "flatness vs. illusion" but used flatness as an element in a picture the way other artists used color, texture or a still life object. It was one more part of their artistic arsenal. Perhaps the whole issue of flatness as subject matter was most succinctly expressed by Rauschenberg's *Factum I* and *Factum II* of 1957, deliberate apings of Abstract Expressionism. Here Rauschenberg showed Abstract Expressionism for what it was—a style which could be manipulated like any other.

Steinberg's exploration of subject matter and style is extremely interesting. His empathic criticism gives the reader the experience of "feeling along with the work,"[20] as suggested by such phrases as "I felt," "It dawned on me," "I began to wonder." This sensitivity to the "average" reader, not just the aesthete, pervades Steinberg's criticism, giving credence to his stated concern for the audience, whether it be of an art work or article. For Steinberg, if art is to be a "challenge to the imagination," then it is the kind of art which does not neatly fit within traditional schema. This process of discovery is not a phony show put on for the reader, but a genuine "bewildered alarm"[21] at contemporary art for its brazenness and shock value. Steinberg first tries to fit modern work in some historical framework, in order to talk about it in familiar terms and to find common ground. If this process can be accomplished without difficulty, the work fails to give the jolt we expect from modern art. We do

not receive our "fix," for "the thrill of pain caused by modern art is like an addiction."[22] Steinberg received his "fix" from Rauschenberg and Johns.

Steinberg's criticism of Rauschenberg and Johns must be understood in the context of a concept latent in his criticism of the fifties but only fully developed in his 1968 essay "Other Criteria," namely, the "flatbed picture plane." This concept is a coup of critical writing, and remains one of the most significant ways of viewing Rauschenberg and Johns' pivotal works. In his early essays on Johns the "flatbed" analogy surfaces in terms of a shift in subject matter from "nature to culture," evident visually in a shift from vertical to a horizontal orientation. Steinberg regarded Abstract Expressionism as still being tied to the "natural" and the "vertical," that is, still relying on the relationship of the viewer/artist to the work as an expression of reality in the formed world. This "reality" was obviously not a "representational" one in the strict sense of the word, but representative of the inner state of the artist's mind. Pollock's drips correlate with the inner workings of his mind, not just with purely aesthetic concerns. Even though Pollock worked on the ground, which would seem to signal the shift from the vertical orientation to the horizontal, he only did so as

> an expedient. After the first color skeins had gone down, he would tack the canvas on to a wall—to get acquainted with it, he used to say; to see where it wanted to go. He lived with the painting in its upright state, as with a world confronting his human posture. It is in this sense, I think, that the Abstract Expressionists were still nature painters.[23]

Only with the advent of the Rauschenberg/Johns phenomenon does Steinberg see a crucial change occur in art. Instead of looking to themselves or to natural forms, as Pollock or Picasso implicitly did, they chose subjects that were "representational" but only of social/cultural/media images. The reality "problem" of modern art signalled here and in Steinberg's "Other Criteria," that is, "how to make the painting a first hand reality—resolves itself when subject matter shifts from nature to culture."[24]

The change Steinberg signals is significant in at least one respect. By denying Greenberg a profound shift in the nineteenth century—a shift which culminated in the new and different art of the American modernists of the 1950s and 1960s—one would think that Steinberg had painted himself into a corner by saying that new art could not be qualitatively or quantitatively different than historical art. Yet, he claims such a difference for Rauschenberg and Johns. Greenberg seemed to throw all art prior to the late 1800s in the same illusionistic category, which was reprehensible to Steinberg. But if one looks at the way he reacts to pre-Rauschenberg and Johns art the result is not dissimilar. Writing about Johns, he states: "what

really depressed me was what I felt these works were able to do to all other art. The pictures of de Kooning and Kline, it seemed to me, were suddenly tossed into the one pot with Rembrandt and Giotto. All alike suddenly became painters of illusion."[25] Remarkably, Steinberg seems to be arguing for a new set of critical tools to deal with an artistic style that brings him "anxiety," as truly modern art should. But the explication of this new anxiety-ridden criticism is held in check by Steinberg's defensive stance against formalism.

The "flatbed" is an even more radical shift for Steinberg than abstraction, for even in Cubism and Abstract Expressionism, "The top of the picture corresponds to where we hold our heads aloft; while its lower edge gravitates to where we place our feet."[26] "Flatbed" pictures are "symbolic allusions to hard surfaces such as tabletops, studio floors, charts, bulletin boards—any receptor surface on which objects are scattered, on which data is entered, on which information may be received, printed, impressed—whether coherently or in confusion."[27] The "source" of this "flatbed" art, if it can be called that, is said to be intimated in Duchamp and his *Large Glass*, which is displayed vertically only for "convenience."[28] Rather than seeing the history of modern painting in terms of a shift from illusion to flatness, as Greenberg would, perhaps Steinberg should see it as a gradual move away from natural subjects toward modern/cultural ones. He might have cited Baudelaire as a predecessor of his concern for contemporary, modern subjects. What Steinberg does in fact do is analyze Rauschenberg and Johns in terms of how they make this shift from natural things to information, from the already-made to cultural and societal processes. This nature/culture shift anticipates the postmodernist attempt to process predigested images and information and displaying them in a seemingly detached way, rather than to the modern attempt to interpret reality. Postmodernism is at least an outgrowth of the idea of looking to culture for subject matter, that is, for images to appropriate.

Steinberg's critical writing on Rauschenberg and Johns signals a field that he should, by his own admission, be exploring, in terms of its psychological significance. Throughout Steinberg's writing one finds brief allusions to psychoanalysis but never, even in his ground breaking "Sexuality of Christ" essay, does he use psychoanalytic understanding satisfactorily.[29] Terms like "subconscious," "self-projection," "psychic-orientation," "psychological gesture" appear with regularity in his "flatbed" essays, but with little or no elaboration of their meaning and specific use. Steinberg acknowledged that his generation was "brought up on Freud and Joyce,"[30] and it seems that his criticism opens itself up to the possibility of such interpretive methods. Speaking of contemporary art, he writes: "It is a kind of self-analysis that a new image can throw you into

and for which I am grateful."[31] After reading such a statement, however, the reader is left wondering what kind of analysis he is discussing and what type of art would lead him to such a reaction. If Freud has taught us anything, then we must realize that what will throw one person into "self-analysis" will throw another into an ecstatic aesthetic experience. The relaying of this information seems to be a crucial, yet missing, piece of Steinberg's writing.

The relative subjectivity of Steinberg's criticism is one of its strong points, particularly in the "objective" environment in which he was working. Yet he never seems to let his "ground" fully show. He does not seem critically aware of his own reasons for becoming engaged with certain art, that is, why his imagination is "challenged" by one painting and not another. He offers tantalizing details without further elaboration, as in the following statement about Rauschenberg's *Bed* of 1955: "There in the vertical posture of 'art,' it continues to work on the imagination as the eternal companion of our other resource, our horizontality, the flat bedding in which we do our begetting, conceiving, and dreaming."[32] Steinberg mentions the sexual use of beds in vague, general language. He does not discuss the fact that it is Rauschenberg's bed that is at issue. He does not state why it might make interesting art, nor what we can learn of Rauschenberg from it, nor even more generally what one can learn about "begetting, conceiving, and dreaming" from it. The possibilities this particular piece offers to the critic of a generation "brought up on Freud" are too numerous to mention but are not even hinted at by Steinberg. Addressing the use of such things as an artist's sexuality in evaluating art in the essay "Objectivity and the Shrinking Self," Steinberg had the following to say about a scholar who denied a place for sexuality in the discussion of Michelangelo's art: "a man's sex life—even if mocked in the phrase 'physical pleasures'—is no less formative in his personality than his faith or his Neo-Platonist thought."[33] Why is it that Steinberg offers such a defense of the exploration of Michelangelo's sexuality but attempts no such inquiry with respect to an artist—Rauschenberg—and work—his *Bed*—which seem to lend themselves explicitly to such a reading?

In Steinberg's essays on Picasso's late works a similar puzzling use of psychological terms occurs with comparable results. In the lengthy 1972 essay "The Algerian Women and Picasso at Large," Steinberg takes a full nine pages before he acknowledges the sexual dimension of Picasso's Algerian Women series, and even then the word "phallicized" appears only in brackets. Steinberg's repression of the sexual violence Picasso wreaks on the women in this series of works is quite remarkable, considering the display of manipulated female bodies Picasso affords the viewer/voyeur. What Steinberg does give us is a careful analysis of the evolution of the harem figures throughout the series' sketches and

paintings. In painstaking detail he traces the shifting figures, changes in position, color, and other compositional elements of the female figures. Picasso's treatment of women is legendary, both on and off of the canvas, yet it is only the treatment of their bodies in terms of what Steinberg calls the "impulse to possess"[34] that is acknowledged. For Steinberg, "the impulse to possess" is based on Picasso's searching nature, his desire to know all that can be known about the female figure. The physically impossible twists and turns Picasso gives these females is said to be a result of Picasso's attempt to display all possible parts of the figure at once. But Steinberg fails to note that the most prominently displayed features are sexual ones. Looking at these convoluted figures, one cannot help but feel that Picasso's simultaneous display of breasts and buttocks comes from more than an intellectual or even emotional desire to possess knowledge. It is in fact reminiscent of the contortions of pornography. Such an association, even if historically questionable, may be a bit too "low-brow" for the genteel Steinberg. Not to admit that Picasso's constructed contortions of the female form contain a violent and hostile element, and instead to euphemize his work as a search for knowledge, is to show an unwillingness to "call a spade a spade," however politically incorrect it may be to do so.

Steinberg never gives Picasso's alleged "impulse to possess" a personal reason for existing. The questions—Why the impulse to possess?, or, What exactly does Picasso want to possess?—are left unanswered, even unexplored. Picasso's depiction of the female form in the Algerian Women series is analyzed in the same way as the Cubist's "impulse to possess" all the views of a bottle on one painted surface. The fact that these are women and that Picasso is a sexually disturbed male is ignored. Instead, Steinberg makes such comments as: "For most of Picasso's twisting anatomies serpentination is in fact a misnomer. The apparent versations of his serpentine poses are not athletically self-induced, but rather a pretext for his own impulsive visualization of three-dimensional form."[35] Yet, the impulsive behavior that Picasso performs is not on mere "three-dimensionality," but on women; his continual degradation of their physical nature, the constant visual violence with which he portrays them, comes from elements of Picasso's personality that are more basic to who he is and what he does than a concern with anything as abstract as "the impulsive visualization of three-dimensional form."

Late in "The Algerian Women and Picasso at Large" Steinberg points out the possibility of "a sadistic streak"[36] in Picasso. But this and similar possibilities are only phrased in the form of questions—Is Picasso doing this to women?, Is he showing us what we do to women?, Are they an exercise of power over women?. These significant issues are not as fully explored by Steinberg as are the changing physical positions of each

figure in the series. In the end, Steinberg believes that in Picasso's later works, "the consolidated parts, though successfully rolled up from ulterior vantage points, yield a sort of hideousness which blocks out normal erotic considerations."[37] What exactly does this mean: that because the figures are so deformed one cannot discuss their sexual content? It is clear from the context that Steinberg does not mean we should discuss the work in terms of "abnormal" erotic considerations (although this would be useful). What are Steinberg's understandings of normal and abnormal erotic expressions?

The sexual issues touched on, in the form of questions, are a few of those left unexamined by Steinberg. They could have been more fully attended to by him, or at least acknowledged as significant areas of inquiry. Steinberg's discussion of contemporary art was regarded as reactionary by formalist criticism, and it is only when he leaves this defensive posture that his writing is most persuasive. But it is only persuasive in that it signals possibilities of criticism, not their realization. His criticism did, however, fill a need in the fifties and sixties, a need made poignant by the dominance of formalism. His willingness to explore issues outside of the picture frame, no matter how cursory in our eyes, was refreshing in a "nearsighted" art critical and art historical community. "These things are what you are missing," would seem to be what he is saying. His openness to multiple interpretations and suspension of initial judgment was welcome in a field where "rightness" and judgments of quality were pervasive in the form of didactic criticism, and still are today. The difference between his writing and today's best criticism is that some of the issues that Steinberg merely signalled are acknowledged as crucial.

Notes

1 A prime example of this reading of historical art in terms of its relationship to modernist art would be the art historical writings of Michael Fried, e.g., *Absorption and Theatricality: Painter and Beholder in the Age of Diderot* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1980). Fried uses the criteria he established in his essay "Art and Objecthood" to "read" how nineteenth century French art creates an aesthetic or "real" theatrical relationship to the viewer.

2 Tom Wolfe, in his essay *The Painted Word* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1975; 5th printing, 1979), has a chapter titled "Hello Steinberg," in which he attempts to lay out Steinberg's theories about the pop movement. Rather than saying that Steinberg was interested in historicizing modern art, as suggested here, Wolfe claims that Steinberg was interested in Johns primarily because his art was more flat than Pollock—an "outflattening" of Greenberg's visual purity. While the choice of flat subject matter was one of Steinberg's concerns, it places him in the same critical camp as Greenberg, something Steinberg was working against. Wolfe's axe-grinding got in the way of seeing the clear distinctions between Steinberg and Greenberg, allowing him to state that Steinberg, a historian of some repute, would forbid "realism and three dimensional illusion" and "flatness is still God" (82). What was important to Steinberg was that the

subject matter have a certain psychological resonance with the beholder—something explored later here.

3 All quotes from Leo Steinberg are from *Other Criteria, Confrontations with Twentieth Century Art* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1972), a collection of his critical essays. I will furnish the title of the essay/chapter in the notes coming from this text; Steinberg, "Other Criteria," 64.

4 Ibid., "Other Criteria," 67, quotes footnote 23 in Greenberg's "Cézanne," in *Art and Culture*, 1961.

5 Ibid., "Other Criteria," 67, quotes Greenberg in "Modernist Painting," 103-4.

6 Ibid., "Other Criteria," 70.

7 Steinberg's idea that there are similar issues being dealt with in historical and contempoary art is remarkably similar to the position of the late nineteenth century German art historians. Michael Podro, in *The Critical Historians of Art* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982), explains that in the eighteenth century, in the first stage of German critical art historiography, Winckelmann examined all art in relation to his ideal art, classical Greek. One could make the same observation of Greenberg or Fried—that they analyze ancient or historical art in terms of their ideal of Post-Painterly Abstraction. In the second Germanic stage of art historiography, as exemplified in Hegel, the Greeks are still privileged as primary, yet other periods are analyzed in terms more intrinsic to their purposes, such as expression. It is in the third and last stage of the Germanic art critical development that one can observe a parallel to Steinberg's writing. The problem of showing "how the art of alien or past cultures could become part of the mental life of the present" (xxii) was a central one to these historians and Steinberg is essentially taking on the same project, only in reverse. His task was not to fit historical art into the present but to situate contemporary art in relation to the established past. Thus, when Podro explains that "in this last stage, rather than seeing earlier works as partial manifestations of an ideal to which the writers themselves subscribed [as Winckelmann and Greenberg], continuity with the sensibility of the present was maintained by the concept of a universal artistic purpose shared by past and present"(4), one can clearly see that Steinberg seems firmly rooted in this Germanic model, of which Panofsky was the latest manifestation.

8 Ibid., "Other Criteria," 80. Steinberg is at direct odds with Fried, who attempted to "follow Noland's development in regard to the modernist pictorial surface alone: in the conviction that if a rigorous conceptual grasp of the transformations it has undergone could somehow be incorporated as a vital factor into the act of perception itself, one would be a long way toward experiencing Noland's paintings in all their passion, eloquence and fragile power." Michael Fried, "Three American Painters," catalogue of the Fogg Art Museum show in Cambridge, Massachusetts (New York: Garland Publications, 1965): 32. Similar contrasts could be made with the writing on Olitski and Louis.

9 Steinberg, "Other Criteria," 70.

10 Ibid., "Other Criteria," 82.

11 Ibid., "The Eye is a Part of the Mind," 291.

12 Ibid., "The Eye is a Part of the Mind," 305.

13 Ibid., "The Eye is a Part of the Mind," 297.

14 Michael Fried, "Three American Painters" (New York: Garland Publications, 1965): 10.

15 Steinberg, "The Eye is a Part of the Mind," 306.

16 In fact, in light of the political, religious and ethical questions being explored by artists such as Mapplethorpe, Serrano, Holzer and "Others," Fried's definition of moral strength seems trite by comparison.

17 Steinberg, "Contemporary Art and the Plight of its Public," 15.

18 Ibid., "Other Criteria," 63.

19 Ibid., "Jasper Johns and the First Seven Years of His Art," 20.

20 Ibid., "Other Criteria," 63.

21 Ibid., "Jasper Johns and the First Seven Years of His Art," 23.

22 Ibid., "Contemporary Art and the Plight of its Public," 6.

23 Ibid., "Other Criteria," 84.

24 Ibid., "Jasper Johns and the First Seven Years of His Art," 28.

25 Ibid., "Other Criteria," 12.
26 Ibid., "Other Criteria," 82.
27 Ibid., "Other Criteria," 84.
28 Ibid., "Other Criteria," 85. One is reminded of the fact that Duchamp worked on his *Large Glass* horizontally. The most famous picture of its construction, by Man Ray, is of Duchamp's "collection" of dust to be fixed onto the glass with varnish, just the kind of collection Steinberg is discussing.
29 Here I disagree with Andrée Hayum, who says that Steinberg's criticism "isolates recurrent themes, filtering a traditional iconographic approach through an awareness of psychoanalytic method." See "The Literature of Art: Steinberg on Twentieth Century Art," a review of "Other Criteria" in *Burlington Magazine*, 852 (March 1974): 159.
30 Ibid., "Objectivity and the Shrinking Self," 320. Max Kozloff, in a review of "Other Criteria," agrees that Steinberg participates "in the outlooks of Joyce and Freud." In contrast, I think Steinberg neither uses nor truly understands the Freudian or any other psychoanalytic system. See *Artforum* VII N6 (February 1973): 77.
31 Ibid., "Contemporary Art and the Plight of its Public," 15.
32 Ibid., "Other Criteria," 90.
33 Ibid., "Objectivity and the Shrinking Self," 314.
34 Ibid., "The Algerian Women and Picasso at Large," 151.
35 Ibid., "The Algerian Women and Picasso at Large," 187.
36 Ibid., "The Algerian Women and Picasso at Large," 225.
37 Ibid., "The Algerian Women and Picasso at Large," 227.

Cindy Sherman: The Cyborg Disrobes

Andrew Menard

How typical of Cindy Sherman to hide behind the idea of nakedness. She has long shown a leniency for nakedness in her use of prostheses: the large, pendulous breasts, the pregnant belly, the battered pair of buttocks that have appeared so often in recent years. I am tempted to say there is a *logic* of nakedness to her work, a rigorous development in the direction of nakedness. Only in her most recent work, however—a lurid, almost comical display of medical mannequins—has the body been reduced to the essentials of orifice and skin.

Strictly speaking, the mannequins are not naked, but nude—and this is the point. Nudity is nakedness without its innocence or vulnerability. Nudity is dispassionate—a visual convention, a form of art—not a raw or limpid state of being. (The defense of Mapplethorpe's photographs in Cincinnati relied quite precisely on this distinction.) In the arrangement of the mannequins we find echoes of Goya, Manet, Picasso, Beckmann, as well as the more rigid, more automated conventions of pornography. There is even an example of the classical torso, with its usual severity of male musculature (the aesthetic inspiration for the ancient breast-plate). These are the least innocent, least transparent of forms and it is clear that Sherman values them for the way in which they obscure the body. Rather than nakedness, it is the *opacity* of nakedness she is after.

The curious paradox of this work is that Sherman herself is anything but naked. For many years she encouraged the public scrutiny of her body, allowing more and more flesh to show, but only in the form of prostheses. This dialectic of flesh and machine, of plasticity and plastic, made the *loss* of her body especially acute. Nakedness became a form of camouflage. Now that the body is completely naked, now that she has stripped the body of all its artifices, her own body has disappeared. Without this disappearance, the nakedness which confronts would lose its meaning. Thus the humorous equation of this work: exposure = concealment.

Rarely do we associate nakedness with artifice. It is more likely to provoke expressions of realness or naturalness. In the words of John

Berger, "Nakedness seems to return us to nature." For Sherman, on the other hand, nakedness is simply the most extreme form of artifice. Her enormous assortment of devices—the make-up, the breasts, the mannequins—are all conspicuous simulations of nakedness and the body. It is almost as if the hard machinery of her wit needs the elusive softness of skin in order to operate. Nakedness is never innocence or naturalness but transparent falseness. At her *most* naked, Sherman is completely artificial.

This is more than a question of irony, however. It is true that the body has never been natural or pure in her work, because Sherman's view of the body has always been jaded, contaminated—historical. There is a symmetry between the eye that beholds and the body that is beheld. But Sherman's eye is not simply critical—it is mechanical. If the body itself has become mechanical in the new work, that is because the force of her gaze has always been in the direction of technology. To spend ten years exposing the body, only to reveal it as an automation of the flesh, is to push artifice, as well as irony, into a new dimension—the dimension of the cyborg. Only in a cyborg world would stripping the body of its artifices mean finding the body itself to be artificial.

Sherman has never made a secret of her sources—they are, in fact, a necessary feature of her irony. But even her most dutiful and intoxicating references to disaster films and *film noir* pale before the intense fidelity of her homage to Hans Bellmer. Sherman's work is complex enough to appropriate Goya and Manet, but it is the photographs of Bellmer which truly haunt her. Traces of his work can be found in many of Sherman's earlier pieces, and it would appear in retrospect that the spirit of Bellmer, and of Surrealism, has been present all along. But in her use of a mannequin with genitals and orifices, and even in her placement of the mannequins, Sherman now exaggerates the comparison to Bellmer. Several of the new pieces rather slavishly mimic photographs from the *poupée* series. Since Sherman always makes slavishness a form of liberation, I suspect that she simply wishes to make the connection to Bellmer explicit. This, too, would seem to adhere to the equation of nakedness. By disappearing into the work of someone else, she allows her own intentions to become clearer: concealment = exposure.

What Sherman locates in Bellmer, and in Surrealism as a movement, must be fairly obvious: an attention to the body, yes, but specifically a body that is both artificial and real. Surrealism was a modern form of the grotesque, an aesthetic of wounded, dismembered, orifice-eroded flesh. Perhaps more important, it was an automated, *mechanized* form of the grotesque. Surrealism systematically fulfilled Marinetti's prophesy of "metallization," not only in the metaphors it resorted to but in its use of

photography and collage. What Surrealism represents is an intersection of the obdurate, prosthetic eye of 19th century photography and the pliant, metallized body of 20th century war. (Many of the Surrealists had either been part of World War I or seen its aftermath in the medical schools they attended.) It is the point at which the body itself began to approximate the way in which we see it: an equivalence of the prosthetic eye and the prosthetic body. To speak of the "Surrealist body" is to affirm an exemplary configuration of flesh and the instruments of flesh. Bellmer's own inspiration was *The Tales of Hoffmann*, Offenbach's opera of a man falling hopelessly in love with a robot.

The cyborg might be understood as a contemporary form of the ancient nude, not only as a product of geometry and engineering, but as an artifact of assembly. The ancient, classical nude was fundamentally generic, constructed from the "superior" parts of several bodies rather than duplicating a single, singular body. During the Enlightenment it was transformed into the automated body, the robotics of toys and dolls, allowing the parts of the body to become modular, interchangeable. The modern cyborg is not a robot but is the result of its history, a history that in many ways parallels the segmentation of the Western nude. (While the classical and Renaissance nude was an aesthetic of the centered body, of the hard, flexible torso, the modern nude is largely a record of fragmentation, a dispersal of the nude to the extremities of body and canvas (Goya, Degas, Rodin); by the end of World War I, nudity had migrated beyond the flesh altogether: Duchamp's *Virgin*, Man Ray's *Érotique-voilée*.)

Unlike the robot, the cyborg is a monster—hybrid, perverted, contaminated. It violates the boundaries of biology and engineering and it assails the precincts of the prosthetic eye, the lubricated gaze of technology. Above all, the cyborg is eccentric, modifying the symmetry between corpus and speculum that began with Surrealism. The prosthetic eye now becomes an agent of change. Its effect is to make the body more artificial, but also more naked in its construction.

In one of the most disturbing of Sherman's new works, an aging, perhaps cynical woman lies naked on a luxurious bed of hair, while giving birth to a series of linked sausages. The woman's body is composed of a truncated (though youthful) pelvis, a "breast-plate" of pregnant stomach and pendulous (perhaps old, perhaps milk-laden) breasts, two detached (though also youthful) arms, and the head of a woman with wizened skin and wispy, whitened hair.

What makes this image so striking is the diversity of its contradictions, its crowded elisions of the usual categories of biology and representation: the shock of a geriatric woman in labor; the body of a young woman

combined with the head of an old one; the violence of birth portrayed in the context of a languorous, almost lethargic pose; the way in which the forbidden image of birth shatters the passivity of a pose so reminiscent of the *Maya desnuda* and other poses of male delectation; the idea of the male breast-plate treated as an image of pregnancy—and of pregnancy itself being associated with armor (an association that Kiki Smith also exploits).

It is within the brown, almost bloody skin of the sausages that the contradictions of this work are most compressed. Along with the wigs, the sausages seem to be the most organic thing in the photograph. On the other hand, what they most remind us of is excrement or entrails (not that many newborns aren't also covered with their own feces). Ruling these works is a fundamental confusion or blending of the orifices—a suggestion that the act of birth is an act of evacuation, that the woman is delivering her insides, turning herself inside out. Evacuation thus becomes a mechanism of creation, of re-birth. That it is literally a mechanism is indicated by the sausages themselves, with their morphology of automation and the production-line. If this woman lacks an interior dimension, she at least has the *conviction* of hollowness, of dehumanization.

For the logic of nakedness to be found in Sherman's work is undoubtedly the logic of dehumanization. It is no accident that in this, her most intimate glimpse of herself, she is most absent. Nakedness is a process of evisceration or disappearance. Even when she seems to exclude the body altogether, as in the vomit series, she is still pursuing the theme of elimination. (Vomiting and birth are somewhat equivalent in this instance.) To eliminate the body, to disappear into the body of the cyborg, is a hollowing out process, a process of evagination. That a woman would do this is especially interesting since it denies the moist, amniotic interior so commonly associated with the female body. Of course, it also denies the "purely internal model" (Breton) of male desire that is so often projected on to this body. Where Breton saw the female body from the outside in, Sherman sees it from the inside out; where Magritte wished to penetrate the body to write in meaning, she allows meaning to escape; where Man Ray tried to possess the body, she prefers to transcend it.

It is hard to look at Sherman's nudes and get a clear idea of their sex and gender. Like the lascivious and "pornographic" poses that contain them, the genitals and orifices resist easy definition.

Confining sexuality to the genitals has long been an aim of Christianity, which finds in the wounds, the stigmata of Christ, the most significant orifices of the body. Most pornography simply reinforces this repression—exceeding it only in the act of *showing* sex. It is true that pornography adds the anus and the mouth to the list of permissible orifices. But

pornography, at least visual pornography, is largely the domain of the close-up—of endlessly repeated labia and buttocks, or, in the case of hard-core pornography, of penetration and come-shots—indicating its preference for the restricted area.

Sherman parodies this prejudice in her poses, with the center of virtually every photograph occupied by a genital or orifice of some sort. She also constructs these poses as if they were an assembly of close-ups. In one of them, for example, a modular vulva is balanced rather awkwardly between two segmented legs, both butting up against a mammoth pair of breasts, which become the pedestal for a head masked in black leather. It is as if the figures in Manet's *Olympia*, which this pose somewhat resembles (especially in its elicitation of the black attendant), had been reduced to an inventory of the "dirty" or "kinky" parts. Certainly there is a visual short-hand operating here that amplifies the divisions of the pornographic body.

On the other hand, what we notice most about these works is their modularity. The same mannequin may be either "male" or "female," depending on which set of genitals is inserted; a "female" body may support a "male" head; a "male" body may develop breasts. Such encroachment of gender is hinted at in the pornography of transsexualism, but is even closer, I think, to the ideology of Sade. By treating the body as a machine, and the orgy as an intercourse of interchangeable parts, Sade made sex into an exemplary instrument of assembly and disassembly. Clearly he had no use for the individual or the couple—no use for unity or the possibility of closure. Nor was there any significant difference between objects and bodies, flesh and machinery, to be found in the plan. The cogs of his vast erotic device turned quite freely.

It is not hard to see elements of the cyborg in this plan; in fact, we might say the cyborg is a perfect embodiment of Sadean sexuality. The difference is that Sade's machinery is always an expression of female availability and of male control, while the cyborg is not. One of Sherman's most eloquent pieces is a close-up of the raised buttocks—a classic ass-shot of pornography—but with the genital/anal insert missing. Unlike Sade, Sherman refuses to govern the apparatus she has set in motion. Genitals and orifices signify the *absence* of sex and gender, not their redolent availability and eagerness to be defined. The most fundamental orifice, it turns out, is the missing part, the orifice which has not been filled or occupied at all—by either male *or* female genitals.

It is, of course, the vagrancy of these orifices that affirms the humorous potential of the mannequins. A rather subdued humor has always been present in Sherman's work and in the condom and vomit series it percolated closer to the surface. Her latest show would appear to be the

sharpest, and most contradictory, expression of this humor. While it is possible to walk up to these works and recoil in horror, it is also possible to look at them and smile, even laugh.

There are a number of comic inversions to be found in the work, a kind of dead-pan oscillation between sexual artifice and artificial sex. There is, for example, an extended joke about insemination, with the "real" insemination of artificial bodies (the geriatric woman giving birth) replacing the "artificial" insemination of real bodies; also the idea of "real" sex between artificial organs replacing "artificial" sex between real organs (phone sex, video sex). As *medical* mannequins, even the theatricality of their poses becomes a kind of joke—an assertion of the operating theater. This, in turn, may be seen as a pun on the most famous image of Surrealism: Lautreamont's "chance meeting on a dissecting table of a sewing machine and an umbrella."

For all the horror to be found in the mannequins, what allows us to laugh is their inflexible invincibility. The mannequins advance their sexual charade with all the aplomb of comedy's great automatons: Rabelais' Panurge, Tom Sawyer, Buster Keaton. Whatever happens to them, they remain essentially unchanged: the wounds they suffer do not hurt; their humiliation does not demean; their sexuality does not sexualize. The very modularity of the mannequins insures their comic possibilities. That this modularity is pursued so aggressively, that it virtually forces itself on the audience, inflates these possibilities. If the mannequins were any less resolute or cruel, they would be maudlin—and therefore *merely* horrifying. It is the lucidity of their meanness which makes them so funny.

An art of pathos or pain would appear to be religious in nature, and Sherman seems to understand that, for most of us, there is little yearning for completeness these days: the fragment has the concentration we seek. Our great obsessions are eroticism and death, not salvation. The body is not so much an impediment to the soul as an end in itself—a necessary fragment. To the degree technology regulates our world, its automation of sexuality and flesh can also be said to mechanize the Christian body of pain and suffering. And what is comedy, after all, but the lure of insensibility, the aspiration "to be free of passion" (Schiller). All great comedy is a form of dehumanization, and like so many artists who preceded her—Breugel, Bosch, Duchamp, Brecht, Warhol—Sherman recognizes this. What we find in her work is that the open orifice of laughter may also be modular.

The orifices of Sherman's mannequins reveal the absence of internal organs as well as sexual organs. Again we are reminded of the hollow, excavated body, the body with no immanent structure or meaning. To

change the sexual organs of a mannequin, even to combine them as Sherman occasionally does, in no way alters its interior framework—for there is none. Much like the cyborg, where there is also little difference between inside and outside, self and other, the meaning of the mannequin resides in its surface, in the skin.

Surrealism was devoted to the skin. Seeking the limits of bourgeois reality in the flesh of the female body, it advocated violence and penetration as a confirmation of the permeability of skin. The Surrealist program of extrusion, dismemberment, and mechanization implied a lack of internal transformation. The body was simply re-shaped—or kept its shape when re-arranged—encouraging the idea that meaning had circulated to the surface. When Ernst intervened in the vellum of 19th century illustration, when Magritte filleted the flesh of a supine woman, it wasn't to divulge the meaning *behind* the surface but to disclose the meaning *in* the surface. Such ruptures insisted on the surface itself being isolated as a kind of fragment. The skin, usually represented as even or smooth, was now seen to be full of sutures and seams. In a sense, the entire body became an orifice.

Sherman is attracted to the Surrealist body because it is a body of transgression. She shares its obsession with the articulation of flesh. We are always aware of severance when examining the mannequins, and we tend to focus on details, segmentation, odd juxtapositions (the oddest, and most explicitly indebted to Bellmer, being the alliance of a male and female pelvis—the male with a silver cock ring and the female with a pendent tampon string).

Despite the openness of their orifices, the mannequins are best understood as a form of appendage. Contrary to Surrealism, which often resurrected the classic torso while trying to ventilate its monumental shape, Sherman approaches the body as a surplus of extremities. Perhaps the most contradictory feature of this work is the way in which her depletion of the body is *composed* additively. Even the genitals and orifices become a kind of appendage—yet another section to be annexed to the body. What matters most is sewing the sections together, the abruptness of concatenation allowing the sutures to remain visible. In this, as in so many other things, Sherman duplicates the anatomy of the cyborg.

There is a clinical side to the mannequins which is reinforced by the conceit of the operating theater and by the almost surgical quality of photography itself, "cutting into the body of the world" (Krauss). Not only does Sherman exploit the anatomical precision of the mannequins, but she photographs them in a manner which emphasizes the transition from "pornographic" subjects to those which appear to be specimens from a pathology text. (A recently published book of her work is entitled

Specimens.) There is a lewdness and an objectivity to be found in both medical illustration and pornography—yet another reminder of the body's specificity, its resistance to spirituality, and one of the reasons the study of anatomy was banned by the Church for so many years. With its intimacy of detail, however, photography enhances this process, inflates it visually. Surely the most important orifice of both pornography and anatomy, is the eye—the orifice that incises (the most shocking example of this being the incision of the eye itself in the movie *Un Chien Andalou*). Photography *is* the enhanced, predatory eye in the age of technology and what we observe in Sherman's work is a measured equivalence of photography, pornography and medicine. Each represents, not only the abstraction of flesh, but also the flesh of abstraction.

Surveillance has always been an aspect of human sight. As predators we are naturally surreptitious and we have perfected the art of observation, of "eyes that see without being seen" (Foucault). What the camera did was mechanize this process, allowing for greater control and visibility. The nature of mechanical surveillance is that it *must* be visible: only through visibility will people be forced to see themselves as the camera sees them, which is the essence of control. (As Julia Scher made clear in her recent show, the purpose of surveillance is "to create suspicious behavior, not detect it.") Enunciating the necessity of *being* seen as well as seeing, the prosthetic eye is both narcissistic and voyeuristic—the burden of the male gaze. Much of what we regard as the male gaze is little more than an institutionalization of our natural inclination towards surveillance.

Voyeurism lacks that sense of "passionate sympathetic contemplation" that, for Pythagoras, made being a spectator the highest form of humanity. (A modern equivalent might be Brecht's theory of "alienation" or Benjamin's aesthetic of "distraction.") Voyeurism is ideally suited to the prosthetic eye, for mechanized vision refuses to engage what it sees. It looks for knowledge and power and beauty, but in a peculiarly insular or possessive manner. No wonder the most commonly invoked instruments of voyeurism (aside from the key-hole) are binoculars and the telephoto lens. Both encourage an intimacy of separation—a closeness of attention rather than affection, of fascination rather than understanding.

Of course Sherman has often been accused of narcissism, and of promoting a victimized view of women. Apparently this is one of the reasons she chose to eliminate herself from the work. That the issues of narcissism and voyeurism remain, even though Sherman herself has disappeared, seems proof enough that a mechanism of some complexity has been operating all along. Naturally there is a question of whether jaundiced mimicry of bourgeois forms is enough to subvert them, and if Sherman's work had never surpassed the strategy of the untitled film stills

she might be vulnerable to this criticism. But over the years the logic of her nakedness has become clearer, and she has never indulged in the kind of exhibitionism that perpetuates the objectification of women. (David Salle and Jeff Koons are obvious examples; Annie Sprinkle and Karen Finley are somewhat more ambiguous.) The use of prostheses would seem to exclude this possibility, since they always interrupt, and thus deny, the real body.

Her latest works consolidate this attack on the prosthetic gaze. Despite the similarities of certain close-ups, it is impossible to approach the mannequins as if they were the work of Jeff Koons, for example. If nothing else, her sense of humor sets Sherman apart, for like most pornographers, Koons is notably humorless. Pornography has to maintain the illusion of closeness—it depends on the steadiness of its gaze—and comedy is always a process of fracture. The calculated intimacy of pornography rather crudely impairs sympathy as well as passion. Sherman demolishes this process, utilizing a body of segmented parts to segment the beady fixation of male regard. Her use of the pornographic close-up, especially in the context of a prosthetic body, is both comic and a feminization of mechanized sight.

In many ways, Sherman is trying to create a new audience, a new spectator for art. She is, in fact, seeking that "passionate sympathetic contemplation" that Pythagoras sought (and that Bertrand Russell identified as the origin of "theory"). If she wishes the body itself to become less human, less passionate, she clearly hopes the contemplation of this body will become more so. Her work is, in the best sense of the word, provocative. While her own body may have had to disappear in order for the cyborg to emerge, there is reason to believe that when it *fully* emerges, when the cyborg *fully* disrobes, it will be the spectator of today who finally disappears.

The most provocative aspect of Sherman's new work is her appropriation of "pornography." Confirming the evolution of the Christian body, pornography has long been associated with mortification, purification—a liberation of the spirit. Certainly the theme of redemption is essential to the more philosophical pornography of Sade, Bellmer, Bataille, Réage. What Sherman sees in pornography, however, is not the liberation of the spirit, but the liberation of the body. Hers is an image of the cyborg rather than religion.

What we think of as *the* body has, for centuries, been a version of the *male* body. Perhaps the most obvious example of this is the nude. Throughout the history of Western art, both male and female nudes have been the reflection of a male obsession with geometry and sexuality, with desire and design, mensuration and masturbation. Even something as "objective" as anatomy perpetuates this stereotype. We like to think of the Renaissance as

the source of modern anatomy, yet "the more Renaissance anatomists dissected, looked into, and visually represented the female body, the more powerfully and convincingly they saw it to be a version of the male's" (Laqueur). While this physiological version of the "one-sex" body petered out by the 19th century, it was soon replaced by a psychological version: Freud's theories of castration and "penis-envy."

For Sherman, for any woman, to feel trapped in the body means that the desire to eliminate it is a far different issue than for men. Efforts to transcend the body have to be located in the desire to transcend male definitions of the body—in the yearning to experience the body as something other than Other. As a visual record of the one-sex body, it is hardly surprising that Sherman would utilize the nude, especially the pornographic nude, to clarify this desire for transcendence. Nor is it surprising, given the history of her work, that she would choose the mannequin as the vehicle of her transcendence. To the degree it expresses both the visual and anatomical history of the body, her use of the *medical* mannequin is particularly droll.

Of course, the appetite for dehumanization is an essential feature of the modern aesthetic, and Sherman is hardly alone in her use of the mannequin. A number of contemporary artists have found it to be suggestive: Charles Ray, Zoe Leonard, Laurie Simmons, Reynolds and Stathacos. But where other artists tend to use the mannequin ironically, as a criticism of corporal or representational stereotypes, Sherman seems to view it as a genuine expression of cyborg aesthetics as well.

The urge to be a machine, an urge that Warhol often (and rather facetiously) expressed, is mostly a male fantasy. Sherman does not want to be a machine. But she does want to disrupt the relentless machinery of convention, where men are associated with technology and women with the more "organic" province of the body. Certainly she rejects that tradition of women artists which finds in the body, especially the female body, the orifice of nature (Carolee Schneeman, Nancy Spero, Kiki Smith). As early as the untitled film stills, when the temperament of her photography began to emerge, Sherman has suppressed this connection between women and nature. As Donna Haraway points out, "The cyborg skips the step of original unity, of identification with nature in the Western sense." In many of Sherman's pieces—the disaster series, for instance, or the more recent condom and vomit pieces—it appears that even nature has become a prosthetic terrain, an environment of debris. Salvation is not to be found in the humid, earthy arms of the goddess, or in its promise of lost unity, but in the dry and metallic embrace of the *film* goddess, an obvious cyborg.

The cyborg is both fact and fantasy.

Less and less do machines fall short of being human: rather it is human beings who must compare themselves to machines—and the very idea of comparison is getting fuzzy. Artificial intelligence will be considered human when our definition of what is human embraces the artificial. The body is already a cyborg. Certainly we do not treat someone with a prosthetic leg or plastic surgery—or, for that matter, an artificial heart—as any less human. We have come to accept the herniated, metallized body, whose technology represents a surplus of humanity rather than a harrowing of it. What the metallized body offers is freedom, life, possibly perfection. In fact, perfection is the beckoning song of technology. It is the myth of Pygmalion in reverse, with the perfect invention, the perfect simulation, allowing *us* to come to life.

The cyborg accepts the inevitability of mechanization while subverting its teleology of perfection. Constructing the cyborg body is not an act of purification. Although it may be seen as a kind of mortification—a dehumanization of the body—the result is not purity but pollution. The cyborg is a hybrid of nature and of representation. It contaminates the male body. It makes the nude naked again.

What Sherman finds in the cyborg is the image of her own transformation. Closing her eyes to the Arcadian cleft of nature, she reaches instead for the prosthetic eye of technology. That the prosthetic eye has largely been the domain of the male gaze means that Sherman refuses to see herself as men would see her. Controlling the technology of one's body is a way of controlling the exchange of technology. The free exchange of flesh and technology offers the promise of a free exchange of bodies themselves—the technological extinction of gender. Only by automating her body could Sherman discover its true nature.

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Cindy Sherman and the Female Grotesque

Emily B. Greenberg

In a 1986 interview with Larry Frascella, artist Cindy Sherman once expressed the significance of the "ugliness" of her art: "I've come to the point where I understand how people can manipulate themselves to look a certain way. I'm disgusted with how people get themselves to look beautiful; I'm much more fascinated with the other side."[1]

The female grotesque is an image that has appeared throughout art history, though somewhat covertly, since the fifteenth century. Various theories have been posited as to the meaning and role of the grotesque female body. In this paper, I will examine several theories concerning the female grotesque, her function and role in art and therefore in society.

I initially became interested in Cindy Sherman's work several years ago upon discovering her "Film Stills" of the late 1970s and early 1980s in which she dresses and photographs herself as starlets and young vulnerable women playing typical women's roles (this includes housewife, girlfriend, etc.). It is fascinating to explore the route that Sherman's art has taken in the past decade. Her innocent, attractive, Marilyn-Monroesque female characters have been transformed into what Gerald Marzonati has described as "women dark and old and pained,"[2] witch-like creatures, pig-snouted hags, images laden with rotted food and vomit, in short—grotesque creations.

In almost all of her works since 1982, Sherman seems fascinated, almost obsessed, with ugliness. Her June 1992 exhibit at Metro Pictures was so disturbing and horrific, that viewers were unsure whether to laugh or to run away. These are exactly the reactions Sherman seems to strive towards; her works at times seem to exist merely to shock her viewer. However, it is simultaneously apparent that these works are far more profound. Throughout the literature referring to Sherman's work, there appears to be much debate as to whether Sherman is a feminist or if her works are just general statements about the human condition. While I do agree with the latter theory, there are strong feminist overtones which cannot be ignored. In addition, Sherman employs the idea of the grotesque to make statements which can easily be defined as feminist.

In their respective essays, "Female Grotesques: Carnival and Theory" and "Carnal Abominations: The Female Body as Grotesque," Mary Russo and Margaret Mills define several artistic functions of the female grotesque. My argument is that whether she is aware of it or not, Cindy Sherman's works do indeed possess many of the characteristics that have been defined as "grotesque" and therefore can be recognized as such.

For Mary Russo, the female body is one which "is dangerous and in danger."[3] The grotesque female therefore can be identified as the female protecting herself; her ugliness can be seen as a form of self-preservation. The question which comes to mind is the following: what is this female protecting herself from? Russo hypothesizes that this horrific female is reacting to the norms of a patriarchal structure which envisions her as inferior. The primary way the woman is identified in society is through her beauty, and her silence. Therefore, by rejecting that beauty and that silence, and furthermore by doing so in a blatantly disturbing manner, the female grotesque serves to counteract society's taboos around the female and femininity.

Russo discusses the theory of "carnival" of the woman making a "spectacle of herself," and of the danger of this—"for a woman making a spectacle out of herself had to do with a kind of inadvertency and loss of boundaries: the possessors of ... overly rouged cheeks, of a voice shrill in laughter."[4] By transforming herself, her "feminine" body, into one which radically negates the invisible, beautiful woman that is expected, the female grotesque serves as a negation of patriarchal expectations. Furthermore, the grotesque female body does not merely confront and contradict these stereotypes. "In its bloated and irrepressible state," its "inversion, mockery and degradation ... suggests a redeployment or counterproduction of culture, knowledge, and can be seen above all as a site of insurgency, and not merely withdrawal."[5]

Russo cites feminist writer Luce Irigary who discusses the use of the woman's body in this manner as a necessity. "For a woman ... it means to resubmit herself ... in particular to ideas about herself, that are elaborated in/by masculine logic, but so as to make visible, by an effect of playful repetition, what was supposed to remain invisible."[6] This theory would account for the overemphasis of the fabricated and artificial that is everpresent in the bodies and the mannerisms of the grotesque, and is ubiquitous in the work of Cindy Sherman. Russo believes this is the female's way of not only reversing the power from the masculine to feminine, it also gives her the control over her own femininity. Womanliness therefore becomes an option for the female; she can put it on or take it off as she so pleases. "For a woman ... a flaunting of the feminine is a take-it-and-leave-it possibility. To put on femininity with a vengeance suggests the power of taking it off."[7]

In her essay, "Carnal Abominations: The Female Body as Grotesque," Margaret Mills states, "The female, from the perspective of the collective male public, is constantly and frustratingly mobile between poles of similarity and alienness."[8] She defines several characteristics of the grotesque including that which is not yet simultaneously of this world, that which is foreign yet familiar. Therefore, the female grotesque acts as a symbol of woman's place in society—present yet absent, apparent yet invisible. Other features include the placement of the spectator into a realm of confusion where it becomes difficult to think clearly when confronted with the image, to distinguish between the known and the unknown. Another aspect of the grotesque is the representation of the female body as sexual: therefore, female sexual organs and reproductive functions are stressed. Images of pregnancy and birth are common in that they provide what Miles terms as "'natural' grotesqueness," as she sees these functions as representative of the female body as imperfect, not the "closed, smooth and impenetrable body."[9] A final attribute of the female grotesque body, which is connected to the above, is that it is a body in transformation. She quotes Bakhtin who calls this body "a body in the act of becoming ... outgrows itself, transgressing its own body."[10]

Miles then defines three devices which are characteristics of the presentation of the grotesque: caricature, inversion and hybridization, each of which she thinks has a connection to women and their bodies; while male bodies are depicted as perfect, women's bodies are portrayed as defective. Caricature is the act of fixating on parts of the body, usually parts that are considered "private." The function of caricature is to display what is, according to societal norms, supposed to be hidden. Thus, it is common for the female grotesque to be portrayed as possessing exaggerated features; her breasts, swollen belly and genitals are frequently depicted, and often displayed as inappropriately large.[11]

The second device Miles describes is inversion. Inversion is the act of reversing an image which is expected to appear in a certain agreeable manner into one which is disquieting. The image of woman, which is expected to delight and ease the mind, in particular that of the male, is now depicted as dangerous and threatening. The body is at times elongated, depicted as too thin or obese, the genitals are unbearably large, the facial features are twisted.[12]

The third device is hybridization. This refers to the mixing of disproportioned body parts and images into one. The female grotesque is commonly depicted as a body in transformation, as displaying various stages of a woman's life, with images such as "pregnancy and senility in one figure, they represent birth and death simultaneously."[13]

Miles' chief argument throughout this essay is her view that something can only be considered "grotesque" if society perceives it as such. There

is no set of qualifications which deem an image as such. "Men who wielded the power of creating public representations of women, perceived the female body as quintessentially grotesque ... gender categories play a crucial role in constructing the category of the grotesque and therefore must play a part in any analysis of what constituted grotesqueness."[14]

The art of Cindy Sherman seems to illustrate and embody these theories about the female grotesque. Her grotesque females range from witches, to victims, to monsters, to creatures that are so bizarre that they have become unnamable. Her artistic progression is traceable from her earlier images in which she always photographed herself as the center of the work, to her works of the late 1980s where she began to disappear from her images, to her present works in which she is no longer actively present, yet vestiges of her attitude still remain. Her images certainly embody all of the aspects of the grotesque mentioned above. Sherman's females particularly fit into Miles' definition of grotesque images in that they make a statement about societal constructions of gender and representations of the female, especially the female within this sphere.

Sherman uses her own body—the female body—as a representation of the female condition. While she does not claim to be a feminist, her works definitely contain strong feminist overtones. The question which one encounters upon viewing her work is: why is Sherman so insistent upon incessantly producing these disturbing images? It appears that Sherman is using these images to describe how it might feel to be a female in today's society. At the termination of her article on the female grotesque, Mary Russo leaves her reader with the question, "Why are these old hags laughing?"[15] She is referring to the dominant image of the laughing grotesque female. Most of Sherman's images are portrayed as either cackling or smirking as well. It is almost as if the artist is aware of something deep and hidden that her viewer will never discover. I see Sherman's use of the female grotesque as her usurpation of power from male to female, from masculine to feminine. It appears that it is the male spectator that she is laughing at, as she transfers control from the male gaze to that of the female.

It is interesting that Sherman's characters never face her spectator. In her article, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," Laura Mulvey discusses the female's chief role in film as signifier for the male other, as the bearer and not the maker of the look. Therefore, the female exists only as a spectacle for the male to play off of: she is present merely as a spectacle for the male to desire, an erotic object to be gazed at and played with.[16] It is known that Cindy Sherman has always had a profound interest in film. As a child she was fascinated with the way images were produced on her television screen in Glen Ridge, New Jersey.[17] Whether she has read Mulvey is unknown; however, she seems to be trying to

solve the dilemma that Mulvey poses in her article—how is it possible for women to reverse the cycle, become active and not passive, while so entangled in the patriarchal system?

Sherman's earliest works, the "Film Stills," appeared to simultaneously adhere to yet mimic this system, by producing females as erotic objects laid out in front of the male spectator to be viewed. However, Sherman very quickly abandoned this and began to produce her grotesque images of women. She initially began to do so by portraying women, such as those in *Untitled #85*, 1981 and *Untitled #120*, 1983, who are bizarre and deformed in some way. They appear distressed and sickly, perhaps inhabitants of a mental institution. There is something creepy and mysterious about them, which is even more disturbing because one cannot quite pinpoint what it is that makes them strange. By 1985, with works such as *Untitled #153*, Sherman's females have become so disquieting that it is almost impossible to look at them. Many of her characters are now either near death or actually deceased. They appear to be murder victims, or perhaps rape victims. *Untitled #155* is a particularly distressing image of an entirely nude woman; her bleeding buttocks are the centerpiece of the work. Toward the back of the photograph, one cannot help but notice Sherman's face. She has become in this work a dying/dead victim of abuse, most likely rape, and the perpetrator is presumably male.

As mentioned above, Sherman's grotesques embody the characteristics that Russo and Miles and Bakhtin describe. Her photographs are certainly spectacles in themselves, and she is certainly making spectacles out of her characters. In works such as *Untitled #155*, mentioned above, the body is literally a body in danger, a body which has been abused and destroyed. She is confronting the viewer with the threat women and their bodies face, and she is thrusting it out at her spectator, forcing us to encounter that which we wish to avoid. Thus, Sherman is representing Irigary's theory that it is necessary for women to make the invisible highly visible through repetition and exaggeration.

Sherman accomplishes this through her emphasis on the fabricated and artificial in her images, particularly those which are grotesque. Almost all of her works contain at least one false element to distract the eye. This falseness also makes the works quite humorous at times. Sherman herself once stated, "I find humor in the violence, because I set it up and I know it's fake ... the fakeness amuses me."[18] Her images are replete with falsifications—breastplates, fabricated buttocks, absurdly large noses and teeth and bulging eyes. Thus, Sherman can literally remove her femininity whenever she desires. The option of take-it-or-leave-it womanliness that Russo described is personified through Sherman's art.

Sherman's images employ all three devices Miles describes as being characteristic of the grotesque. She uses caricature by constantly fixating

on emphasized body parts. This is especially apparent in her latest and most horrifying images in which she appears to be determined to make the female anatomy as large and distorted as possible. Her whole manner of reversing the image of woman, which is expected to be beautiful at all times, into her monstrous creations is the epitome of inversion. This is particularly apparent in images such as *Untitled #140*, in which she becomes half woman, half pig, and *Untitled #146*, in which she portrays a crouching frightening creature, neither man nor woman, with a mad look in its eye and teeth that are about to devour the spectator. Most of her works employ the device of hybridization as well, as she is constantly mixing body parts. Her creatures are half animal, half human, young yet old, woman yet man, terrifying yet hilarious.

Another aspect of the grotesque common to all of Sherman's images is her vacillation between the spheres of the known and the unknown. Her images, her females, are of our world, yet alien. They are realistic yet dreamlike, and they tend to border on scenes from a nightmare. An example of Sherman's moving between the familiar and the unfamiliar is a work from 1986, *Untitled #165*, in which she presents to her viewers a creature of indeterminate sex in a red checked gown. The creature peers out at the spectator from behind trees. The image is so bizarre that it becomes threatening, even though the character is not nearly as fierce as many of Sherman's other images. This creature appears in several of Sherman's works, as she crosses the sphere from the known into the unknown, and does so by moving into the male sphere, the "other" sphere.

Finally, Sherman's emphasis on sexuality, most blatant in the form of her concentration on pregnancy and birth in her works, also characterize them as fitting into the category of the grotesque. This is particularly evident in her latest works, such as *Untitled, 1992*, which is one of her most disturbing images. She no longer integrates her own body. Instead, she has fashioned various parts, a breastplate, a doll's arm, and a mask, into a horrifying image of an old hag lying naked on a bed of wigs and giving birth, with distressingly large reproductive organs, to several sausages. All of the devices mentioned above are employed here. The woman's fear of aging, her function as a machine for giving birth, her implicit sexuality, are all part of this startling image which certainly serves to make a statement about the feminine condition. Sherman's focus, as in her earlier works, is on the female body. However, this woman is the antithesis of the nubile, "pretty" women in her "Film Stills." Instead, she confronts her viewer with a grotesque image of a woman literally rotting away, dying, yet still attempting to measure up to feminine expectations. By producing such a ghastly vision of woman, Sherman is reversing woman's function from weak and vulnerable to strong and powerful. Throughout her artistic career, one witnesses Sherman transforming her females, and perhaps herself, from

female voyeurs, who exist merely to play off of the male gaze, into potent women of strength who exist to avert and counteract the male gaze.

Notes

1 Larry Frascella, "Cindy Sherman's Tales of Horror," *Aperture* (Summer 1986): 49.
2 Gerald Marzonati, "Self-Possessed," *Vanity Fair* (October 1985).
3 Mary Russo, "Female Grotesques: Carnival and Theory," in Theresa de Lauretis ed. *Feminist Studies/Critical Studies* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986), 217.
4 Ibid., 212.
5 Ibid., 218.
6 Luce Irigary, *This Sex Which Is Not One*, trans. Catherine Porter (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1985), 76.
7 Russo, 224.
8 Margaret Miles, "Carnal Abominations: The Female Body as Grotesque," in *Carnal Knowing: Female Nakedness and Religious Meaning in the Christian West* (New York: Vintage Books, 1989), 152.
9 Ibid., 153.
10 Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, trans. Helene Iswolsky (Cambridge: The M.I.T. Press, 1968), 307.
11 Miles, 156-157.
12 Ibid., 159.
13 Ibid., 161.
14 Ibid., 162-168.
15 Russo, 228.
16 Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and the Narrative Cinema," in *Visual and Other Pleasures* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989), 14-26.
17 Amei Wallach, "Tough Images to Face," *Los Angeles Times/Calendar* (June 7, 1992): 14-26.
18 Howard Kissel, "The Ego Has Landed," *The Daily News* (July 10, 1987): 61.

The Great Divide

Donald Kuspit

Every once and a while there appears, in the art media, a statement of an issue that is stunning and disarming in its clarity. It is presented with a seeming self-evidence that lets it slide by into inevitable truth. That it might be a lie, all the bigger for the obviousness in which it is cast, never occurs to the reader, because of the casual certainty with which it presented.

Such a grand occasion occurred in the context of a recent article by Thomas Crow. There he writes about "the European star curators—the likes of Achille Bonito Oliva, Rudi Fuchs, Jan Hoet, and Norman Rosenthal— ... who have revived the windy subjectivism and mystical excesses that hardnosed American critics of the '60s had thought banished forever." The curators should not be allowed to get away with their criminal stupidity, and luckily a model exists that shows how to deal with them. "Given the crucial role of Joseph Beuys in authorizing the new curatorial subjectivism ... Benjamin H. D. Buchloh's thorough dismantling of the Beuys mythology, 'The Twilight of the Idol',"[1] sets the standard for the harsh, new hardnosedness necessary to critically dispense with the miscreants.

Both Crow and Buchloh are full of punitive contempt. Whether they understand what they are contemptuous of is another matter. They are eager to assume the superego role, to be the arrogant voiceover, to have the commissarial last word and judgment as though it is their exclusive right.[2] Their militant grandiosity masks profound ignorance of the subjectivism they condemn. Nonetheless, they state an issue, even though they present it in the corrupt, biased form necessary to their self-righteousness. Buchloh has no understanding of the subjective need that motivated Beuys to construct his personal mythology, as the psychoanalysts call it—no sensitivity to subjective need at all—and Crow even less than no understanding, for he takes its meaninglessness for granted. But it is just this assumption that unequivocally discloses the issue.

For what Jean-Francois Lyotard calls "the nostalgia for presence felt by the human subject,"[3] and Frederic Jameson calls "the mirage of the continuity of personal identity,"[4] convey the search for a subjectivity that is supposedly an illusion. Implicit in their thinking, and Crow's and Buchloh's, is the assumption that such subjectivity is a mystification. For

them, internal reality is a refraction of external reality; subjectivity is a distorted mirror of objectivity. Subjectivity can never be primary, for it is always derivative of objectivity. For them, the human subject is reducible to the contingencies of its history and the codes of its society. Its existence is in effect exhausted by them. Thus the subject's feelings are simply artifacts of its historical and social reality. Psychological reality is read away into them. The subject is at most an eccentric, idiomatic expression of the language of its lifeworld. The psyche is turned inside out, as though it has no immanence. There is no real interiority from their point of view—no substantive dynamic to the psyche.

Suffering and the widespread feeling of isolation—Erich Fromm thought that "it was the great fear of isolation, and it alone, that forces the child, girl or boy, to adapt to his family and his society in order to survive"[5]—simply reflect the vicissitudes of "bourgeois ideology," as Lillian Robinson and Lise Vogel assert, in a statement quoted with approval by Buchloh.[6] He himself speaks of "the ritual of instant excitation and perpetually postponed gratification that is the bourgeois mode of experience" and "the bourgeois model of sublimation."[7] "Enforced regression" and "melancholic infantilism"[8]—"incapacitating and infantilizing melancholy"[9]—are characteristic of bourgeois existence. And in the Neo-Expressionist paintings that reflect this infantilism, there is also "the pathetic farce of [bourgeois] repetition-compulsion."[10]

One wonders what a non-bourgeois psychology would be. Regression, melancholy, infantilism, postponed gratification, repetition-compulsion, sublimation are actualities of the human psyche whatever social class a human being belongs to. Buchloh gives interiority a class identity, mystifying its workings. In this he follows Walter Benjamin, who thought that psychoanalysis revealed the pathology of the bourgeois psyche, not the pathology of the psyche as such. Pathology belongs to the bourgeois enemy not the proletariat friend, to the capitalist profiteer not the revolutionary intellectual—a simplistic division not unlike that Crow sets up between windy subjectivism and hardnosed criticism. Such splitting is typical of paranoid-schizoid thinking, and it pervades Marxist thinking about art and society. It is responsible for the ideologization of the psyche. And for ignorance of it. It is doubtful that Buchloh understands the meaning of any of the psychoanalytic terms he uses. He strips them of their intrapsychic import, and uses them as damning catchwords.

The Marxist ideologization of the psyche has been sharply criticized by psychoanalysts as a grotesque misunderstanding of it. It is much more: it is an attempt to label the bourgeois psyche—and the bourgeois psyche alone—pathological. It is to assert that after the revolution that will eliminate class differences there will be no intrapsychic conflict, as though the latter was simply an echo of the former. But this is to

trivialize, indeed, falsify psychological reality. It is as though the Marxists must deny it in order to convince themselves of the possibility of changing social reality. Probably the most notable psychoanalytic critique of Marxism is that Erich Fromm, Béla Grunberger, and Janine Chassequet-Smirgel made of Herbert Marcuse.[11] But Marxists are indifferent to such criticism. They continue to misuse and abuse psychoanalytic concepts for their own ideological purpose: Crow and Buchloh unthinkingly follow in the footsteps of Marcuse.

They cannot help themselves. For if subjectivity has its own "negative dialectic" (regression, deferred gratification, repetition-compulsion, melancholy, etc.)—if pathology is inevitable in human beings whatever the social reality—then social revolution can never be successful. It can never change human nature. Thus Marxists cannot help hating human subjectivity, even more than bourgeois society. Subjectivity not only symbolizes bourgeois society, but the inevitability of psychopathology makes it seem impossible to cure society of its bourgeois character. The Marxists have only one way left to deal with subjectivity: deny it, that is, deny that the psyche has a logic of its own. Deny that any of its developments—psychosexual, object relations, etc.—are primary. Above all, deny the dynamic unconscious. Do not admit that the psyche has a structure independent of social structure. Such denial shows complete contempt for the subject, as in Crow's characterization of subjectivism as windy.

The denial of the subject is epitomized by Marxist contempt for feeling, especially any feeling of vulnerability, as in Buchloh's contempt for the use of the clown as a symbol of the feeling of being powerless in "the work of Picasso, Beckmann, Severini, Derrain and others."[12] Far be it for a Marxist to admit feeling vulnerable. (That would be pathological, and by self-definition there is nothing pathological about Marxists, who declare themselves the healthiest and sanest people in bourgeois society.) In fact, Buchloh grotesquely simplifies the psychological meaning of the clown figure. He completely ignores the humor—a mature defense—it embodies. The clown is a sign of ego strength, integrity, and mastery of adversity, rather than of castration. The clown has successfully dealt with the helplessness and hopelessness of depression. In any case, the scorn Buchloh feels for the clown figure and the artists who use it, and the scorn Crow feels for subjectivism, indicates that they have very strong feeling. Only it is feeling derived from the death instinct—destructive feeling, including the wish to destroy feeling evident in the denial of feeling itself.

A similar denial of feeling is evident in Rosalind E. Krauss's labelling "the fullness of human emotion" as a [petit-bourgeois] "myth," a "universalizing generalization," in Roland Barthes's sense.[13] The fact that an actor remains an "unmoved mover" in a scene that changes around

him/her does not invalidate the intensity of emotion the audience feels when it watches the scene. Moreover, the idea that fullness of human emotion is a myth is nonsense, and a misapplication of the concept of myth. But one can also argue that universalizing generalization prepares the ground for empathy. And a critique of universalizing generalization ignores the fact that particularism can be as mythifying or mystifying. To see femaleness and maleness, blackness and whiteness, heterosexuality and homosexuality, bourgeois and proletariat as isolated particulars is to fetishize and essentialize them into a mythical naturalness that makes the experience of them inaccessible. Krauss, along with Crow and Buchloh, represents the status quo of suppressive art thinking about feeling and the subject.

But I am crediting Buchloh and Crow with too much subtlety, attributing to them an awareness they do not have. In despising feeling—the major representative of the subject—they naïvely reflect the final stage of the dissociation of sensibility inseparable from modernity, as T. S. Eliot thought.[14] Their mentality indicates that the dissociation has become a disintegration. The split between the "sentimental" and "ratiocinative"—the affective and the cognitive—has finally strained sensibility to the extent of reducing it to absurdity. Eliot thought that we had not yet recovered from the dissociation, and it now seems we never will. The split has become absolute and irreversible, to the extent that feeling has not simply become "crude" and thought hypertrophied, but feeling has become irrelevant and thought without reference, that is, it no longer serves reality-testing.[15] This is more than just a version of what Heinz Kohut calls "vertical splitting," with its schizophrenic implications. It is not simply a matter of hating subjective reality as an obstacle to objective social change, or an extension of hatred of bourgeois reality, but of a special kind of psychosis and hatred—the psychosis of denying and hating internal reality. For in denying feeling, one denies internal reality-testing. (Perhaps in attempting to annihilate psychological reality Crow and Buchloh are defending against their own fear of being annihilated by bourgeois society for criticizing it—the bourgeois society that, as professors, they are part of. Such annihilation anxiety is expressed by Buchloh's scorn for the vulnerable clown—the bourgeois in disguise. Perhaps the Marxists are afraid of being mistaken for clowns—not taken seriously—themselves.)

Crow and Buchloh want to deny the relevance of subjective reality, represented by feeling, to art, or rather, they don't see its point, which is why they—Buchloh in particular—necessarily distort subjective reality by giving it comprehensive (if also pseudo) social sense. Neither Crow nor Buchloh has any understanding of what affective attunement to and affective exchange with a work of art might mean. This is another reason

why "subjectivism"—awareness of the role of feeling, and more crucially primary subjectivity, in the production and perception of art [16]—is windy for Crow. It just makes no sense for him, which suggests how disintegrated his sensibility is.

Contemporary expression of the dissociation of sensibility appears in Lyotard's polarization of "melancholia" and "*novatio*,"[17] the "new subjectivity" and the old "experimentation."[18] "The nuance which distinguishes these two modes may be infinitesimal," he writes, and "they often co-exist in the same pieces, are almost indistinguishable; and yet they testify to a difference on which the fate of thought depends and will depend for a long time, between regret and assay."[19] In labelling the subjective side "regret" Lyotard shows his prejudice against it, even his naïveté about it. What kind of insightless understanding of melancholia is it to call it "regret," a term which sentimentalizes and ultimately trivializes it? Does Lyotard have any comprehension of the reality of melancholy—the complexity of the psychology of depression—whether in Sigmund Freud's or Melanie Klein's or Jacob Arlow's or Emmy Gut's or Otto Kernberg's terms? It seems not; it is, simplistically, "regret," which says next to nothing, although a little more than Buchloh who calls it "infantilistic." It is inhumane and insensitive to describe depression, which has become epidemic in modernity,[20] as "infantilistic." It is to insult those who suffer from it. No doubt Buchloh despises depression because it is another sign of vulnerability, like the clown. His attitude of superiority to it indicates a typical Marxist atrophy of empathy and indifference to human feeling.

The trivialization of melancholy as "regret" or infantile, the misappropriation of such ideas as "regression" and "repetition-compulsion" in order to analyze art socially, the general misrepresentation of theories of the psyche, the offhand dismissal of subjectivism as "windy," Buchloh's revival of Lukacs's contemptuous analysis of expressionism—as necrophiliac a critical act as the Neo-Expressionist appropriation of early twentieth century German Expressionism and American Abstract Expressionism supposedly is[21]—and above all the pathologically absurd displacement and subordination of internal (psychological) reality to external (social) reality in order to make the former seem secondary rather than primary, and even meaningless—all mock human suffering as well as the artistic difficulty of finding innovative ways to articulate and symbolize it. What does Lyotard think experimentation and innovation are about? Indeed, his sense of the peculiar intimacy—inseparability?—of melancholia and *novatio* suggests that he in fact unconsciously does understand that the latter exists to make symbolic sense of the former (and all other feelings), whatever else it exists for. (Is Lyotard unwittingly reiterating, in his sense of the infinitesimal nuances that separate

melancholia and *novatio*, the clichéd association of madness and genius, or artist's melancholy, that is, Albrecht Dürer's *Melencolia I*?) Does Buchloh think that early avant-garde experimentation and innovation existed only for their own intellectual sake or to lay bare, in direct correspondence, "the fissures, voids, unresolvable contradictions, irreconcilable particularizations"[22] that exist in society? They exist in primary form in the subject first.

Subjective reality is not a mechanical, myopic, ironic reflection of external reality, but dynamically primary. As Grunberger and Chasseguet-Smirgel have argued, it is a serious mistake to regard society as the source of all human suffering, and social revolution as the cure for it. Arguing that ideology is a projection of subjective reality, they undermine the assumption of Crow and Buchloh that the opposite is true—that subjective reality is an ideological projection of society.[23] Art is the projection of a primary subject as well as an assessment of social reality, but the latter has been split off and fetishized at the expense of the former, which can only weaken our understanding of both. But perhaps to understand the psychosocial reasons why the primary subject has been misunderstood and negated—at best regarded as a social symptom—is the key to understanding suffering. The blindness of Crow and Buchloh to the primacy of subjectivity, and to its primary importance in art and for its audience, suggests the inadequacy of their feeling for both, as well as of their understanding of society.

Notes

1 Thomas Crow, "The Graying of Criticism," *Artforum* 32 (September 1993): 188.
2 I mean arrogance in the sense in which W. R. Bion characterizes it in "On Arrogance" in *Second Thoughts: Selected Papers on Psycho-Analysis* (New York: Jason Aronson, 1984), 86. It is, as he says, "a psychological disaster," for "in the personality ... where death instincts predominate, pride becomes arrogance."
3 Jean-Francois Lyotard, "Answering the Question: What Is Postmodernism," *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), 79.
4 Quoted in Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, "Figures of Authority, Ciphers of Regression: Notes on the Return of Representation in European Painting," *Art After Modernism: Rethinking Representation*, ed. Brian Wallis (New York: New Museum of Contemporary Art in association with David R. Goodine, Boston, 1984), 119.
5 The quotation is from Fromm's Mexican disciple Jorge Silva-Garcia, "Erich Fromm in Mexico," *Contemporary Psychoanalysis*, 25 (April 1989): 249.
6 Quoted in Buchloh, 121.
7 Buchloh, 121.
8 Ibid., 118.
9 Ibid., 108.
10 Ibid., 131.
11 Erich Fromm, *The Crisis of Psychoanalysis* (Greenwich, Conn.: Fawcett, 1971), pp. 27-28 notes that Marcuse distorts "the Freudian concept of repression" by using it "for both

conscious and unconscious data," losing its "whole significance. Marcuse confuses its conventional meaning of oppression or suppression with its psychological one of removing 'something from awareness'." He "plays on the double meaning of the word 'repression,' making it appear as if the two meanings were one, and in this process the meaning of repression in the psychoanalytic sense is lost—although a nice formula is found which unifies a psychological category by the ambiguity of the word." Buchloh does the same thing with "regression." In fact, it is not at all clear by what measure representation is "regressive" and abstraction is "progressive." Is it not possible that once progressive abstraction can come to seem regressive and sterile, and once regressive representation come to seem full of unexpected creative possibilities? This may explain why the progressive artists Buchloh discusses may regress to representation, while assimilating their earlier abstraction into it. In general, it is not clear what "advance" means in art. Anthony Storr, "Psychoanalysis and Creativity," *Freud and the Humanities*, ed. Peregrine Horden (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1985), p. 55 remarks that while "there is a temporal progress in science which makes even the greatest generalizations, like Newton's Law of Universal Gravitation, out of date ... the same is not true of works of art. Although styles change in the course of time, Beethoven is not an advance on Mozart, nor Picasso on Cézanne: they are simply different."

Fromm remarks that "the ideal of Marcuse's 'non-repressive society' seems to be an infantile paradise where all work is play and where there is no serious conflict or tragedy" (28). Fromm also states: "Marcuse's revolutionary rhetoric obscures the irrational and anti-revolutionary character of this attitude. Like some *avant garde* artists and writers from de Sade and Marinetti to the present, he is attracted by infantile regression, perversions and ... in a more hidden way by destruction and hate" (29). Finally, Fromm suggests that "Marcuse shares the popular misconception that 'pleasure principle' refers to the hedonistic norm that the aim of life is pleasure, and 'reality principle' to the social norm that man's striving should be directed toward work and duty. Freud, of course, meant nothing of the kind; to him the reality principle was 'a modification' of the pleasure principle, not its opponent. Freud's concept of the reality principle is that there is in every human being a capacity to observe reality and a tendency to protect oneself from the damage which the unchecked satisfaction of the instincts could inflict upon one" (27). Fromm's criticism of Marcuse is particularly devastating because Fromm is a Marxist as well as Freudian.

Janine Chasseguet-Smirgel and Béla Grunberger, *Freud or Reich? Psychoanalysis and Illusion* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1986), p. 210 point out that Marxism's "system of analysis is ... projective, compared to psychoanalysis, because only the latter is based on a theory of the primacy of internal factors. Marcusian theories, like all ultraleftists to some extent, are an interpretation of sociopolitical facts which is particularly projective and persecuting." They note that "in Marcuse's view it is the 'outside' (industrial society) that has invaded the inside (the ego and the drives), a process which mirrors the persecution fantasy at its height. Finally, for Marcuse, outside and inside come to coincide. Not because man projects himself outwards, basing his behaviour and actions on his internal psychic model; but because the outside (the 'system,' social organization, etc.), like a veritable *deus ex machina* has come to appropriate the individual's ego, who thus becomes 'possessed'" (211). Buchloh makes the exact same error, from a psychoanalytic point of view, as Marcuse does in conflating inside and outside. Like Marcuse, for Buchloh bourgeois society instills false needs in the individual. But "the concept of 'false' needs is diametrically opposed to psychoanalysis. In the latter, every psychic manifestation, every form of human behaviour, has deep infantile roots and is related, although sometimes at a great distance, to the primary drives. It would be impossible for a society to create needs if these did not have some internal meaning—corresponding to some unsatisfied infantile wish" (211). Thus Marcuse and Buchloh completely invert the human condition as it is psychoanalytically understood.

12 Buchloh, 110.

13 Rosalind E. Krauss, "Cindy Sherman's Gravity: A Critical Fable," *Artforum* 32 (September 1993): 163.

14 In "The Metaphysical Poets," *Selected Essays 1917-1932* (New York: Harcourt, Brace,

1931), 247. Eliot argues that "in the seventeenth century a dissociation of sensibility set in, from which we have never recovered." Sensibility splits into "the sentimental" and "the ratiocinative" (248), a disintegration which leads to cruder feeling and more abstract thought, that is, to a schizoid state. Eliot finds few "traces of a struggle toward unification of sensibility" (248) in modernity.

15 In "Differentiation of the Psychotic from the Non-Psychotic Personalities," Bion, ibid., p. 44 notes the "hatred of reality, internal and external" typical of the psychotic attitude to it. In not serving reality-testing—observation of both internal and external reality—thought encourages, as it were, sadistic, destructive feelings, which correlates with "a dread of imminent annihilation."

16 Hanna Segal, *Dream, Phantasy and Art* (London and New York: Tavistock/Routledge, 1991), p. 82 remarks that "the truth the artist is after is primarily psychic truth," and notes that "aesthetic experience in the recipient involves psychic work [which] is what distinguishes it from pure entertainment or sensuous pleasure" (94).

17 Lyotard, 80.

18 Ibid., 71.

19 Ibid., 80.

20 As the December 8, 1992 *New York Times* points out in an article by Daniel Goleman called "A Rising Cost of Modernity" (C. 1), "the first international study of major depression reveals a steady rise in the disorder worldwide ... each successive generation is growing more vulnerable to the malady," which involves "not just sadness, but a paralyzing listlessness, dejection and self-depreciation, as well as an overwhelming sense of hopelessness and helplessness."

21 Buchloh, 108.

22 Ibid., 119.

23 Chasseguet-Smirgel and Grunberger, pp. 211-12 point out that the "explanatory models of political ideologies are very much like the 'influencing machine' fantasy that is so characteristic of paranoid-schizophrenics ... the 'influencing machine' is nothing but the projection of the subject's own body." In general, "because political ideologies analyze sociopolitical facts in terms of a projective, and sometimes persecutory, system of interpretation, they tend to disconnect these facts from their unconscious roots. This disconnection opposes the reconnection that psychoanalysis tends to make." Chasseguet-Smirgel and Grunberger also note that "another aspect of political ideologies ... is their tendency to foster the illusion of the possibility of escaping from castration." They believe "that there will come a time when all desires will be fulfilled. Psychoanalysis, however, maintains that human incompleteness, and thus human desire, will never disappear" (213). Like all other political ideologues, Buchloh seems to believe that it is society that makes one into a castrated clown—that prevents the fulfillment of all desires—rather than the character of desire itself.

Art: Sublimated Expression Or Transitional Experience?

The Examples Of Van Gogh And Mondrian

Donald Kuspit

For Freud, art originates, psychologically, in the sublimation of perverse sexual instinct. The pleasure we take in art is the pleasure of regressing to that Pre-Oedipal level of sexuality. Art expresses it in sublime form, but what emotionally counts is the expression not the form.

For Winnicott, art is "the adult equivalent of the transitional phenomena of infancy and early childhood."[1] The pleasure of art is the pleasure of childhood play. The existence of art makes clear that the ordinary creativity of play remains possible throughout life. Art suggests a play approach to its problems may be the best way to find a realistic solution to them.

Which concept makes more sense? Psychoanalysis cannot help but find the shadow of infantile and childhood issues in the substance of art. It cannot help but find regressive factors in what seems to be emotional progress. But the question raised by the comparison between Freud and Winnicott is whether there is one fundamental issue in terms of which all others must be seen. Freud thinks it is sexuality, Winnicott thinks it is relationality. Thus Freud necessarily sees art in terms of sexuality, Winnicott necessarily sees it in terms of relationality. Can they be reconciled? If they could be, wouldn't each be compromised at his core? Wouldn't each lose his radicality?

If we put all of Freud's remarks on art together, it seems that he regarded it as an ingenious integration of the pleasure principle and the reality principle. For in the very act of seeming to uphold the reality principle—even consolidate its hold on the psyche—art enlists it in the cause of the pleasure principle. Art is thus insidious and subversive—brilliantly deceptive, like a cunning, perverse child—for it reverses the usual priority of principles in adulthood while seeming to maintain it. The best art seems not simply to inform us about the facts of reality but to have mastered them. But this is an illusion, an artifact of art's articulation of reality in a way that makes it seem subliminally pleasurable. That is, art turns the

inherent unpleasure of the banal facts of reality—including the elementary facts of form (line, color, shape)—into perversely exciting pleasure by emotionally overinversting in them. It miraculously squeezes pleasure out of the unpleasure of matter of fact, the way Moses brought forth the water of life from desert stone. In a sense, art is an id derivative shaped by the ego so that it is acceptable to the superego, which is no mean feat. (Indeed, not only does instinct take a shape acceptable to the superego in art, but it takes the shape of the ego—the most marvellous of art's deceptions.)

To put this another way: in art instinct is partly neutralized, partly raw, so that it can be used to think about reality as well as express feeling. Art is an idiosyncratic blend of both, reconciling them to uncanny effect. The gratification art affords seems all the more uncanny because it is informed by an uncanny "understanding" of reality. Indeed, art's greatest trick is that it makes the pleasure it gives us against the odds of reality seem like a profound understanding of reality.

At first glance, Winnicott seems to think the work of art completes the process of transition to reality begun with the transitional object. At second glance, we realize that for him art does not exist in actual space. Rather, it apotheosizes potential space. Art embodies it in a way that seems to defer the actual space of separation indefinitely—indeed, forever—while signalling it. It is as though art saw the unpromising land of cold reality from the safety of a warm illusion. In fact art makes adult life seem like child's play, in however complex form, thus creating the illusion of timeless potential space. Absorbed in art, we remain forever young and happy in potential space. Without this socially sanctioned as well as psychologically necessary illusion of art—a hortus conclusus of connection and self-connection in a world of disconnection, an expression and facilitator of intimacy with others and oneself in a depressing world of contractual relations—there would be little depth of relational experience in adult life. Art is subliminally experienced as healing because it offers relational hope in a harsh world in which there is no reason for having any.

Both Freud and Winnicott privilege art, but in very different ways. For Freud, art affords instinctive gratification in a world that demands one sacrifice one's instincts to one's reason and superego in order to survive in it. For Winnicott, art affords relational gratification with both internal and external objects in a relationally ungratifying external world that makes one's internal relations—in effect one's relationship with oneself—seem morbid. For Freud, the socialization of instinct—ultimately this has to involve aggression as well as sexuality, even though Freud does not say so—is at stake in art. For Winnicott, art is a major way of broadening relationality into full-fledged, if still incompletely realistic, sociality. This connects their views of art at the top, as it were; but at bottom they seem irreconcilable.

However, they do exist on a continuum of psychoanalytic understanding. To recognize this does not exactly reconcile them, but it does indicate a certain relationship between their ideas. This has to be argued, but a somewhat small, if general methodological point first has to be made. Psychoanalysis is more credible when it tries to elucidate a cultural phenomenon's psychodynamic effect on the individual than when it tries to elucidate the phenomenon's psychodynamic cause. This distinction has to be made to preclude the charge of reductive interpretation typically used to discredit applied psychoanalysis. It makes adult cultural phenomena intelligible through infantile and childhood issues, which is legitimate as far as it goes. But psychoanalysis goes too far if it privileges its explanation of cultural phenomena as more fundamental than explanations that acknowledge social factors. Psychoanalysis can then be said to be guilty of what might be called the infantomorphic fallacy. This is the opposite of the familiar adultomorphic fallacy which makes sense of childhood experience in terms of adult preconceptions of it. It also implies a somewhat onesided view of overdetermination.

I am suggesting that Freud's understanding of art through the defense of sublimation and Winnicott's understanding of it through the transitional process are more useful for an understanding of why people are attracted to art than why the artist makes it. Freud and Winnicott address the reasons the adult spectator is motivated to take art seriously—the appeal or lure of art—rather than the reasons the child in the artist is motivated to make it (as though there was no adult involved in its making). The psychological reasons a particular artist makes art may be comprehensible retrospectively, but there is no one universal psychological reason why art is made. We all sublimate and have transitional experiences—we all have issues of sexuality and identity—but this does not necessarily lead us to become artists. In sum, Freud and Winnicott have to be understood as explaining, in a roundabout way, the emotional satisfaction art gives adults, not why a child grows up to become an artist. They may think they have found the origin of culture in childhood, but in fact they have understood the need for culture in adults—a crucial difference in nuance.

To return to the question of this paper: I think that Winnicott's idea of art has a certain priority over Freud's, on the ground that, in the words of Joyce McDougall, "to have psychic possession of one's sex and a feeling of sexual identity it is necessary to first have psychic possession of one's own body and a feeling of individual existence."[2] Art can more readily help one have the latter than the former, that is, art can more readily give one a feeling of individual existence than of sexual identity. The work of art has a specific identity, but not a sexually specific identity. One can metaphorically speak of it having a body, but not of its sex. The

inconclusive feminist and in fact age-old debate about whether there is such a thing as an inherently masculine or feminine art demonstrates as much.

I think that Freud and Winnicott speak to different needs—the need for sexual satisfaction and the need to gratify the sense of being a unique self—and that the strength of these needs in the individual, and even more importantly the way society prioritizes them, privileging one over the other, determines the individual's expectation from art. I would like to digress, right at the beginning of my paper, to discuss this assertion, for it informs what I will later say about Van Gogh and Mondrian, who for my purpose here embody the opposition, tension, and oscillation between expression and construction basic to modern art, as Adorno has argued. If modern art has any superiority to traditional art, it is in its tendency to purity, which I understand not so much as making works that reference their own medium and no other, as Clement Greenberg thinks, but rather as disclosing the basic psychoformal possibilities of art per se. I think the contradiction between expression and construction is reflected in the difference between Freud's and Winnicott's conceptions of the psychological significance of art. That is, I think expression speaks to the issue of sexual identity and construction to the issue of individual identity. One might say that at its best, as in Van Gogh, the art of expression affords an id orgasm, and that at its best, as in Mondrian, the art of construction affords an ego orgasm, to use Winnicott's term. We need both id and ego orgasms to be mentally healthy, which is why we need both Van Gogh and Mondrian, even though society sometimes privileges one over the other.

When society tells us that sexual satisfaction is the be all and end all of existence, as our society tends to do for its own exploitive reasons as well as the fact that sexuality is the great secular good, that is, the ultimate consumer frontier, in the process playing down the importance of the sense of being a unique self—at least unique to oneself—the individual will unconsciously feel himself or herself losing his or her sense of unique selfhood, and will turn to the supposedly unique identity of the work of art to recover it. As McDougall says, "a Picasso can be recognized at a glance from the farthest end of the gallery, so strong is the personal imprint of the master on his work."[3] We want to recognize ourselves the same way whatever gallery of our existence we walk in. It is because of this need for a sense of unique selfhood, projected onto and satisfied by identification with the work of art's uniqueness, which bespeaks that of the artist—who presumably discovered how to remain true to himself or herself whatever his or her lifeworld situation—that the work of art, and by extension the artist, comes to be regarded as sacred and transcendent, that is, comes to serve a religious purpose in a secular world. Through this identification with the work of art's and the artist's

supposedly inherent uniqueness, the self not only no longer feels threatened and anxious, often to the point of disintegration and even annihilation, but strengthened, to the extent of feeling existentially unique. In other words, the work of art will give the spectator a positive sense of self, or buttress what sense of self he or she has.

Thus, the more a society elevates and promises us one kind of satisfaction, the more it tends to frustrate the need for the other kind, making it all the more valuable and desirable. Freud was responding to a society in which works of art were regarded as inherently sublime, that is, of such transcendent significance that they had nothing whatsoever to do with such a profane and vulgar matter as sexuality. Indeed, they were overidealized to the extent of supposedly appealing exclusively to a higher civilized self rather than a lower philistine, even barbaric—instinctive—self. Freud's conception of art as sublimated sexual instinct not only undermines the credibility of its sublimity, which can no longer be regarded as pure or unqualified, but reminds us that art hides something, censoring it to the extent of denying it. (Freud seemed blind to the fact that belief in art's sublimity confirms the self's sense of the uniqueness of its identity.) Freud does not so much turn the tables on art, discrediting it, as change our understanding of the kind of satisfaction we get from it—which may in fact discredit it for some. He no doubt approached art in the ironical spirit of his statement, in a letter to Binswanger, that he could find plenty of room in his sexual basement for the higher things in life.

> I've always lived in the *parterre* and basement of the building. You claim that with a change of viewpoint one is able to see an upper storey which houses such distinguished guests as religion, art, etc. You're not the only one who thinks that; most cultured specimens of *homo natura* believe it. In that you are conservative, I revolutionary. If I had another lifetime of work before me, I have no doubt that I could find room for these noble guests in my little subterranean house.[4]

To return to what I said earlier, Freud and Winnicott are not only equally necessary for an understanding of the psychological workings of art, but because they address and explicate different aspects of our ordinary experience of it. Freud's conception of the work of art as the sublimated expression of perverse sexual instinct, which is an understanding of it in terms of the economy of the pleasure principle, speaks to art's seductive power and pleasurableness. Winnicott's conception of the transitional character of the work of art by reason of its embodying me and not-me experiences simultaneously, that is, by reason of the fact that autonomy and difference are implicated in it concurrently, speaks to our

sense of works of art as very different from ordinary things yet able to put us in touch with ourselves as they cannot, which is experienced as a healing process. In Winnicott's terms, art tilts the balance toward the True bodily Self and away from the False compliant Self, however much art necessarily involves False Self elements to be socially credible, that is, of general interest to society rather than simply of clinical interest as the artist's personal symptom.

In so turning us toward our creative self and away from our social self, to use Phyllis Greenacre's terms, art gives us a new confidence in our reality and a sense of our own creative possibilities, whether we act on them or not. Or, as I would say, art enhances our sense of the reality of our particular existence and our sense of being intensely alive. Art does this in defiance of our social identity and the usual matter-of-fact, unthinking acceptance of our existence, and despite the fact that art always speaks with and seems invested in the authority of the society in which it is made, however contradictory and critical of the norms of that society it may seem to be. Art achieves its emotional value—becomes psychically facilitative—despite the fact that it is always an ideological construction and socially contextualized and manipulated, and even when society seems to present it to us as a peace offering and gratuitous gift. More particularly, in creating the illusion that it exists in its own right, the work of art helps us feel that we have a right to exist despite society's indifference to our existence except insofar as we are of use to it, and despite the recognition that every existence is an accident and essentially groundless. Thus, art keeps us from falling into a psychotic plot, as McDougall calls it, against ourselves.[5]

To understand how neither a Van Gogh expression nor a Mondrian construction are psychotic—however much people who do not understand avant-garde stylistic innovation reject it as insane—and yet to understand how they "flirt with the psychosis," as Winnicott thinks modern art does, it is necessary to realize that sublimation (in Van Gogh's case) and transitionality (in Mondrian's case) can be used simultaneously to flirt with and outsmart psychosis. Sublimation and transitionality are different modes of creativity, that is, different ways of embodying and besting—making the best of—psychosis, not simply of socializing sexuality and achieving a sense of identity. Indeed, the radical innovations of Van Gogh and Mondrian imply that psychosis is inseparable from genuine creativity, that is, creativity which produces something altogether unexpected, however much, retrospectively, we academize it by showing that it is not entirely unprecedented, a pretense that makes it seem more respectable than it actually is.

I want to suggest that psychosis does not involve a failure of reality testing, but such a thorough and accurate reality testing that the tester

realizes that there is a great discrepancy between what society claims reality is and what he or she experiences it to be. This leaves one in an excruciating dilemma: am I right and society wrong, or vice versa? When the dilemma becomes too much to bear, one can find an artistic solution to it, that is, creatively revolt against it—or really go mad. To be radically creative means to make one's critical disillusionment with the institutional—one might say parental—sense of reality the opportunity to create one's own illusion of reality. Absolute disillusionment seems like a psychotic break, but without it there is no creative breakthrough. To put this another way, to be radically creative means not to passively experience psychosis, which involves the pathology of accepting society as one's fate—as though it had not failed and lied to one, but that one was all along lying to and betraying oneself when one thought one was sane and society was insane—but to actively engage and work one's submissive psychotic attitude through, which is a healthy way of making a new start. This is what Van Gogh and Mondrian did.

To be radically creative, then, is to try to make the psychotic root of psychic being grow an altogether new kind of artistic tree. It involves using one's frustration with and defeat by the existing social sense of reality to create a personal sense of reality, in indifference to whether society does or does not accept it. Genuine creativity brings into question the conventional sense of self and reality, in effect undermining their social ground, and at the same time realizing that the very act of bringing them into question and the capacity to tolerate their being in question without great anxiety—a situation not unlike Cartesian doubt—creates the utopian possibility of giving them a new ground of being. This in effect transforms them from the ground up, that is, makes them seem new.

Both Van Gogh and Mondrian are simultaneously decadent and utopian, pessimistic and optimistic, in that they despair of the old sense of self and reality but envision a new one. In Van Gogh's expressive representations a new raison d'etre for the self and reality spontaneously emerges in the orgasmic eruptions of painterly gesture, undermining the old, traditional way of representing them in the process of re-conceiving and re-perceiving them. In Mondrian's constructions a new raison d'etre for the self and reality is implicit in the radical nonobjectivity of the construction. It involves not only the repudiation of the socially normal way of representing them, bespeaking its staleness and obsoleteness in the psyche, but the abstract envisionment of their new ideality. (I think Winnicott is actually speaking of avant-garde art, not modern art, very little of which is genuinely avant-garde, that is, sufficiently radical to bring art into question in the very act of conceiving it, the way, as McDougall says, one puts oneself into question in undergoing psychoanalysis.[6] This opens the door to psychosis, for it arouses the sleeping dogs of disintegrative and annihila-

tive anxieties. Indeed, such putting into question, which undermines old self and reality representations, is itself a form of psychosis—a deliberate cultivation of madness—which I think is inevitable and necessary at developmental impasses, whether in art or life. Just as this madness occurs within the containment of the psychoanalytic situation, so the avant-garde self-questioning of art is contained by the making of what the artist believes is still art, if art that seems to do little more than bring what is conventionally considered art into question.)

Freud first used the word "sublimation" in an 1897 letter to Fliess. He described the fantasies of the hysteric as "protective structures, sublimations of the facts, embellishments of them, and at the same time serve for self-exoneration."[7] More relevant to the purposes of this paper, the next use occurs in the 1905 *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*. He explicitly associates sublimation with art, as though art was its major example. He seems to suggest that sublimation is originally artistic, or more accurately, aesthetic. Sexual curiosity, he writes, can 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."[8] This is a shift from content to form—from a body part with overt sexual purpose to the body's form, which becomes covertly sexual in the process. That is, it is a shift from a specifically sexual interest in the genitals to a generally erotic interest in the body. The eroticizing of the body's form, so that the body seems desirable as a whole, is in effect the first sublimation—one might say aetheticization—of sexuality. If we put this together with the 1897 sentence, it seems possible to argue that Freud is asserting, however unwittingly, that the displacement of sexual interest to art is hysterical in character. This suggests that the interest in artistic form in and for itself, that is, in denial of its sexual connotations, is hysterical.

However, later in the *Three Essays* Freud speaks more broadly and definitively: "sublimation enables excessively strong excitation arising from particular sources of sexuality to find an outlet and use in other fields, so that a not inconsiderable increase in psychical efficiency results from a disposition which in itself is perilous .... The multifariously perverse sexual disposition of childhood can accordingly be regarded as the source of a number of our virtues."[9] In his 1915 essay on narcissism, Freud offers his most comprehensive definition of sublimation. It "is a process that concerns object-libido and consists in the instinct's directing itself towards an aim other than, and remote from, that of sexual satisfaction; in this process the accent falls upon deflection from sexuality ... sublimation is a way out, a way by which those [instinctual] demands can be met *without* involving repression."[10] If we trace the path of the concept of sublimation from 1897 to 1915, we see that it has

changed from a defense to a mode of adaption. As Anna Freud states, "sublimation, i.e., the displacement of the instinctual aim in conformity with higher social values, presupposes the acceptance or at least the knowledge of such values, that is to say, presupposes the existence of the superego" and as such "could not be employed until relatively late in the process of development."[11] It "pertains rather to the study of the normal than that of neurosis."[12]

The transitional process is equally normal. An object becomes transitional when it serves the purpose of helping the infant make the difficult transition from unconscious fusion with the mother to consciousness of its separateness from the mother—its difference from the mother as well as other objects. Winnicott calls this a transition from the me to the not-me. Both are implicated in the transitional object, so that the question as to whether it is artistically invented or cognitively discovered by the infant is meaningless to it. It has in effect done both, with no sense of the difference between them. As Winnicott says, the infant regards the object "without reference to the object's state of being either subjective or objectively perceived."[13] It sees no contradiction between these states.

More particularly, "the infant assumes rights over the object," although "some abrogation of omnipotence is a feature from the start."[14] The object is simultaneously "affectionately cuddled ... and mutilated." It must survive instinctual love and hatred, indeed, "pure aggression." At the same time, it must "show it has vitality or reality of its own." It is neither a hallucination nor is it completely comprehensible from an external point of view. "Its fate is to be gradually allowed to be decathected, so that in the course of years it becomes not so much forgotten as relegated to limbo." That is, "the transitional object does not 'go inside' nor does the feeling about it necessarily undergo repression. It is forgotten and it is not mourned. It loses meaning," becoming "diffused," that is, "spread out over the whole intermediate territory between 'inner psychic reality' and 'the external world as perceived by the two persons in common'." Intermediate territory becomes the "cultural field," as Winnicott says.

I think Winnicott is wrong, or one might say too optimistic, about one aspect of outgrowing the transitional object, or, what is synonymous with that outgrowing, its diffusion and transformation into the cultural field. The object is in fact mourned by becoming culturalized, as it were, for the diffusion of intermediate space is predicated on, and compensation for, personal loss. One turns to culture because one wants to overcome a certain feeling of being at a loss, which expresses itself as loneliness. The individual turns to culture to compensate for the loss of connection with the primary object, and the correlate loss of feeling primary and creative oneself, that is, not simply reactive to others. The cultural object is really a poor substitute for the transitional object, just as the infant knows, in its

heart of hearts, that its blanket is a poor substitute for mother's warm, cuddly flesh. But however inadequate, they are necessary, and socially accepted as such.

I think that Van Gogh and Mondrian, in their different ways, were responding to this situation of basic self and object loss with their art—an inescapable personal situation that was aggravated, I will argue, by the fact that in the modern lifeworld there is no object that one can connect to that will give one an adequate sense of self because the modern lifeworld is inherently antithetical to intimate connection. I am suggesting that Winnicott has missed something: the transformation of the transitional object into the cultural object may be inevitable, but it involves a quasi-psychotic sense of being at a loss in a lifeworld of strange objects. That is, it involves a loss of the sense of one's own and the lifeworld's inherent reality. Winnicott is all too optimistic about what the self's "widening out," as he calls it, into the cultural field involves, however much he acknowledges that it can lead to "fetishism, lying and stealing ... loss of affectionate feeling, drug addiction, ... obsessional rituals" as well as normal "play, ... artistic creativity and appreciation, ... religious feeling, and ... dreaming." For behind both these neurotic and normal extensions of transitionality is quasi-psychotic desperation and depression that nothing can fill or is adequate to the space that separates the self "from the Other or from the fulfillment of [its] desires," in the words of McDougall,[15] so that the self will never connect enough with the Other to feel itself and its desires, as well as the Other and its desires, to be real and fulfillable. All three are experienced as empty—meaningless—intermediate territory.

It is this void of nonconnection and unfulfillment that Van Gogh acknowledges in what he called his "melancholic staring into the abyss."[16] This abyss is explicit in such paintings as *Night Cafe*, 1888 and *The Ravine*, 1889, among other pictures. And it is this void that he attempts to overcome when he wants, as he says, "to paint men and women with that something of the eternal which the halo used to symbolize, and which we seek to convey by the actual radiance and vibration of our coloring."[17] There is no doubt some empathy for mortal men and women in this ambition to eternalize their appearances. But more to the psychotic point is that he is attempting to fulfill his deep desire to merge with the Other by idealization of it, which he thinks will help him recover, as he says, the "youth and freshness" "I have lost." He overcomes his sense of self-loss not only by regressive merger with and aggrandizement of the Other through idealization, but by regressive expression of the perverse sexuality—implicit in his polymorphous colorful painterliness—it masks. Van Gogh perversely connects with men and women through his painterliness,

which orgasmically fuses libido and aggression. (It should be noted that for both Freud and Winnicott, creativity involves the recovery, in idealized form, of not simply what is inevitably lost in the course of life, but what remains fundamental to it yet which it has lost touch with. For Freud polymorphous perversity is fundamental to sexuality, for Winnicott the sense of having the right to exist and existing in one's own right are fundamental to identity. One has a sense of loss—of something fundamental missing from one's life—when the Other, in whatever social form, seems to fail one. This makes one feel one's existence is living death, which leads one to mourn for oneself, which in turn arouses the wish to be reborn—made new. It was a very strong wish in Van Gogh, as Lubin has shown, and it was embodied in the avant-garde newness of his best paintings.)

Similarly, Mondrian was depressed about the tragedy of "disequilibrated expression of the universal and individual," as he called it. This was his way of understanding the emptiness of intermediate space, that is, its failure to do its job of affording fulfilling connection. Emptiness—the isolation in emptiness of an object that is emblematic of the Other—is in forceful evidence in the tree, church tower, and ocean paintings Mondrian made in transition to his non-objective works, where it is finally accepted without resistance and worked with as both the emotional source and inevitable subject matter of art in the modern lifeworld. In compensation for this emptiness, and to correct the disequilibrium it causes, he created an art of "pure plastic vision," in which universal and individual were idealistically united in a "dynamic equilibrium," which he called the "abstract real"—a telling term in a psychoanalytic context. Pure plastic art is "truly religious" in that it "transcends" or "towers far above us," he wrote, for it "directly expresses the universal." Thus Mondrian thought his "pure" art showed the way to "life's goal," the "abolition of the tragic."[18] In fact, as I will argue, it embodied the tragic fact of emptiness, that is, non-relationality.

McDougall thinks "that man *always creates something*" in intermediate space, but in fact there is no guarantee that what is created will fill it, that is, end separation from the Other and fulfill desire. I want to argue that Van Gogh and Mondrian were among the first artists who recognized that in the modern lifeworld social space did not connect people in a fulfilling way, and by its nature could not. Whatever one created between oneself and the Other in the social space of the modern lifeworld cannot bring them into significant relationship. A sense of abandonment—of being unsupported, completely separate—is built into modern space. There are no reliable relationships in the modern lifeworld because there is no tradition of trust between the self and the Other in it.

Indeed, modernity is in large part founded on the abandonment of

traditional relationships and trust. That is, one becomes modern when one no longer trusts existing models of relationship to fulfill desire. All one's relationships then come to seem "unfounded." One must struggle to found them anew, which suggests that in psychological fact one can find no one significant to relate to. In general, modernity involves a loss of trust in tradition—indeed, a determined break with it—or else the filling of its forms with new content, which eventually bursts them. The collective collapse of trust in tradition brings with it the feeling that trust can no longer be taken for granted. This is hard on the self, which first finds itself in and through a trusting relationship with the Other. In general, it becomes hard to trust the Other when society can no longer be trusted, that is, no longer affords a stable ground of trust. It is hard to have to renew trust with every relationship, especially when there is no social reason for doing so. In fact, trust is embodied in respect for and understanding of tradition, which hardly means slavish emulation of it, or blind acceptance of it as a model, but rather acknowledgement that one, too, will eventually be a hopefully trustworthy part of tradition.

The self and the Other, then, feel isolated in the modern lifeworld, which makes both feel unique and vulnerable at once. The latter feeling is realistic, the former a compensatory grand illusion. Van Gogh's self-portraits, and the figures in his portraits, clearly show this isolation, with its perverse psychological effect, and Mondrian's "objective" paintings represent this isolation, and his non-objective paintings poignantly embody it. Creativity dries up in isolation; it cannot be sustained apart from intimacy, however unconscious, with a significant, facilitating Other. As long as one can be inwardly alone with such an Other, one remains creative. We see, in his portraits of the Other, Van Gogh struggling to establish a significant, facilitating intimacy and at the same time sustain his creativity through it. It is as though he uses his creativity to grasp at the straw of an intimate relationship in and for itself, as well as to sustain itself. But one senses that he is forcing himself upon the Other through his painterliness—using his creativity to force intimacy where it does not really exist, that is, where there are only partners in isolation. Thus, his portraits, and especially his self-portraits, in which he is trying to relate to himself as an Other—to be self and Other in one—convey profound anxiety about isolation rather than the successful achievement of intimacy and reciprocity.

In contrast, Mondrian, in both his objective and non-objective paintings, accepts isolation as fate, but not in a resigned way, for he apotheosizes it, with as much delirium as Van Gogh fantasized an intimacy that did not exist. Mondrian in effect transforms his anxiety about his isolation into a vital abstract art. It continues to bespeak isolation, but without anxiety. Unlike Van Gogh, Mondrian stopped struggling against isolation. He did not

turn to any old Other to give him the illusion that it was possible to escape it, as Van Gogh did, which is his real "madness." (No doubt both suffered from the isolation of the artist alone with his motif, but that isolation confirmed the larger feeling of isolation. Painting in isolation confirmed that they had no reliably significant other to relate to. Mondrian of course gave up the motif, although his non-objective paintings suggest that he had internalized the motif of the landscape he had struggled to make intimate in order to end his sense of isolation in it—paradoxically, by making it the symbolic form of his feeling of isolation.)

I think that unconscious recognition of and anxiety about this insidious psychosocial situation is one of the things that made Van Gogh and Mondrian psychologically avant-garde. They represent different stages in coming to grips with it, in effect different creative responses to it: "expressionistically" struggling against it, and "constructively" accepting it with detachment. In the modern lifeworld the field of human relationship is subtly, and sometimes not so subtly empty—a wasteland—whatever is created in it. DeChirico's reduction of the Italian piazza—the traditional space of socially fulfilling relationship—to a depressing, empty stage set, often spotted with traditional works of art and isolated figures, is an exemplary disclosure of what the field of relationship has turned into in the modern lifeworld. It cannot help but fail one. To paraphrase Marx, we live on a sterile stage of artificial—so called exchange—relationships, not in a fertile field of real ones, that is, relationships with others we feel to be fully human and real and who make us feel fully real and ourselves, and I do not mean abstractly real, to use Mondrian's term. The modern cultural field and modern social space in general loudly and clearly bespeak what Habermas calls the pathological desolation of modern society, that is, the depressing situation in which the distance between the self and the Other has become unbridgable by reason of the simultaneous psychological processes of atomization and totalization.

Atomization involves the individual's illusion of being a self-sufficient, hermetically sealed monad—a kind of media monad in the case of someone wearing a Walkman shutting out the immediately surrounding world but internalizing the ideology of society, whether in the form of popular music or controlled information. The feeling of being an altogether unique atom—a world unto oneself—is an ironical, unconsciously defensive, acknowledgement of the feeling of radical isolation. Totalization involves the construction of what Adorno called the administration society, a fascistic world of standardization and conformity, in which even criticality is an ironical form of submission, however much it is also a desperate attempt at autonomy. This capitalist pseudo-paradise, with its commodity-opiates, which numb us into total submission, usually succeeds in stifling even the modicum of nonconformity such criticality is.

The sense that society is an engulfing, inescapable totality masks, and unconsciously defends against, the feeling that it is a void—depressingly empty. In such a society, the very idea of creating something that will connect and fulfill the self and the Other is absurd. In such a society the need to fill the space between the self and the Other is intensely felt, but it is also recognized that the culture created to fill it does so only for a hallucinatory moment. It quickly becomes an entertaining lie, to be replaced by another transient novelty. The idea of making a culture that durably binds the self and the Other has become a lost art.

Van Gogh and Mondrian attempt to keep this art alive. This is another way of understanding why they were avant-garde, that is, broke with the traditional idea of the kind of art that could connect and fulfill the self and Other. In my opinion the reason more people connect with and feel fulfilled by Van Gogh's art than Mondrian's art, as the former's great popular success suggests—the latter's esoteric character automatically makes it less popular and more elite—is because it helps them forget their emptiness, that is, their lack of connection to each other, and their realization that no relationship can ever really be fulfilling in modern society. Van Gogh's art accomplishes this by overwhelming—saturating—people with the sublime perversity of its intense, polymorphous, colorful painterliness, facilely regressing them. Gestural color orgasm is a great opiate in a social vacuum, especially when it seems to restore jaded instinct to freshness. Also, Van Gogh's pictures, for all their painterliness, do not break radically with conventional representation, making them, for all their strangeness, familiar and accessible.

In contrast, Mondrian's abstract compositions, with their equivocal equilibrium or occult, asymmetrical balance—Van Gogh's compositions generally remain symmetrical for all his expressive distortion of space—speak directly to the modern sense of desolation, allowing no evasion of its threat to the self and the Other. The lack—simultaneous failure and impossibility—of symmetry in a Mondrian composition bespeaks a more insidious, comprehensive sense of desolation—annihilation anxiety—than Van Gogh's painterliness, with its symmetrical underpinning. Mondrian's asymmetry shows that desolation and annihilation anxiety have become structural. Mondrian's asymmetry states the inability of self and Other to relate, that is, to establish a symmetry between themselves. In Van Gogh's symmetrical world this still seemed to be a possibility.

The planes in Mondrian's paintings, whether white or a primary color, function simultaneously as positive and negative spaces, or rather eliminate the distinction between the two, and the composition's boundaries are transgressed yet remain ironically intact. This doubleness recreates the permanent ambiguity and paradoxicality—the ontological as well as

epistemological irresolution of meaning—of the transitional object. We feel simultaneously connected and not connected to, fulfilled and frustrated by Mondrian's constructions, reflecting the fact that the lines simultaneously connect and sharply separate planes in them—planes which, when in primary colors, are inherently irreconcilable. That is, from the right distance the planes seem discreet and incompatible yet simultaneously equilibrated. Mondrian's composition as a whole is satisfying while the relationship of its parts remains frustrating. Its nonobjectivity makes Van Gogh's representational intention seem retardataire. In general, a Mondrian seems to have an inherently unique identity, while a Van Gogh seems to have uniqueness imposed on it by its painterliness.

It may seem strange to say so, but Winnicott's idea of transitionality speaks more to the modern experience of the lifeworld as a place of desolation in which creativity is a desperate, ambiguous, and increasingly irrelevant and inadequate act than Freud's idea of sublimation, which assumes that sexuality is a universal that unequivocally connects and fulfills the self and the Other. (Freud's conception of the "creative" power of sexuality and of artistic creativity as sublimation increasingly seems to belong to the past, that is, seems true to traditional rather than modern society.) But for Van Gogh sublimated sexuality, in the form of colorful painterly gesture, is a way of creating something in the empty space between the self and the Other that does not so much make the space seem relationally full as dramatize its emptiness. Or else Van Gogh's perverse painterliness is an opiate that he uses to numb himself to the desolation of the modern social space he has intuitively discovered and represented. Van Gogh creates his painterliness in the space between the self and the Other but to no avail. Perverse practice in general blinds its practitioners to the emptiness between them by giving them the illusion that they are deeply connected with and completely fulfilled by one another.

In Mondrian's works this emptiness is not disguised by painterliness—indeed, he eschews it—but openly declared, as if in a kind of revelation, and made radiant. They make the best of emptiness, giving it an architecture that makes it seem to have a unique identity. They individualize emptiness, as it were, or rather suggest that it is still possible to be individual—radically be oneself—while feeling empty. There is no pretense that there is a space of fulfilling connection with the Other, as in Van Gogh, who still believes, like a traditionalist, that God can connect and fulfill the self and Other—that is, that God is the third thing that can fill the void and be the medium of a vital, real relationship between them—when nothing else can. I accept the art historical idea that Van Gogh's painterliness, for all its perversity, is spiritual in import, in that it transforms profane everyday space into sacred artistic space. Indeed, it perversely fulfills his nostalgia for—fantasy of—the sacred space of

traditional painting. In contrast, Mondrian rejects both profane everyday space and traditional sacred space. His space is unconditionally desolate, but desolation made hermetic, so that it becomes a presence in its own right. Mondrian's trick is to give psychotic absence real presence, while Van Gogh's trick is to perversely fill the abyss of absence until it seems to overflow with a life that contradicts it.

Both Van Gogh and Mondrian refused lonely isolation and unfulfillment in the infinite space between the self and the other. Van Gogh gave himself the illusion of connection and fulfillment by eroticizing his feeling of emptiness, evident in the implicitly abysmal space he painted. He was fascinated by the abyss, finally coming to invest himself totally in it. There is no doubt that his gestures, when they seem spontaneous rather than contrived, can be understood as the "True Self in action," to use Winnicott's words—in revolt against the world of the False Self—but the polymorphous character of the gesture suggest that they express perverse instinct. Indeed, they seem simultaneously to disintegrate and reintegrate whatever representation they constitute. This ambiguous effect makes us suspect that they are less spontaneous than they look—that they may be forced in their spontaneity, and as such a falsification of it, especially if, as Fromm said, true spontaneity signals integration. We may mistake Van Gogh's compulsiveness for spontaneity, his regression for liberation.

In contrast, Mondrian did not try to fill the emptiness with his own spontaneity (or self-deceiving illusion of spontaneity, as in Van Gogh's case), but rather gave the emptiness a kind of structure. It is given body, so to speak. Mondrian's differently sized color planes are "details of the experience of aliveness" that Winnicott associates with the True Self experience. Indeed, they are the structure's vital tissues, for, by reason of the fact that they are primary colors, they seem to have the (primary) "aliveness of tissues," to use Winnicott's words again. Thus, Mondrian vitalizes the psychotic vacuum of modern desolation without denying its reality, as Van Gogh attempted to do by blindly investing his vitality in it. Mondrian remains self-connected and self-fulfilled in modern emptiness, while Van Gogh attempts to connect with and find fulfillment in the void by projecting his feelings onto and into it as though it was the Other. In their different ways—in Mondrian's case by creating the illusion of a self in no need of relationships to survive and be itself, in Van Gogh's case by fantasizing that the Other is not the hollow signifier it in fact is in modern society, that is, by imagining that the Other does not exist in desolation but in plenitude—they show that art can be the self's way of not surrendering to the feeling and reality of desolation, that is, not becoming an Other False Self. In general, the self must become an artist to survive in modern emptiness.

Notes

1 D. W. Winnicott, "Communicating and Not Communicating Leading to a Study of Certain Opposites," *The Maturational Processes and the Facilitating Environment* (New York: International Universities Press, 1965), 184.
2 Joyce McDougall, *Plea for a Measure of Abnormality* (New York: Brunner/Mazel, 1992), 147.
3 Ibid., 176.
4 Quoted in Peregrine Horden, "Thoughts on Freud," *Freud and the Humanities*, ed. Peregrine Horden (New York: St. Martin's, 1985), 1.
5 Joyce McDougall, *Theaters of the Mind* (New York: Brunner/Mazel, 1991), 9.
6 McDougall, *Plea for a Measure of Abnormality*, 472.
7 Sigmund Freud, Standard Edition, 1, p. 247.
8 Sigmund Freud, Standard Edition, 7, p. 156.
9 Ibid., 238-39.
10 Sigmund Freud, Standard Edition, 14, pp. 94-95.
11 Anna Freud, *The Ego and the Mechanisms of Defense* (Madison, Conn.: International Universities Press, 1966), 52.
12 Ibid., 44.
13 Winnicott, 184.
14 D. W. Winnicott, *Collected Papers* (London: Tavistock, 1958), 233.
15 McDougall, *Plea for a Measure of Abnormality*, 481.
16 Quoted in Albert J. Lubin, *Stranger on the Earth: A Psychological Biography of Vincent van Gogh* (New York: Holt, 1987), 18.
17 Quoted in Herschel B. Chipp, ed., *Theories of Modern Art* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968), 35.
18 Quoted in Hans L. C. Jaffee, ed. *De Stijl* (New York: Abrams, 1971), 78, 62.

The Expressive Gaze

Donald Kuspit

There is a long list of gazes in discourse about the power of the eye, and I want to propose the existence of yet another gaze, which I call "the expressive gaze." I will try to describe it, analyze its psychodynamics, and suggest why it is rare, at least in art, and probably in life, although I have made no systematic survey of its appearance in the latter, as I have in the former. Four examples come to mind: the central figure in Velazquez's *Drinkers or Triumph of Bacchus*; the two open shirted figures, one seated, one standing, in Goya's *The Threshing Floor*; Velazquez's *The Geographer*; and Ribera's *Archimedes*. The first two form an expressive subgroup that I call "the natural gaze." The second two form a subgroup I call "the intellectual gaze." I hope the sense of these labels will become clear later.

Velazquez's smiling, drinking peasant gazes at us from the space of the picture, inviting us to smile back and join the company. His gaze is framed, from above, by the wide brim of his hat, and from below by the wide brim of his cup of wine. Above all, it is framed by his smile, which can be understood as part of it. All this makes its intensity unmistakable. It focuses on us, unavoidably. But the gaze is not threatening, only insistent. And it is quite friendly. It asks us to become one of the Bacchanalians, have a drink, indeed, get drunk, and submit to the god. Do we think we are too good for the company? But we are all equal before Bacchus. In psychic fact we acknowledge as much by happily smiling to ourselves. Unable to join the drinkers literally, we join them in spirit.[1] Inwardly we are part of the image, worshipping at the shrine of Bacchus, realizing that we too are peasants at heart. The empathic power of the peasant's gaze has brought us into the picture, whether we want to be or not. The drinker's gaze forms a spontaneous bridge between the realm of illusion he inhabits and the lifeworld we inhabit, suggesting that they are less incommensurate than they seem to be.

Similarly, Archimedes and the geographer frankly gaze and smile at us, as though asking us to join them in intellectual recognition of the geometrical truth to which they point, and seem to have just discovered. In the one case it is altogether abstract, in the other it is embodied in the earth. They are clearly intellectually enlightened, as the happy light in their eyes suggests, but its intensity also suggests the deep emotional investment they have in the geometrical truth. Knowledge gives them

personal pleasure, that is, their entire person is involved in it, to the extent of becoming one with it. They certainly do not have the impersonality and detachment, not to speak of inexpressive demeanor, supposedly proper to intellectuals. Their ideas excite them and make them happy, and they invite us to share their excitement and happiness. Just as their gaze dissolves the distance between them and us, it dissolves contemplation from a distance. Like people, ideas must be intimately known to be really known. For these intellectuals the idea and the feeling it induces are inseparable: no dissociation of sensibility, as T. S. Eliot called it, for them. They are in fact as intoxicated by ideas as the peasants are on wine, and they seem to suggest that unless one is intoxicated, in the good company of equally intoxicated, supportive minds, one cannot really grasp an idea, that is, make it part of oneself, as though it was instinctive in origin. For Archimedes and the geographer the truth is not the truth without community-creating contagion about it, which makes it simultaneously personally and generally true. The effects of the intoxication will wear off, but one will remain certain that one had an encounter with the living truth.

Archimedes and the geographer are not dogmatic about their ideas, nor routinely intellectual, but possess what might be called an intellectual sensibility. Ideas exist transitionally for them, to use Winnicott's concept, that is, ideas are simultaneously subjective and objective, created and discovered, symbiotically merged with and altogether separate, personal symbols and autonomous objects. Ideas are naturally constituent parts of themselves as well as theoretical constructions of the world beyond themselves. As Winnicott says, in the transitional state opposites co-exist, with no sense of contradiction. The transitional experience is the antidote to the dissociation of sensibility, with its sense of radical contradiction between, indeed, the incommensurateness of, cognition and feeling.

The joie de vivre of Archimedes and the geographer comes from their transitional use of ideas. Indeed, the pictures are about the joy of transitionality. We empathically and spontaneously join Archimedes and the geographer in their pictures because their gazes not only transfigure the world by seeing it in a transitional way, but transfigure us by seeing us—and forcing us to see ourselves—the same way. We may regard ourselves as objective spectators analytically studying the pictures as texts, in an attempt to exhaustively understand their construction, but the transitional gaze of Archimedes and the geographer turns us into subjects spontaneously involved with them emotionally. It may be philistine and naïve to take their gaze personally—to fall into the trap of the illusion by gazing back—but it is more philistine and naïve, and more irresponsible to the pictures, and ultimately beside their main point, to deconstruct them, as though to dismiss their expressivity and emotional effect on us. That is, avoid personal involvement with them, indeed, deny dependence on them,

whether it be immature or what Fairbairn calls mature dependence. Deconstruction is a form of disbelief, that is, a refusal to suspend the disbelief necessary to accept the picture on its own emotional terms. It is a premature scepticism, suggesting a schizoid defense and ultra-intellectualization, in anxiety about being taken in by the picture, that is, taking a so-called natural attitude to it, which includes regarding it as a natural creation. Above all, anxiety about feeling anything for it and in and through it, that is, accepting it as a medium of feeling, accepting the feelings it evokes. But unless one allows oneself to be taken in by the illusion it has no significant, that is, transformative, effect on one; it is not an experience. It is the contagion of the happy but far from dumb gaze, blessing the world by seeing it in a transitional way, that makes the invitation of Archimedes and the geographer to join them in the illusion irresistible, not the irresistibility of their logic.

In Goya's painting, there is a rhythm of relationship between the standing open shirted figure happily gazing into space, the seated open shirted figure gazing at the figure next to him, and the open shirted figure, sleeping—contentedly, I think—after his labor. The entire scene is of one big happy extended family—a genuine community, with each figure seamlessly attached to the other. It is as though each figure makes the same emotional point in different, but seamlessly integrated, contexts of experience. One can be happy in oneself, happy with others, and happy in nature. Secure in a good enough environment, there is no narcissistic, object relational, or generalized separation anxiety. One can openly be one's True Self, in Winnicott's sense, whatever situation one is in, because there are no false situations.

I should note that I will also examine the more veiled, if also smiling, gaze of the victorious general in Velazquez's *Surrender of Breda.* It is somewhat less intense than the natural and intellectual gazes. Indeed, it is a kind of attenuated, compromised expressivity: expressivity which is a thin veil for a power relationship. It is used to establish a diplomatic relationship with the losing general—a relationship of less than complete engagement, that is, a relationship lacking in the existential and emotional depth implicit in the natural and intellectual gazes. That is, the diplomatic gaze bridges the space that separates winner and loser, but not enough to raise the latter to the level of the former, obliterating the difference between them. Emotional and intellectual equality have been replaced by social inequality, masked by geniality. The expressive gazes of the peasants and the intellectuals establish parity between the spectator and them, and invite the spectator to participate, as an equal partner, in their experience, rather than to stand outside it as an alien observer. In contrast, the winning general's diplomatic gaze observes the inferiority of the losing general even as it seems to deny that inferiority with its own

noblesse oblige cordiality. While not a perfunctory and empty politesse, it is hardly the intimate embrace it pretends to be. It may be too much to say that it is insidiously intimidating, but power stands behind its ease, and there is a certain self-congratulation in its graciousness. It bridges the distance between winner and loser, but only to the extent necessary to finalize the peace between them, not to change the order of their relationship, which remains unchangably hierarchical.

The winner reassures the loser that he will not be cruel in victory, and the loser reassures the winner that he will submit to the winner's rule, neither of which gives them anything existentially and emotionally in common. The diplomatic gaze casts the status quo of social power in bronze, as though it was the eternal order of things. Conflict is contained and reified by hierarchicalizing victory and defeat, which is why war does not break out in every social exchange between winners and losers. Nonetheless, the sense of society as a structure of winners and losers is implicit in the diplomatic gaze, in and through which the winner establishes authority over the loser, which is the model for all further exchange between them. The diplomatic gaze is coldly realistic compared to the natural and intellectual gazes. It is the False Self's gaze, brought to perfection. Goya's pastoral vision of an ideal world of natural gazes is the antidote to it.

You have no doubt noted that all my examples of the expressive gaze come from Spanish art. It is the one art in which it unequivocally, however irregularly, occurs. I will later briefly, and no doubt unconvincingly, suggest why this might be so.

"It must be recognized," Joyce McDougall writes, "that man *always creates something* in the space that separates him from the Other or from the fulfillment of his desires. These 'diverse' creations require as much energy, passion, and innovation as the socially recognized ones. They may take the form of a neurotic symptom, a perversion, a psychosis, a criminal career, a work of art, or an intellectual production."[2] According to McDougall, "it is the hand that is destined to repair the first rupture in narcissistic integrity and the feeling of completion created by the absence of the breast. It is likewise the hand that caresses the genital long before the infant can conceive of the differences between the sexes, and later will play the role of the sexual partner's genital in an imaginary erotic relation."[3] But in the adult world the gaze displaces the hand, and comes before it: the gaze is the creation that spans the space of separation, allowing satisfying contact over distance with the other. All other creations, including those of the handshake, presuppose it, and as such are secondary, at least, as I emphasize, in the adult world. For it is the gaze that creates the mental representation of the other implicit in them.

(I think the gaze has a greater importance in the infant's world than McDougall accords it, but that is another matter. Kenneth Wright, expanding on Winnicott, who points out that the first mirror is the mother's smiling face, argues for its supreme importance in the emotionally primitive yet subtle relationship between mother and infant. It is perhaps the major facilitator, after direct body contact, within the facilitating environment.[4])

The gaze is paradoxical: it maintains, or at least acknowledges and accepts, separation while overcoming it. In other words, it is transitional. It affirms potential space in defiance of actual space, however much, as Wright convincingly argues, acceptance of complete separation and actual space, while invariably traumatic, are essential for symbolization, and with it successful social functioning. Transitional objects are proto-symbols not full-fledged symbols, that is, they do not substitute for an object whose absence has been maturely accepted, thus granting it reality. But one is always in narcissistic need of emotional refueling, to use Margaret Mahler's term, so that one is always ready to regress to potential space, reversing separation and experiencing merger, thus replenishing one's sense of self. Indeed, such regression to transitionality—a kind of temporary, socially sanctioned de-maturing, as it were (which is not the same as infantilization)—is necessary for narcissistic health, and the major motivation for creating something in the space of separation. A good creation affords not simply a superficial, conscious sense of social connection with the other, through the medium of the creation, but an unconscious sense of profound personal merger with the other. The other becomes a significant other not simply another, that is, seems primary and supportive by reason of the shared experience of the creation, which also seems primary and supportive. However shortlived this complex transitional illusion, it is absolutely necessary for the adult's emotional well-being and sense of safety.

There are a number of reasons why the paintings I have mentioned are good creations, but perhaps the most important, from the point of view I am trying to develop here, is the seemingly tricky device—but the artists execute it with such panache and flair, as well as technical brilliance—of the central figure's expressive gaze at the spectator in the lifeworld outside the picture. It is difficult to picture the expressive gaze, because real life models are few and far between. It is a rare person who is able to gaze expressively—it is not an easy thing to do emotionally, however spontaneous the gaze seems once it occurs—and it is a rare person who is able to accept the gift of that gaze. Through the gaze, both become significant, primary others for one another, however temporarily. Engaged by the expressive gaze, we are emotionally drawn into the picture, and enabled to enjoy the happy feeling that pervades it. This feeling is more than incidental atmosphere, a secondary feature of the scene. It is its substance—

more real than anything that looks obviously real in it, or rather everything that looks obviously real in it converges in the feeling. In psychic fact we do not decide whether or not we will allow ourselves to respond to the expressive gaze, as though it could be taken or left. Rather, we find ourselves instantly implicated in the picture—intoxicated by it—the moment the gazer's eyes catch our own. We may intellectually resist the invitation and happiness epitomized by the gaze, but it has worked on us unconsciously whether we wanted it to or not. That is, the expressive gaze bypasses the repression barrier, sidestepping the intellectual will that not infrequently sustains it. The expressive gaze relieves us, despite the strength of that will. Against the will, the picture, for an unconscious moment, becomes transitional, that is, creatively bridges the space between us and the other (in the surrogate form of the central figure) with its intoxicating fantasy of happiness. We have the illusion that we are in an I-Thou relationship with the other, whose happy world we experience as more facilitative of our being than the unhappy world we actually inhabit. That is, in the world of the picture we feel more real and embodied than we usually do in our everyday world, suggesting that so-called everyday experience may be insidiously psychotic. At the moment when everyday reality blurs and the pictorial illusion becomes emotional reality, desire is vicariously or empathically fulfilled: we feel ourselves to be drunk, as though on wine or ideas. The desire of the other is also fulfilled; after all, all the central figure wanted was for us to join him in the picture, share his world and happiness, which the pleasure the picture gives us indicates we have done. We have trusted the illusion enough to have a more than good enough experience. The paintings I have mentioned are more than good enough because the intoxicating feeling they convey through the expressive gaze is more than good enough. The pictures create a grand, very good illusion, because they break down the emotional distance between the spectator and the world of the picture. The picture's expressivity not only releases us from the repression of everyday life, which separates us from the other (among other things), but becomes our expressivity—the expressivity that connects us with the other.

The intense expressive gaze "works"—makes the spectator feel at home in the emotional world of the picture—because it is the mirror image of the spectator's gaze. Or rather, a construction of the ideally intense gaze that the spectator ought to have—the gaze that the artist wishes the spectator to have. Only through it will the spectator get the full "benefit" of the picture. (Of course, intensely gazing at the picture—completely and exclusively absorbed in it, as though the spectator had no other relationship in the world—the spectator satisfies the artist's narcissism, that is, the wish to have his art taken seriously, even his omnipotent wish to have it regarded as the most important or only really

significant art in the world.) The artist has constructed a gaze that presents itself as the ideal or model spectator gaze. Indeed, the invented expressive gaze is meant to catalyze, by contagion, the spectator's "natural" gaze at the picture, intensely involving him or her in it. It means to persuade the spectator that he or she is necessary to sustain its intoxicating, happy mood, that is, that the spectator is part of the picture's inner necessity. It tells the spectator that if he does not give himself or herself emotionally to the picture its good mood might change, even disappear, never to return, suggesting how fleeting such expressive moods are in the first place, and thus how unconvincing they may seem. By insisting that there are no emotional boundaries between the picture and the spectator, however absolute the literal ones—and, if I may make an aside, installation art suggests they are hardly absolute, and never really were—the expressive gaze pleads for the life of the picture. Its life depends entirely on the transitional conviction the spectator has in it.

To summarize: the figure who gazes expressively exists as simultaneously the other separated from the spectator, the spectator himself or herself, and the (artistic) creation that fills the space between the spectator and the other, that is, that metamorphosizes the space of separation into the consensual Dionysian space in which desire can be fulfilled. It is the intoxicating illusion the self and the other consent to in order to relate to facilitate each other's happiness. It is a space that exists only in the imagination.

However, it often seems impossible to bridge the space of separation, with all the creative will in the world. There is in fact an uncreative gaze that seems to forbid transitionality, ruthlessly insisting upon the irreversibility of separation. I call it the superego gaze. It leaves the gazer and the other gazed at stranded on opposite sides of the space of separation, indifferent to—feeling nothing for—one another. This gaze has given up all pursuit of merger with the other. It represents the other as completely alien—beyond even being a bad or good object. It is an Apollo that no longer wants to embrace Daphne, even though it cognizes her. It is unaware of the emotional consequences: each not only feels frustrated because its desire is never to be satisfied, but abandoned to the extent of feeling annihilated. Such annihilative anxiety is much more emotionally serious than the anxiety of being unable to express desire, for it involves the inability to express oneself, there being almost no self to express. Without secure attachment to a significant, primary other, there is no secure sense of self, as Bowlby tells us. It is such secure attachment that the expressive gaze invites us to, but the superego gaze finalizes the detachment, as Bowlby calls it, that follows the protest and despair—again his terms—that are the emotional consequences of complete separation. Of course, such separation is an inevitable part of the maturing

process, and not durably traumatic if it is handled well by the facilitating environment. Also, one always knows, as an adult, that it can be reversed by creativity, which reinstates transitionality. But what if one lives in an adult world in which personal creativity, making the True Self feel fully alive again, however unconsciously, is forbidden? What if one lives in a world of massproduced, pseudo-creativity that exists to elevate the False Self as the only valid self? Then the elemental experience of primary anxiety, as Bowlby calls it, becomes pervasive. People feel unconnected and permanently unsafe, in Sandler's sense. The self becomes paranoid. It feels trapped in a persecutory relationship with the other—which is one way of connecting with the other if one cannot relate creatively to him or her, one way of connecting until the innate need to relate has been completely stilled. Paranoid fantasy masks the sense that every significant sharing relationship has collapsed, and no new one is possible. It shows the need to relate reduced to a disturbing psychic tic. I think such paranoia is a prelude to a feelingless state whose latent content is the fantasy that significant, primary relationships never existed. This universalizes to the belief that no one ever had one. The ultimate suffering is to read paranoid solitude back into infancy.

Now I think paranoid solitude—the isolation of ultimate alienation—more accurately describes the underlying mood of postmodernism than the idea of schizophrenic mania customarily used to do so. There is certain relationship between them: schizophrenic mania, and more crucially schizophrenic Stimmung, and especially the "truth-taking stare," are a kind of defense against paranoid solitude. But the point I want to make is that one experiences the anxiety of being unrelatable to, leading to a feeling that every relationship is futile—a profounder anxiety than that aroused by the feeling of being unlovable, with its accompanying sense that it is futile to think that love can make life good, repair its wretchedness—when the world not only seems, in Wordsworth's words, too much with one, but when it seems inescapably with one, watching one all the time. This occurs when one is completely compliant to society—completely false to oneself—so that one no longer knows who one truly is, no longer even feels real, no longer knows the meaning of what Winnicott calls the spontaneous act and personal idea. It is when one no longer knows how to create—when one feels shut out of the near paradise of transitionality, not even knowing it exists in oneself. Wright, along with others, understands psychosis as the denial of separation—separation anxiety carried to a disorganizing, indeed, disintegrative extreme—but I think there is a kind of socially induced psychosis that is a denial of the merger experience, a rejection of it as dangerously regressive and unrealistic. No doubt it is allowed to exist in carefully regulated form, that is, under the superego gaze, which stylizes—overcontrols—it. It is the psychosis induced by a society in which everyone

is an instrument of reason, that is, has exclusively exchange and functional value. The dissociation of sensibility typical of modernity is its first consequence. Socially induced psychosis, which involves the suspicion that cognition and feeling can never be brought back together (in and through transitionality), and with that the loss of any feeling of relatedness and of any will to relate, and thus total detachment (not without spasmodic paranoid fantasies of relationship)—is typical of postmodernity. It is the final devastating effect on the psyche of instrumental reason.

We all learn the superego gaze, with its subliminal authoritarianism, masked by a diplomatic look. We all become more completely social than creative, giving up on creativity or accepting society's version of it. Phyllis Greenacre has described the parent's prejudice, in the name of the child's social self, against its creative self. The parent is supposedly doing something for the child's own good, that is, teaching it how to survive in the world beyond the world of the family. The child internalizes the parent's superego gaze, suppressing the creative expression of feeling for the other and feeling in general. It is the gaze of anonymous authority made quasi-personal by seeming to be the parents' authority, which makes it seem all the more normal. The child learns that inexpressivity—a kind of living death—is a necessary "adaption" to society, acknowledging its "necessity." It learns to hold its emotional as well as literal tongue. Inexpressivity adapts one to functionality, reinforcing society's command that one must make oneself of use to it before one dare satisfy one's desire. Functional relationships are not intimate ones; to make transitional use of the other in them is to misunderstand them and perform badly.

At its kindest, the superego gaze is diplomatic, that is, the parents teach the child to deal with the world diplomatically. This looks good from the outside—in the world's eyes—but it is an awkward compromise between the child's creative and social selves. The child is taught to compromise itself in the course of learning to compromise with the world—a compromise enforced by its taking as its own the world's superego gaze (which is why adults look as distant as they do, as the many inexpressive portraits show). This gaze identifies it with society and gives one the right to speak in its name, that is, the right to be a parent and teach one's own children how to compromise themselves. Thus one learns the ultimate lesson in life.

Now no doubt it is a necessary, unavoidable lesson. The false social self mediates and protects the true creative self, as Winnicott says. We need and have both, however much one—usually the false social one—tends to run away with and even usurp the rights of the other, indeed, sometimes claims to be it, for example, to be creatively social. No doubt it is possible to be that. No doubt the ideal is to integrate both, but even then, as Winnicott suggests—with a touch of irony—it is the social self

that will get all the attention, and make for the success of the creative self, which, perversely, denies it, that is, denies its difference from the social self.

But the point I want to make is that society's advocacy of the false self has become extreme in modern society, to the extent that the depression such advocacy induces—there are studies that indicate that depression is the one mental pathology that has increased, exponentially, in modern society—has become endemic in postmodern society. The flat affect pervasive in it is masked by manic appropriation, but what is appropriated is a simulation of substance, which unashamedly declares its affectlessness. Postmodern simulation—perfected sign functioning as pseudo-substance—is the nihilistic consequence of the modern emphasis on pure functionality. In modernity, this served the "interest" of the False Self; in postmodernity, it leads to the con-fusion of True Self and False Self, the authentic and inauthentic. What this means, from the perspective I am trying to develop here, is that it becomes harder and harder, and finally impossible, to create something that will end the sensation of separateness, let alone afford transitional richness.

Avant-garde art at its most authentic, that is, before it became institutionalized, or hypertrophied, to use Clement Greenberg's word, was in part an effort to assert the true creative self that could end separation from the other by creating something that would engage the true creative self in him or her. Along with artistic revolution, social revolution also once served that psychological purpose, whatever else it was about. I think avant-garde and social revolution no longer work, that is, are no longer creative—partly because the social self is eager to appropriate and manipulate the creative self for its own functional success—and I think society is mass producing pseudo-creations, that is, creations that do not evoke the creative self of the spectator, ending his or her feeling of separateness and alienation. Even the peasant and the intellectual have become false creations in our society. That is, they no longer have the power to make us drunk with our true selves, engage us with any emotional conviction that seems to revolutionize our existence. We see them, touristically, from the outside; we no longer share anything with them, we can no longer be on the same inside—the intoxicating inside which the pictures I alluded to represented. Even the peasants and intellectuals are alien simulations these days. Their affects are simulated, unlike the peasants and intellectuals in the pictures. Even they have inexpressive superego gazes. That is, they are completely identified with the society that produced them.

I am going to argue that in this inexpressive or pseudo-expressive situation the expressive gaze can come to the rescue of the alienated true creative self, or at least create the illusion—which is not the same as a simulation—of being a true creative self. It dissolves the social self by

the power of its affect. What, then, are the psychodynamics of this gaze of last resort? It is in effect a healing gaze, and looks melodramatic and excessive—all too full of feeling—to the False Self. It seems weak, for it does not put any pressure on one the way the superego gaze does. But then part of the point of the expressive gaze is to remove pressure in order to facilitate happiness. The expressive gaze is the antidote to the depression induced by the pressure of separateness that seems to reach the point of no return to intimate relationship. Paradoxically, depression confirms the sense that the only possible relationships are instrumental—that a good, transitional relationship is impossible. But someone completely depressed can no longer function socially. The inhabitants of postmodern society tend to be completely depressed. They not only feel useless to themselves, but they are useless to society. Thus the pervasive feeling of hopelessness-helplessness in postmodern society. I regard the rise in narcissistic-borderline disorders, in which the most elementary sense of selfhood is at stake, as the unequivocal marker of postmodernity.

My hypothesis is that the expressive gaze, a rare phenomenon in general and all the more rare in this day and age of false personalization—the falsification of the personal so that it can serve social functionality—can save the self and the other from their annihilative separateness by convincing them of the possibility of personal happiness—momentary but intense—in defiance of seemingly insuperable social misery and alienation. In joining them together in a moment of memorable intoxication, in which they seem not only to discover a basic truth about being, but to become one with it—in other words, experience it transitionally—they overcome catastrophic separation.

The expressive gaze occurs despite disbelief in its own success. It is a gamble that knows it may not work—may not reach across the space of separation absolutized by alienation. The peasants and the intellectuals in the Spanish pictures do not really believe that you will respond to their gaze, accept it as the gaze it is—take it seriously enough to enter the illusion of the picture they inhabit and become as intoxicated, expressive, and full of the joy of life as they are. They know you are likely, in the name of reality, to distrust the promise of happiness, whether in the form of bodily or intellectual pleasure, explicit in their expressive gaze. But they continue to gaze, their gaze a perpetual opportunity for intimacy, a perpetual invitation to a transitional vision of the world. One of my theses is that the expressive gaze can in fact only exist in a sustained way in the technically unrealistic yet emotionally realistic space of the picture. That is, in our all too real world, expressivity, fraught with transitional vision, which in emotional fact is as much of the promise of happiness as will ever be realized, necessarily exists in the ghetto of a picture, that is, within some frame of non-reference that suggests its possibility in the

very act of declaring its unreality.

The frame allows it to make itself manifest in a kind of dream, which we know we will awaken from, and we often wish we never had, because it haunts everyday functional life almost enough to distract us from it, and make us think it is possible to have more intoxicating exchanges with others than we in sober fact do—more genuine, that is, self-creating and self-created, excitement than the programmed, prescriptive (superego supervised) excitements society offers us. The expressive gaze is a siren song that may make us crash on the rocks of reminiscence because it distracts us from our passage through the rough sea of everyday reality. The expressive gaze in the picture is a perpetual enticement and enchantment that deludes us into believing we can safely drop the guard of our disillusionment with the world—so necessary to successful functioning in it—and be our True creatively expressive Selves.

In harsh everyday fact this is to make ourselves vulnerable, that is, expose our existence to the world's anger, which is its defense against the anxiety aroused in it by any attempt to unequivocally be and creatively express the True Self, evoking and appealing to the True Selves of others, and thus forging a kind of community of the happy few, as Stendhal called them, within the larger society. It is a community of elective expressive affinities, the only kind of community, however erratic, possible today, that is, after what Tönnies describes as the collapse into irrelevance of the traditional community of inherited intimate relationships (as they might be called) with the advent and under the pressure of modern mass society. Such a society regards True Self expression as provocative—even if it manipulates and exploits our longing to be a True Self—and may force the True Self to commit suicide, in traumatic reaction to and internalization of society's hostility to it (which often takes the form of militant super-egoistic indifference). Such hostility is in emotional fact a kind of soul murder of the True Self, in Shengold's sense (and in McDougall's sense of the threat against the self evident in psychosis). It involves society's re-assertion of its superego rights over the self as such.

Society wishes that the Pandora's box of True Self creative expressivity had never been opened, for its contents undermine the basic code of society, namely, to be a completely compliant False Self, trusting in society as the be-all and end-all of existence. Indeed, believing that it is so good that it will never betray one, which of course it invariably does, after giving one what look like opportunities to be oneself. But they were opportunities to be one's False Self, which the power of one's desire made one realize one had to use to one's emotional and existential advantage by turning them into opportunities to be, in however small measure, one's True Self. This is to outsmart society, for which society is partially grateful—it knows it gets its vitality by cannibalizing the achievements of True

creative Selves—but in the end it takes its revenge by reducing all True creative Self achievement to exchange value, and regarding the expressivity that made it possible as a dumb instrument, at best an evil emotional necessity.

To refer to the paintings, this means that the spectator studies the peasants' working conditions—no doubt they are exploited by society—and disregards their happiness. They are presumably too dumb to know better. That is, what is ignored is the fact that they can only be productive within the context of a happy relationship with nature. The picture is reduced to ideology, ignoring the importance of its expressive power. It means that the spectator regards the geometry of Archimedes and the geographer as simply another intellectual triumph. Their happiness is beside its intellectual point, no more than a sign of their personal eccentricity and dubious character—as though they came to the geometrical truth despite their neurotic selves. But in fact it is the sign of their creativity and imaginative investment in or transitional relationship with geometry, which is what makes them want to share it with us. If they did not expect it to make them happy, they would not have been creative minds.

Society is interested in objective results not the subjective creative expressive route an individual must take to get them, whatever else is involved in doing so. Perhaps paradoxically, what ends up being socially significant is initially realized within the framework of creative self-realization and self-expression, not as something that is done for society's sake. The peasants have a good harvest because they realize and express themselves—and find happiness in doing so—in and through their transitional, intoxicating, good relationship with nature, not because society has forced them to do so, or because they cunningly want to have a monopoly in grain. The intellectuals make their successful discoveries because they realize and express themselves—and find happiness in doing so—through their transitional intoxication with ideas, not because they think their discoveries will win them prizes, make them celebrities, and allow them to wear tuxedos rather than rags. The peasants are seduced by nature, as it were, emotionally connecting with and becoming dependent on it—that is, they experience it as facilitative and supportive—without denying its separateness from them. Similarly, the intellectuals are seduced by ideas, becoming emotionally dependent on them—internalizing them as good objects, or rather using them to revive an already existing relationship to an already internalized good object—without denying their difference from them. In both cases, by letting themselves be enchanted, that is, taking something external to them as though it was internal, they discover—recover—their instinctive expressivity, which fuels their creativity.

Perhaps most important, they free themselves from what Kernberg calls malignant narcissism, a psychopathic destructive state which I think is the

disease of postmodernism. (Kernberg thinks it can become paranoid, which he thinks affords a glimmer of good relational hope, although, as I have suggested, paranoia can be regarded as the dregs of relationality as such.) It involves, as he says, the "diffuse, generalized destruction or corruption of everything valuable"[5]—which among postmodern artists and intellectuals takes the form of a profound unconscious rage against the achievements of the past, a kind of liquidation of tradition, including the tradition of the new, that is, the tradition that argues, as Harold Rosenberg suggests, that every self must be self-invented and radically new and different from every other self. Malignant artistic and intellectual narcissism involves the standardization and stereotyping of the avant-garde attitude—a falsifying universalization of it as applicable in any and every context of life. I think that deconstruction and correlate textualization are perhaps the most characteristic current forms of it. Nothing is built on, there is no accumulation of what Whitehead calls real possibilities, and above all the existence of creative flux and the experience of transitionality are denied. Instead there is the facadification—as it may no doubt absurdly be called—of all actual cultural phenomena (in effect potential surrogate selves, or at least facilitators of and supports for existing selves), under the auspices of the twin peaks of semioticization and historicization. They are the instruments of hatred when they do not exist to facilitate a transitional relationship with their objects. When they no longer serve as creative means of transitionally bridging the space of separation between self and the otherness of the phenomena, they become reifications of separateness and absolutizations of otherness. Malignant artistic and intellectual narcissism, involving a "consistent attempt to exploit, destroy, symbolically castrate, or dehumanize significant others,"[6] that is, facilitative cultural others—others with expressive (re)creative gazes—has become almost de rigeur in today's postmodern academies, outside as well as inside the university, suggesting how full of "self-deception" and unfacilitative they are. There is no escape from societal psychosis in them. They may be symptoms of widespread envy, in Melanie Klein's sense. Indeed, the scooping out and spoiling of the creative past, motivated by unconscious anxiety that one may not be artistically and intellectually creative oneself—which is perhaps the ultimate form of annihilation anxiety—is basic to malignant postmodern narcissism.

The expressive gaze is a creative risk in a world of self-perpetuating alienation, where relationships are experienced as meaningless and ultimately futile however much they are needed and eagerly pursued. In my opinion a cultural product becomes a significant other for us when we can establish emotional rapport with it, in effect regarding it as expressively gazing at us—whether or not it creates the illusion of gazing eyes—and thus facilitating our existence. It becomes a kind of face that

spontaneously and unexpectedly smiles at us, making us spontaneously and unexpectedly feel good about ourselves. The risk of the expressive gaze is that what is expressed—externalized—and consolidated or concentrated in it, are all the good internal objects supportive of the True Self, above all the mnemonic residue of the primary facilitating environment—the truly significant other. Such unqualified expression of goodness may—indeed, sooner or later will—bring the superego gaze's wrath down on it. It will not be able to sustain itself for long—unless it is made permanent in the "picture" of a cultural phenomenon, which in fact is the only place it can be sustained and seem self-sustaining, and the only place it is allowed to seriously occur in society (which means it is not supposed to occur in everyday life)—and ultimately censor itself.

The expressive gaze is made by a self that has managed to inhibit every sign of bad internal objects—all the frowns of the superego gaze—but unless it is taken up and returned by the expressive gaze of someone else, that is, its spectator, it will perish in the limbo reserved for lost opportunities for creative self-realization and self-expression. The chances of the spectator responding and inwardly returning it—taking his own creative risk—are less than might be expected, as previously noted, for the response and return can only occur in illusory communal rather than social space, and if the spectator is willing to suspend his or her intellectual disbelief, that is, his or her analytic approach to the gaze (which reduces it to a code or convention, or else regards it as an "engaging" trick). The spectator knows that communal space is an illusion—it exists only in and through and with the picture—and so becomes sceptical of it, that is, inhibited by the whole expressive situation. The expressive gaze then becomes deceptive, or at best merely interesting—that is, the spectator regards it in the terms of his or her own malignant narcissism.

But the expressive gaze is a therapeutic gaze—an ironically socially sanctioned therapeutic gaze that must, however, not go any further than the relationship between the therapist peasant and therapist intellectual and ourselves—in that it reminds the depressed postmodern spectator that there is somewhere in himself or herself a good relational object struggling to express itself in order to facilitate his or her True creative Self. It reminds him or her that there is something valuable in himself or herself that feels bad because it dare not express itself under the superego gaze of society, and acts out its bad feeling by being destructive. The expressive gaze even hopes, against all malignant narcissistic odds, to evoke the good internal object, that is, bring it out of hiding, showing the depressed spectator that in emotional fact it really exists, and thus make him or her feel internally good and even good about himself or herself in general, however transiently. The person or cultural phenomenon that makes the expressive gaze needs to have it responded to and returned, for

he or she or it also needs to feel good and be a True creative Self. The gazer and the gazed at are attempting to constitute—not just socially construct—an island of spontaneous elective affinity within an indifferent society. They are both in need of sustenance and facilitation for their existences, which are always on the verge of collapsing into alienation and false relationships.

The pictures I have mentioned are symbols of this island of spontaneous community. They reflect the nostalgia of artists for intimacy within an imperial society. Intimacy had become a diplomatic, manipulative trick, as the smiling winner of the battle of Breda indicates. Spain was not modern, but the power of the superego prevailed in it, in the form of Catholicism. At the same time, the real possibility of mutually facilitative intimacy still existed in Spain. It was provincial and agricultural enough for pockets of instinctive community to exist. Archimedes looks like a provincial intellectual—which is perhaps why he felt grand enough to imagine himself standing on a spot from which he could move the whole world—and the sophistication of the geographer is deceptive, as his all too indiscreet, undiplomatic smile suggests. Also, Spain was still profoundly magical in its thinking, that is, it had a good enough religious illusion about life, however much that illusion sometimes veered toward dogmatic superstition and became bad enough—I think this is Spain's pagan rather than Catholic side, although the latter reinforces it—to see life in a transitional way, that is, as enigmatic. The expressive smile is in emotional fact enigmatic, because it is undiplomatic in a world in which diplomacy is all—where one dare not contradict the superego gaze. Thus to expressively gaze is to live dangerously—perhaps the basic alternative to living depressively. Moreover, the expressivity of the expressive gaze shows mysterious faith in the alienated expressivity of the other—belief that it can be redeemed, repaired. It can become engaged despite itself, which is the point of spontaneity. Also, the expressive gazer believes that when the other joins it in the oasis of the picture he or she will experience the mysteriousness of nature and mind. They are the ultimate mysteries, and in mysterious connection. The expressive smile initiates the self into these mysteries, showing how intoxicating they can be. They may ultimately be ineffable, but in the intimate state of intoxication they become facilitative environments. Indeed, joyously shared through the intoxicating affinity and spontaneous intimacy of a good gaze, they embody our original relationship with the facilitative environment, and as such become an intoxicating means of reoriginating or recreating ourselves. That is, they become Mother Nature and Father Mind, renewing the good mother and good father lost to childhood.

Notes

1 André Breton, "Marcelle Loubchansky," *Surrealism and Painting* (New York: Harper & Row, 1972), page 346 writes: "In 1821, Hegel received as a present from Goethe a wineglass recalling symbolically the latter's *Theory of Colours* and dedicated as follows: 'The originating phenomenon very humbly begs the absolute to give a cordial welcome.' Only a fragment of Hegel's letter of thanks has survived: 'Wine,' said Hegel, 'has always been a powerful ally of the philosophy of nature, because it has demonstrated conclusively to the world that spirit also resides in nature.' But, he added, a wineglass as instructive as the one which Goethe had given him was a veritable cosmic glass in which the sinister Ahriman joined Ormuzd, the child of light, to serve the folly of revelation."

2 Joyce McDougall, *Plea for a Measure of Abnormality* (New York: Brunner/Mazel, 1992), 481.

3 Ibid., 157.

4 See Kenneth Wright, *Vision and Separation: Between Mother and Baby* (Northvale, New Jersey: Jason Aronson, 1991), especially chapter 6.

5 Otto F. Kernberg, *Aggression in Personality Disorders and Perversions* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), 24.

6 Ibid., 23.

Madness and Modernism, The Cult of the Avant-Garde Artist, and Empathic Art in the Mediascape

David Sherman

In this paper I intend to map out a dialogue between Louis Sass's *Madness and Modernism* and Donald Kuspit's *The Cult of The Avant-Garde Artist.* Sass propounds a notion of modern art as the space in which the schizophrenic pathology of modern society is expressed and exposed. Kuspit, on the other hand, acknowledges the existence of a general social pathology, but unlike Sass, he sees modern or "avant-garde" art as providing a therapeutic or curative function. Kuspit goes on to argue, however, that postmodern, or "neo-avant-garde" art has emptied out avant-garde art's therapeutic aspect and become an end point, the expression of a social pathology so far gone it no longer "wants to be cured." I came away from Kuspit's book with several "answers" to Sass's position, and a central question which I will phrase as follows: What is the role/fate of art and artmaking in postmodernity? And its corollary: Is empathic art possible given the nature of the postmodern condition? I will begin by examining Sass's argument and consider Kuspit's "response." I will then consider what Kuspit's thesis impels me towards: a notion of the necessity for rewriting the definitions of "artifact," "artist," and "viewer of art" as a prerequisite for creating empathic art in the postmodern mediascape.

In *Madness and Modernism* (New York: Harper Collins, 1992), Sass attempts to reinterpret schizophrenia and related forms of pathology by demonstrating affinities between schizophrenia, the condition of modernity, and modern and postmodern art. According to Sass, images of madness in the western tradition have revolved around two opposing yet frequently combined poles: "On the one hand, notions of emptiness, of defect and decrepitude, of blindness, even of death itself; on the other, ideas of plenitude, energy, and irrepressible vitality—a surfeit of passion or fury bursting through all boundaries of reason or constraint"(3). The formulation is based on the notion of reason, logic, order, control, and integration as

underlying sanity; in contrast, the absence of reason, irrationality, disorder, loss of control and disintegration are associated with insanity. Sass writes that Nietzsche's critique of western metaphysics in *The Birth of Tragedy*, "glorifies the clinical forms of madness (the "Dionysian" as opposed to the "Apollonian" tendency) for their presumed spontaneity and sensual abandon instead of condemning them for irrationality and evident loss of control"(4). The core formulation, however, linking madness with unreason and sanity with reason continues to hold.[1] Sass argues that this formulation also informs Freud's model of schizophrenia. For Freud, schizophrenia is "a profound regression to the most primitive stage of "infantile auto-eroticism ... a return to an archaic mode of experience dominated by illogical primary-process, by hallucinatory wish-fulfillment fantasy and raw, untamed instinct, by a state of primal fusion with the world, and by an absence or severe attenuation of "observing ego" (the capacity for self-conscious reflection and ironic distance from experience)"(20).

Sass proposes another possibility. He suggests that modernist art manifests "certain off-putting characteristics that are reminiscent of schizophrenia: a quality of being hard to understand (by conventional standards) or feel one's way into." Sass argues that "the relevant aspects of such art are, however, antithetical to notions of primitivity and of deficit or defect, for these art forms are characterized not so much by unreflectiveness and spontaneity as by acute self-consciousness and self-reference, and by alienation from action and experience—qualities we might refer to as "hyperreflexivity"(8). Considering the situation of Dostoevsksy's narrator in *Notes from the Underground*, Sass proposes that we invert the traditional binary and instead consider the possibility that "too much" rather than a deficiency of consciousness might be a thoroughgoing illness.

> What if madness were to involve not an escape from but an exacerbation of that thoroughgoing illness Dostoevsky imagined? What if madness, in at least some of its forms, were to derive from a heightening rather than a dimming of conscious awareness, and an alienation not from reason but from the emotions, instincts, and the body? (4)

Sass's main project is to attempt to demonstrate affinities and "close parallels" between modern art and schizophrenia. Citing clinical evidence, he proposes four main aspects of the "Stimmung" or "truth-taking stare" experience characteristic of the "schizophrenic break": "Unreality," "Mere Being," "Fragmentation," and "Apophany."

Sass describes the "Unreality" vision as revealing "an alien and forbidding world pervaded by a sense of illimitable vastness, brilliant light and the gloss and smoothness of material things—a universe of precision

and clarity but devoid of the dynamism, emotional resonance, and sense of human purpose that are characteristic of everyday life." Juxtaposing *The Autobiography of a Schizophrenic Girl* with DeChirico's *Gare Montparnasse* (1914), Sass observes a comparable distortion of normal perception:

> (Madness was a country) where reigned an implacable light, blinding, leaving no place for shadow; an immense space without boundary, limitless, flat; a mineral, lunar country, cold as the wastes of the North Pole. In this stretching emptiness, all is unchangeable, immobile, congealed, crystallized. Objects are stage trappings, placed here and there, geometric cubes without meaning (47).

Sass's sense of "Mere Being" refers to "what Heidegger considers the basic question of metaphysics—Why is there something rather than nothing?"[2] For Sass, this experience shares an affinity with the existential "vertigo" or "nausea" Sartre's characters face, "before the brute fact of existence itself"(49). For the schizophrenic, these feelings become all-consuming, paralyzing. From *The Autobiography*:

> When for example, I looked at a chair or a jug, I thought not of their use or function—a jug not as something to hold water and milk, a chair not as something to sit in—but as having lost their names, their functions and meanings; they became "things" and began to take on life, to exist (49).

For Sass, "Fragmentation" refers to the schizophrenic's experiencing a world in which: "Objects normally perceived as part of larger complexes may seem strangely isolated, disconnected from each other and devoid of encompassing context; or a single object may lose its perceptual integrity and disintegrate into a disunity of parts"(49-50). Sass juxtaposes the schizophrenic's "kaleidoscopic drifting in which perspective gives way to perspective"(136) with Cubism's multiple perspectives and with certain surrealist works. He argues that the latter are "structurally identical to contamination responses on the Rorsach: two objects or domains so interfused that they seem to have merged, creating a single object that could exist nowhere but in some mental or inner universe"(137).

Finally, Sass's use of the term "Apophany" refers to a sense of the hypersignificance of objects, in which, paradoxically, meaning is never fully present and is always "just out of reach." For Sass, this mood is also evidenced in DeChirico's writings and art: "the world resonates with a fugitive significance. Every detail and event takes on an excruciating distinctness, specialness, and peculiarity." Definite meaning, however, "eludes all attempts to grasp or specify it"(52).

For the purposes of this paper, I will not be concerned with debating

the validity of Sass's hypothesis relative to the psychological and psychoanalytic literature on schizophrenia. My interest is in Sass's juxtaposition of schizophrenia and modern art, specifically, the implications when modern art becomes the social space in which the schizophrenic aspects of society are exposed and worked out.

Sass describes "modernity" as a continuum with its origins in the late seventeenth-eighteenth century Enlightenment period, "reaching its highest pitch"(8) in the art and thought of the twentieth century. Sass acknowledges that as a result of industrialization and the development of science we are overwhelmed with information. He cites: "Karl Marx—on the alienating consequences of certain economic structures and relationships; Max Weber—on the growing rationalization, technologicalization, secularization, and bureaucratization of modern life; and Emile Durkheim—on the juggernaut of industrialization and the growing reflectiveness that cause traditional values to lose their quasi-natural status." The consequences for the individual are feelings of vulnerability, anonymity, and a sense of dislocation from a human community that no longer appears solid, cohesive and nurturing.[3] Sass argues: "It is not hard to conceive the role such a transformation might play in fostering schizoid and schizophrenic pathology—by encouraging (or exacerbating) the social withdrawnness, the cognitive wavering and incertitude, the sense of being a divided self, and the predilection for overly abstract modes of thought that are characteristic of such persons"(372). The modern condition is, in T. S. Eliot's words, a "dissociation of sensibility": a widening rift between thought and emotion, intellect and sensation, and a general failure to achieve "unification of sensibility"(357); consequently, Eliot describes the modern poet as one who is able only to think or feel, "by fits, unbalanced"(536).[4]

In *Madness and Modernism*, Sass argues against Freudian psychoanalytic models of schizophrenia but does not treat more recent developments in object-relations psychology. Using the thesis Kuspit develops in *The Cult of the Avant-Garde Artist* (New York: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1993), I want to argue that this omission limits Sass's analysis and prevents him from working through the further implications of his thesis. Sass discusses one half of what, when understood within an object-relations vocabulary, turns out to be a double-movement. Specifically, art is not only a symptom of the schizophrenic condition of modern society but also simultaneously the space in which the individual can work out pathology and move towards a "cure."

Sass's analysis of modern society's pathology can be further elucidated within an object-relations vocabulary. D. W. Winnicott's basic precept is that without an adequate facilitating environment pathology will result.

> The potential space between baby and mother, between child and family, between individual and society or the world, depends on experience which leads to trust. It can be looked upon as sacred to the individual in that it is here that the individual experiences creative living.
>
> By contrast, exploitation of this area leads to a pathological condition in which the individual is cluttered up with persecutory elements of which he has no means of ridding himself. (Winnicott, *Playing and Reality* [New York: Routledge, 1991], p. 103)

On the level of the individual, if the mother is not "good enough"—if she is not there from the outset providing appropriate mirroring to develop the infant's initial sense of its omnipotence and then in a seeming paradox, "good-enough" in the sense of weaning the child, providing a safe enough environment so the child can develop autonomy and move out of its infantile narcissism—pathology will result. On the psychosocial level, if one cannot attach to the environment, in this case, the social environment, a corresponding pathology will ensue. Unable to process the overwhelming information of modernity by ourselves, we turn to others: the community. But as Sass observes, modernity is characterized as the break-up and dislocation of community. In the modern era, the nurturing aspects of community have fallen away. Community has given way to "society," a mass phenomenon which is inherently superficial, cold, and unempathic; in addition, the displacement of the communal model for the transient, partial relationships that define the societal and the "mass age" have simultaneously begun to evacuate the "mother." For the postmodern generation, TVs have literally displaced the mother, they are our baby-sitters and pseudo-parents. In object-relations terms, modern society is not "good enough" and therefore does not provide an adequate facilitating environment; hence, the schizophrenic pathology Sass sees exposed in modern art.

When *Madness and Modernism* is contrasted with *The Cult of the Avant Garde Artist* two main areas are opened up. One, the double movement inherent in modern art: modern art as both symptom and therapy. And, two, the implications of the shift from modernism to postmodernism.

For Kuspit, the "avant-garde" or modernist artist "makes his art to restore himself to health, an intention that not only informs his art but influences his public's perception of that art"(28). Kuspit's double-movement thesis is encapsulated in the following passage in which he argues that "avant-garde's melting forms are simultaneously symptoms of disintegration anxiety and indications of a process of creative reintegration of the self"(29).

> According to (Heinz) Kohut, "the psyche of modern man—the psyche described by Kafka and Proust and Joyce—is enfeebled, multifragmented (vertically split), and disharmonious." At the same time, their avant-garde art attempts "to describe the indescribable, "the disintegration anxiety" that constitutes the fear of decadence—"the deepest anxiety man can experience," for it involves fear of "psychological death" or "loss of humanness." Their art, then, shows an incipient "presence of a firm self" that seems to thrive on disintegration anxiety, and amounts to "a creative way of responding" to it. If, as Kohut says, "every self ... consists to a greater or lesser extent of compensatory structures," then the forms of avant-garde art function as so many compensatory structures of self, affording a certain sense of firmness and strength despite their often fleeting, improvisational look (29).

Sass is content with noting the affinities between modern art and the schizophrenic condition. His omission is his failure to note that the schizophrenic remains schizophrenic as it were; the artist and the viewer who fully engages with the process offered to him does not.[5] One goes to the edge, so to speak, facing and working through the intrapsychic process of disintegration or annihilation of the self and reemerges with a new, stronger, albeit fleeting, sense of wholeness. The therapeutic process catalyzed by interacting with the "provocative object" is one in which the viewer grapples with the primordial aspects of "splitting" as inherent to self-formation.[6] The process involves two main stages: "the terror of the threat of disintegration" and the "elation of the promise of reintegration." In the first stage:

> One is split the way the distorted work of art is split, torn between contradictory elements and tendencies. Recognition of one's inner distortion evokes disintegration anxiety. (One is threatened) with complete collapse of the self, loss of all cohesiveness. The conflict or split widens, as it were, until the very idea of integrity of self seems impossible, unreal, a fiction (32).

In the second stage which unfolds simultaneously:

> (The) intense awareness of internal contradictoriness, catalyzed by the explicitly distorted work of art, has an abreactive effect, ultimately emancipating and maturing. It triggers emotions and memories associated with a traumatic past, bringing the past to consciousness, in whatever fragmentary form. Under the inspiration of the distorted work of art, one unconsciously—with reckless compulsivity—works through the past in which one had to split oneself to preserve oneself, works through the traumatic split which became the form of

> oneself. After the fit of madness—the purge—induced by the distorted work, one spontaneously coheres again and acquires fresh self-possession, greater ego strength (32).

Kuspit focuses on Picasso and Duchamp as two modern artists whose work catalyzes this therapeutic process. Both distort the object yet each in different ways. Picasso "takes possession of" them so that he seems their "creator"(33). As Picasso states, "in my case a picture is a sum of destructions"(30). In contrast, Duchamp distorts by draining the object of its normal function and place. The readymade consists of a dialectic of "withdrawing" from the object, annihilating it "in the very act of presenting (it)"(33), and, simultaneously affirming it due to his investment in the object and "the extent to which it is a content of his form" (34). Therefore, while the readymade's status as an object "having lost its name, its function and meaning" initially evokes a sense of vertigo comparable to Sass's "Sense of Mere Being," the other half of the therapeutic dialectic incorporates a corresponding reintegration which Sass does not consider.

Along similar lines, Kuspit responds to Fairbairn's thesis (echoed by Sass) that avant-garde art's "so-called obscurity and incomprehensibility" is "pathognomonic of an underlying schizoid tendency"(60). Similarly, I want to argue that the schizophrenic aspects Sass reads in DeChirico is only one half of the equation. The other half is a therapeutic movement in which the sense of freedom and "revelation of desire" evoked in surrealist and expressionist works taps into what André Breton terms, "total spontaneity of expression" as the "most direct avenue to the primordial unconscious"(60), and what Kuspit describes as: "the release and overflowing of primordial unconscious desire, and the chaotic flux of feeling that accompanies it. (This) restores a sense of freshness and vitality to life, refertilizing it in the process"(62).

To build on the notion of the therapeutic aspects of the artwork, I want to invoke Gilbert Rose's thesis in *The Power of Form* (New York: International Univ. Press, 1980). Rose argues that "the work of art sets up a context of primary and secondary process interaction which reflects the mind's imaginative activity or movement"(203). Rose proposes that rather than existing as conceptually distinct entities, primary and secondary processes are instead in a constant two-way flow. Rose suggests that art mirrors and taps into this "two-way flow between primary and secondary processes, building structure and tension and dissolving it"(202). For Rose, art encourages a "temporary lifting of the boundaries between self and object. A partial fusion can take place between the self and the art object. This is then followed by a reseparation. The fusion and reseparation recalls the fluid temporal, spatial, and personal boundaries of the child—openness and sensuousness—but it is not itself child-like"(1980; 203-4). Following this logic, Rose argues for a model of the mind in which the artwork occasions

a dynamic movement of primary and secondary process consisting of their corollary fusion and reseparation: "The imaginative, if nonlogical perception and thought demanded by art are characterized by a temporary suspension and then reimposition of the usual boundaries of subject-object, time and space."

To illustrate, I want to consider the therapeutic movement offered by Paul Klee's watercolors and drawings. *The New Yorker* review of the recent Guggenheim exhibition comments that the works reflect "the confluence of traditional German graphic illustration (wherein the "real" is often portrayed as gruesome and bizarre) and color theory in Klee's work."[7] Following Sass, a reading of these works would presumably focus on the distortions of the figures, their "unreality," and their "bizarre" aspect as reflections of the schizophrenic pathology of modern existence. Conflating Rose with Kuspit's "expressive cure," I want to argue for their therapeutic aspect: the movement between, and telescoping of, primary and secondary processes and their articulation of spontaneous desire. In Klee's drawings, the lines are controlled, have implicit meaning, and represent definable concepts; hence, they are captured by secondary process mode. But the medium of water color and washes of ink occasions an affective response that speaks to a playful sense of spontaneity, and invokes primary process. The two modes resonate in the work to create a third, an ongoing dialectic between and among the two "processes" in which it is impossible to separate one pole from the other and specify where primary and secondary process begins or ends. The result is that the viewer has the opportunity to "re-emerge with perception and thought refreshed" (Rose 1987, p.190) and thus experience "a restoration of vitality to life" (Kuspit).

The second major contrast between Kuspit and Sass is their treatment of "postmodernism." For Sass, "postmodernism looks less like an adversary than like an offspring—or perhaps, a sibling—of the artworks of the high modernist period and sensibility"(29). While congruent with Sass on the stylistic features present in both modern and postmodern art—"an emphatic self-referentiality, profound relativism and uncertainty, extreme irony, and tendencies toward fragmentation"(418 Sass), Kuspit argues for a critical difference in the attitude that informs postmodernism as distinguished from modernism, that is: the presence of a therapeutic attitude and possibility within the modern, and the corresponding absence of this attitude and possibility within the postmodern. Kuspit's use of the terms "modern" and "postmodern," are paralleled and sharpened by the terms "avant-garde" and "neo-avant-garde." The latter is "neo" because it attempts to appropriate the avant-garde's form without the substance. Neo-avant-garde is envious of the avant-garde's creativity and stature, which society condenses into the fame and celebrity status enjoyed by artists. Neo-avant-garde appropriates the "fame" aspect as an end in itself

rather than as a by-product of what began as a transformative and creative process. For Melanie Klein, envy fulfills a narcissistic lack. It is a regression to the infant's narcissistic omnipotence. The infant is envious, wants to "scoop out" and incorporate the "good breast" so that it will never be unsatisfied again. For Kuspit, neo-avant-garde art exhibits a pathological narcissistic regression:

> Today, to be avant-garde has reversed meaning: It is to accept cynically, guiltlessly, a facile, impersonal formula for making art and being an artist, rather than to be a missionary converting the fallen to the faith of the true self by way of an original art ... The self is no longer a mission with an uncertain outcome but a fait accompli with no purpose. The self forfeits the sincerity that makes it feel human and creative, and becomes a narcissistic act ... a delusion of narcissistic omnipotence (Kuspit, p. 74).

The contrast between avant-garde and neo-avant-garde and modernism and postmodernism can be elucidated by comparing Kuspit's assessments of Andy Warhol and Joseph Beuys, the two artists he sets up as the poles of artmaking and labels "cold" and "warm" art respectively.[8] For Kuspit, Warhol is prototypically postmodern or neo-avant-garde due to the narcissistic and commodified nature of his art, an art "based on exchange value"(76); analogously, Warhol's art evacuates the therapeutic attitude or intention of the avant-garde. Warhol "personifies the psychotic theatricality that prevails in and is perhaps definitive of postmodernist society ... (The self) becomes a consummate narcissist, so completely theatrical as to imagine it has no need of creative relations with others—or of creativity in general"(76). Beuys, on the other hand, while working within the postmodern vocabulary of performance and conceptual art, is nonetheless also avant-garde due to the therapeutic attitude that informs his art, "his great concern for the welfare of the German audience"(86). Beuys's art is "biophilic" or life-affirming as opposed to Warhol's "necrophilic" obsession with the copy, or in Baudrillard's terms, the "simulacral." Understood within an object-relations vocabulary, "cure" occurs as part of the transformative and dynamic experience that occurs when one integrates True and False selves. This necessarily involves getting in touch with one's "true" or creative self, as opposed to the static state of remaining exclusively within the "false" or socially conforming self.

For Kuspit, therefore, both modern and postmodern art expose the schizophrenic pathology of modernity. Modernism differs from the latter, however, in that it contains the seeds of its own cure. The postmodern thus embodies an attitude that is beyond cure. Neo-avant-garde art oscillates between revelling in its own sickness and not wanting to be cured: a cynical embrace of its own pathology, and, not realizing one is

sick: a denial of reality.

In *Philosophy* (quoted in Kuspit), Warhol recounts how he chose to watch TV instead of seeing a psychiatrist. For Kuspit, the anecdote captures the pathological condition of postmodernism and its corollary, "the postmodern conception of art as a diversionary strategy" (157). I also believe the anecdote underscores the fact that discussions of postmodernism and media are inseparable. I would go so far as to argue that "postmodernism" only really comes into its own with the advent of the full-fledged mediascape we currently inhabit. The postmodern condition therefore consists of the "mediaization" of everything, including high art. I would place these events as coagulating around the advances in computer technology of the seventies and the election of the first fully "mediated" president, Ronald Reagan. Not without coincidence, MTV and Ronald Reagan inaugurated the decade of the nineteen eighties together.

In the mediascape, the film theorist Giuliana Bruno writes in "Ramble City: Postmodernism and *Blade Runner*," "memories are no longer Proustian madelaines, but photographs. The past has become a collection of photographic, filmic or televisual images. We, like the replicants, (in the film) are put in the position of reclaiming a history by means of its reproduction." Building on Marshall McLuhan's notion of "the outering" of the senses in technological society articulated in *Understanding Media*, Jean Baudrillard theorizes the postmodern "simulacrum:"

> By putting our physical bodies inside our extended nervous systems, by means of our electronic media, we set up a dynamic by which all previous technologies that are mere extensions of hands and feet and teeth and bodily-heat controls—all such extensions of our bodies, including cities—will be translated into information systems. Electromagnetic technology requires utter human docility and quiescence of meditation such as befits an organism that now wears its brain outside its skull and its nerves outside its hide (*Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* [New York: McGraw-Hill, 1984], p. 57).

Baudrillard conceives of the postmodern mediascape as a world of simulations in which the "real" has been replaced by the "hyperreality" of media technology. Internal reality and external reality catch up and become as one:[9]

> The definition of the real has become that of which it is possible to give an equivalent reproduction ... TV is hyperreal, more real than real, that which is already reproduced (*Simulations* [New York: Semiotext(e), 1983], p. 146).

Hyperreality creates an excess of signification which collapses back onto itself or "implodes" and empties the signifier of meaning; thus, the postmodern is an infinitely reversible and self-consuming space, the eyeblink between excess and emptiness. Baudrillard speaks of "cancerous metastases" and "viral reality" of the "genetic" and "mental software" which has invaded the neural networks of the mind, constituting and simultaneously ablating consciousness itself and problematizing boundaries between "inside" and "outside," "self" and "other:"

> We are now in the age of soft technologies, of genetic software and mental software. The prostheses of the industrial age, the machines, could still impact on the body in order to modify its image—they themselves being metabolized in the imaginary, in which this metabolism constituted part of the image of the body (that is, as machine or whatever). But when one attains a point of non-return in simulation, when prostheses infiltrate the anonymous and micro-molecular heart of the body as its very matrix, burning all ulterior symbolic circuits, every possible body being only its immutable repetition—this is the end of the body and of its history: the individual is henceforth only a cancerous metastasis of its basic formula (*Seduction* [Paris: Denoel-Gonthier, 1979; 2nd ed. with new preface, 1981], p. 233).

In the simulacrum, McLuhan's "the media is the message" becomes "the medium is the massage"—Arthur Kroker's formulation of media as "mass-age" and media as seduction, "massage." Inherent in the seductive nature of electronic media are speed and continuous flow. In *Rocking Around The Clock* (New York: Routledge, 1987), E. Ann Kaplan understands TV in general and MTV in particular as "seductive precisely because it speaks to a desire that is insatiable—it promises complete knowledge in some far distant and never-to-be-experienced future. TV's strategy is to keep us endlessly consuming in the hopes of fulfilling our desire"(4). For Kaplan, film, in contrast to TV's inducement of insatiable desire, "satisfies (partly) the longing for the world of the imaginary ... particularly in the sense of providing the more perfect selves (ego-ideals) evoked by the mirror phase and facilitating regression to that phase"(189).

I want to push Kaplan's thesis one step further and suggest two points. One, the condition of the simulacrum is that of an eternal present, a state in which "we have nostalgia without memory"(Appadurai, p. 3). The mediascape therefore works to induce a collective regression to a state of infantile narcissism. Two, in the mediascape, the separation between the individual and technology has collapsed. The televisual apparatus has, in Baudrillard's terms, infiltrated the individual's "genetic code." TV itself is the consumption machine, existing with and simultaneously absorbing other media. TV thus becomes the agent and consumes film,[10] merging

with and at the same time, ablating film's pre-mediascape Lacanian signification. As Arjun Appadurai observes:

> Many audiences throughout the world experience the media themselves as a complicated and interconnected repertoire of print, celluloid, electronic screens and billboards. The lines between the realistic and the fictional landscapes they see are blurred ...(9).[11]

The mediascape therefore consists of "filmscapes," "computerscapes" (the information highway), "adscapes," and "ideoscapes" subsumed under the sign of the televisual apparatus. (These last two collapse in turn, in the sense of "advertisement" as the dominant Western ideology.)

I find Baudrillard's theorizations useful both as a warning and for providing a vocabulary for discussing what is going on in the postmodern mediascape. However, I do not believe that the problem of postmodern subjectivity is an either/or situation of total "evacuation" or unproblematic "presence." I see a double movement. Unlike Baudrillard who argues for the "end" of the unconscious and hence the "end" of psychoanalysis, I see the "unconscious" as still very much a part of human subjectivity; likewise, the primary interactions between mother and child and the child's urge to appropriate and create transitional objects described by Winnicott—the critical period of development—Baudrillard ignores. That being said, I believe that once one has passed the infantile stage and entered the world of society, the logic of the simulacrum nonetheless works to evacuate transparent signification and becomes a form of power—"dead-power," as Baudrillard puts it—with its own agency.

I submit that given their status as the first postmodern generation, today's students will have more difficulty accessing the therapeutic potential of the avant-garde art works Kuspit discusses than the "typical" viewers he might have in mind. I do not believe, however, that human beings are full-fledged cyborgs, nor are they simply passive sponges. The logic of the simulacrum is the evacuation of empathy. To resist, one must challenge its invasive formula by taking control of the medium/mediascape and becoming active instead of passive.

I see two main spaces for potential resistance operating in the culture at large. The first consists of what Baudrillard calls "the resistance of the masses:"

> It is equivalent to sending back to the system its own logic by doubling it, to reflecting like a mirror, meaning without absorbing it. This strategy (if one can still speak of strategy) prevails today because it was ushered in by that phase of the system (*Echange Symbolique et La Mort* [Paris: Galimard], p. 108-109).

This is the resistance of certain subcultures. For example, "punk" and certain aspects of "hip hop" culture. Punk is self-consciously about the simulacrum while simultaneously inhabiting its space.[12] Punk's ironic—post-ironic?—stance of knowing the state of the mess and revelling in it is a type of surfing the wave of the "end": "Dance This Mess Around" (the B52's: *B52's* 1979); "I Don't Care" (The Ramones: *Rocket to Russia* 1977). In addition, hip hop d.j.'s effectively rewrite pop music's generic conventions by modifying and transforming the records they play by slowing them down, speeding them up, scratching, and adding different vocal lines and bits of syncopation. Passive reception of prepackaged musical "products" gives way to a constantly mutating live performance in which the familiar is "made strange" as recognizable songs are altered, destroyed, and reconstituted into new forms.[13]

A second space of resistance can occur within the educational context, what amounts to making resistance to the simulacrum a conscious goal of education. If the first step is to understand where we are, or how we have been inscribed and coded by power, technology, and ultimately, the sign—the "dead power" of the simulacrum—the next step is *em*powerment. Donna Haraway starts from this point and describes our current reality when she describes the postmodern "cyborg" body: "We can be responsible for machines; *they* do not dominate or threaten us. We are responsible for boundaries; we are they"(356). I am interested in the cyborg body in the educational context (I am willing to invoke the metaphor as useful here), not simply new bodies of information or knowledge but also new ways of making meaning and knowing: embodying knowledge. I would suggest ways of empowering students which tap into the innate human urge to create and the therapeutic potential of "technics": sensual, hands-on creation. For example, students can study advertisements as a type of text analysis. The crucial aspect of the assignment would be for students to physically transform the ads by adding or taking away, using color, line, and shape in order to make the ad say what it really says, that is, make the invisible visible, what is unconscious conscious. Students could also make their own videos or take a cue from conceptual artists and manipulate/transform the images. As the first postmodern generation, the current class of undergraduates should be particularly adept and challenged to interact with the medium and create meaning through a process that essentially transforms their selves-bodies. A different kind of knowledge occurs. It involves a full-body response since meaning has been created by the student as opposed to the "talking head" situation characteristic of the traditional lecture format. It is an active process versus Baudrillard's passive "screen" or pure "switching center". The results are what I take to be the goals of education: an "explosion" of signification versus an "implosion"; rewriting versus being written upon.

After participating in a creative experience that ideally involves both "play" and "reflection" on what they have done—the synthesis of primary and secondary process modes—I submit that students will be more ready to dialogue with traditional "artifacts" and be more open to their therapeutic potential. As Winnicott observes, "To use an object the subject must have developed a *capacity* to use objects"(89).

I see this educational project as an example of how the concept of the "artifact" can be rewritten to signify meaningfully in the mediascape. The "artifact" is de-aestheticized and constructed in a new way.[13] "Artifact" is no longer restricted to an object which we read for a message that we hope will affect us. The empathic process of human interaction and creation, the "making," becomes the artifact. The "product" is important mainly as a symbol of what went into its becoming.

Notes

1 This antirationalist tendency undergirds what amounts to certain poststructuralist thinkers' romanticization of the schizophrenic as part of their critique of Western "logocentrism." I'm thinking of Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari and Jean Baudrillard. I do not find the analogy fruitful or liberating in the sense that they intend it—as a means of considering new modes of thinking and a less constraining way of looking at the world. Criticizing rationality is one thing; attempting to celebrate and negate a patho-logical condition that creates genuine pain for individuals and their families, is in my view, naïve and irresponsible.

2 This is in fact an insane question since it is posed from within "being," which cannot imagine its own absence, that is, "nothing."

3 One wonders if such a condition ever really existed. I feel that Sass here affects a nostalgia for a past that never really was.

4 By ascribing to the modern poet Dionysian aspects of madness as essential to creativity, Eliot is participating in what is, by now, a familiar cliché of high modernism: the apotheosizing of the artist as "übermensch," a Byronic hero in touch with the primordial, separate from, and opposed to, the philistinism of the masses.

5 This is not to suggest that an artist or viewer of art cannot suffer from schizophrenia. The issue here is that Kuspit, unlike Sass, argues for the therapeutic potential inherent in the making of and the reception of particular kinds of art objects, in this case, certain types of modernist art.

6 Kuspit cites James S. Grostein, *Splitting and Protective Identification* (Northvale, New Jersey: Aronson, 1985), 3, and defines non-pathological "splitting" as "a normal, universal phenomenon" (Kuspit, 136): "the activity by which the ego discerns differences within the self and its objects, or between itself and its objects." The act of birth separation thus becomes the "passive experience of primal splitting." Splitting indicative of narcissistic pathology occurs in the case of "unresolved contradiction, in which neither side knows that the other exists, while the psyche oscillates wildly between both, compounding the irrationality of the contradiction ...."

7 *The New Yorker* (June 21, 1993): 15.

8 Donald Kuspit, "Beuys or Warhol," *C magazine* (Fall, 1987).

9 This collapsing of internal and external realities creates what Kuspit would consider a false resolution of "the conflict of the times" inherent in the modern condition: the situation in which the outer world moves faster than the inner. As opposed to the potentially therapeutic frustration occasioned by avant-garde art's catalyzing the psyche's working through of the "splitting" defense mechanism, neo-avant-garde art and, by

extension, the condition of the postmodern mediascape—in which image subsumes implication—elicits a sense of superficial connection and shallow narcissistic satisfaction. Kuspit illustrates the point by comparing David Salle's images with surrealism:

> Unlike the tense, abruptly farfetched connections of surrealism, Salle's slick, passive conjunctions afford a shallow satisfaction. They give a brief shock of recognition, gratifying because it involves acknowledgment of the artistry of the connection, rather than frustrating because it involves acknowledgement of its absurdity ... Salle's juxtapositions do not bespeak a hidden order of unconscious frustration and uncontrollable tension—the agony of the split—but rather form an order of superficial control, a kind of facile gestalt of tension, which becomes a self-equilibrating aesthetic (24).

10 Literally, the transition of film to video is several months. Practically, it is instantaneous. Jaye Davidson's transition from *The Crying Game* to Gap ad has recently been accom-plished. What begins as commodification ends up as liquidation. The film, which was still playing in first-run theaters, has effectively been rewritten, co-opted by a simulation of what was already simulation to begin with.

11 Arjun Appadurai, "Disjuncture and Difference in the Global Economy," *Public Culture* Vol. 2 No. 2 [Spring 1990]: pp. 1-24.

12 I consider David Cronenberg's *Videodrome* a "punk" film. *Videodrome* and the punk audience it signifies for create a node within the simulacrum where meaning is produced and new speaking positions are established. *Videodrome* reproduces the modes of the simulacrum: hyperreality, excess, the problematizing of machine and human, mind and technology, inner and outer space, sex and gender—and reflects them back without absorbing them. The film says that simulacra is us and we know it.

Another example of a punk film is Richard Linklater's *Slacker*. The film's non-linear narrative, self-consciousness, sense of humor about its conventional expectations, use of "non-actors," and final self-consuming move of erasing its own mode of production—the final frames consist of one of the characters tossing the camera off a cliff as the image on the screen self-destructs before our eyes—is decidedly un-TV-like. As such, it signifies against TV representations and can make us aware of its conventions and how we have been constructed. In his book on the making of the film, Linklater writes concerning the film and the "Generation-X" audience he has in mind: "It's experiencing an incredible kind of—what? Dissatisfaction, or total nonbelief in everything, but with an interesting sense of humor and irony about it all."

13 The problem with simulacra and resistance to it is resistance becomes instantly co-opted. Punk is long gone after being commodified by MTV. What begins as a reaction to commodity becomes commodity. *Videodrome* has been simulated by *Barton Fink*: the peeling walls, living manuscript, fire scene at the end are simulations of *Videodrome* without implication. *Barton Fink* is simulacra, not about simulacra.

In the simulacrum, nostalgia gets faster and faster to the point that it is instantaneous. A recent *New York Times* article stated that we should be experiencing a choreographed "eighties" revival next year. This has the potential to be part simulation of what was already simulation to begin with, and part irony. Luckily, punk is always waiting to reinvent itself.

14 I am thinking of Joseph Beuys's notion of rewriting the "artifact" through his "environmental art" when I speak about signifying in the mediascape. As Terrence Heath observes in "Warm Art" (lecture transcription): "An externalization of inner life; the transformation of the life-giving associations of materials into making the world which humans control a place of constructive, warm, energy-filled, positive forms: art as a total human activity rather than a specialized ocular and aesthetic experience; total commitment to the planet, to all plants, animals and materials; the involvement of all people in art—these are the basic tenents of Beuys's thought and work" (29).

Contributors

Emily B. Greenberg is an art historian living in New York.

Seymour Howard teaches courses in Ancient and Modern art history and theory at the University of California at Davis. His research and recent graphic productions deal with these subjects, along with matters of patronage, psychology, and perception in the arts.

Christine Mehring received an M.A. from SUNY at Stony Brook and is currently a Ph.D. candidate in the Department of Fine Arts at Harvard University.

Andrew Menard is an artist who writes occasionally on the topic of art and science. He lives in New York.

David Sherman is a doctoral student in the English department at SUNY Stony Brook.

Randall K. Van Schepen is a Ph.D. candidate at the University of Minnesota. He is working on a dissertation on American formalist art criticism.

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