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ART CRITICISM

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Room 16

Thomasine Bradford

> When I looked around, I saw and heard of none like me.
> Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein*; or, *The Modern Prometheus*

In the Weekend section of *The New York Times* Sunday, September 24, 1993, art critic Michael Kimmelman reviewed the reinstallation of the permanent collection at the Museum of Modern Art.

> Realists will recognize the installation, which has just gone on view, for what it is; a prudent, serious, often provocative, overdue self-examination of the richest and by far the most influential presentation of 20th-century art in the world, one that has come to define the canon of modernism.[1]

In particular, Kimmelman attempted to discern the ways MoMA Director Kirk Varnedoe's reinstallation would produce a new reading of Modernism. Kimmelman pointed out in his review that this "messier, less elegant and harder to follow" arrangement would interrupt the more determinist accounts of modern art maintained by the previous directors, William Rubin and Alfred Barr. Kimmelman revealed that "Varnedoe...has been working on this reinstallation since the close in January of the Matisse exhibition." There is no doubt that the director gave the placement of works more than casual deliberation. I went to MoMA as one of the "revisionists" in Kimmelman's article, "who for decades has been questioning the seamlessness of the history of 20th-century art as the Modern portrayed it."[2] I expected this to be a rational and aesthetically invigorating excursion, and so it was, until I approached the far end of Room 16.

The following essay examines a set of ambiguous and tangential relations involving modernist tropes, an institutional space, and anecdotal history. In *The Truth in Painting*, Derrida speaks of the history and circumstances surrounding art as its parergon. Speaking at a symposium on the philosophy of art, he refers to the word 'art' in the title as false.

> The history would be that of philosophy within which the history of the philosophy of art would be marked off, insofar as it treats art and of the history of art: its models, its concepts, its problems have not fallen from the skies, they have been constituted according to determinate modes at determinate moments. This set forms a system, a greater logic and an encyclopedia within which the fine arts would stand out as a particular region.[3]

Deconstruction emphasizes the meaning repressed by seemingly trivial contradictions and uncertainties within a set of relations. Feminist deconstruction further speculates that these heterogeneous uncertainties occur at sites constitutive of power and gender. The repressed of a text or set of relations forms its limits and thus the possibility of its meaning or identity. I refer to archival material concerning the Surrealist collection found in MoMA's research library.

In this paper, there is more than one 'text' under consideration. "Authentic" texts are Surrealist exhibition catalogues from the Museum of Modern Art and the current Surrealist exhibit. (These authentic texts do not account for the historical circumstances of their production.) This paper also uses "interpretable texts" which Descombes calls "any arrangement of things at all, not just the Great Texts of tradition, but the fact that it rains on a specific day, or the fact that there is a black car parked across the street from my place, etc."[4] Varnedoe and Modernist institutions, like Descombes, would exclude these unruly interpretable texts from the purview of Modernism.

The present deconstruction is framed by a personal anecdote, a marginal device intended to reintroduce the viewer's gender always consigned to the margins of Modernism. The marginalia framing the reinstallation of the permanent collection at the Museum of Modern Art consists of a coincidence in the corner of one room, a woman viewer, little girls, sexual shame, and incessant menace.

Kirk Varnedoe assigned Room 16 to Surrealism, a genre depicting the forbidden thoughts repressed in man's (sic) psyche. Surrealist artists reconstructed aspects of dreams—bizarre alliances of image and time—into a collage of fantasy scenes realistically depicted. In a time of near-religious faith in science, they found a quasi-scientific legitimacy for their work in Freud's *The Interpretation of Dreams*. Freud gave a rationale to the seemingly irrational unconscious and to dreams, one of its primary manifestations. He designated the unconscious as the location of those sexual desires and anxieties that children must necessarily restrain before entering adulthood. The Surrealists used the female body in their art objects as the trope for these anxieties.

Varnedoe staged a gauntlet of the most violent and sexually menacing Surrealist images of women by Balthus, Giacometti, Bellmer, and Magritte in one corner of the Surrealist collection at the far end of Room 16. The curator ostensibly based his design on the Modernist tenets of formalism and chronology but, like every experienced curator, he relied ultimately on his aesthetic sense—an informed emotion. Modernist aesthetics obviously do not recoil from sexual violence. On one wall, Varnedoe hung three of Balthus' eerily bland paintings. In the portrait *André Derain*, Balthus depicted the artist as a bloodless pedophile contemplating his nubile prey. The unnamed model, trivial in comparison to the central male character, sits impassively in the background. *The Living Room* features two preadolescent girls in highly provocative poses—a dream scenario for the delectation of the painter's surrogate—a smiling cat. In *Street Scene*, an impending molestation is frozen on the far left of the composition. A young man grabs a girl from the back and attempts to pull up her skirt. Both figures display classically impassive

expressions. Balthus restricts his paintings to the middle values of liminal light. The low light of dusk or dawn is a subtle device suggesting an impending change: from stasis to action, from reason to emotion, from one place to another. Hans Bellmer's witty and immaculately cast aluminum *Poupeé* on a gleaming bronze base guards the exit from Room 16. Two identical truncated female pelvises with painted genitals are articulated by a spherical joint reading the same at the bottom and at the top. The height of the base fixes the sculpture at eye-level so it directly confronts the viewer. The rose-tipped vulva seemed to smirk at my discomfort.

Alberto Giacometti's *Woman with Her Throat Cut* takes up the central floor space. His title assigns gender to a life-size bronze translation of human bones and organs sprawled on a low base. In *The Catalogue to the Collection*, William Rubin interprets Giacometti's dis-placement of the sculpture below normal eye level in terms of its base, a formal concern central to this work.[5] This translation of mortal female flesh into noble and incorruptible art stands in the center of the spectacle in Room 16 as the trope for art making. Across the room, René Magritte's *Menaced Assassin* and *The False Mirror* correspond cryptically to Balthus' strangely familiar scenes. In *Menaced Assassin*, six male figures tightly armored in business suits surround a nude female corpse with wisps of blood trickling from her mouth.

In sharp contrast to the scale of the other paintings, *The False Mirror* is the nucleus of Varnedoe's ensemble. In *Psychology and the Arts*, Hans and Shulamith Kreitler describe how Surrealist artists learn to evoke uncanny moods through the application of elaborate artistic devices such as the collage effect. Magritte created the sense of collage by juxtaposing different levels of reality or by obscuring distinctions between the real and the imaginary. In *The False Mirror,* the two aspects of external reality, sky and eye, are given heightened force by the curator's installation. Central to the other leering and violent works, this guilty voyeuristic eye sees only blue sky and fluffy white clouds. *The False Mirror* instructs viewers "See, but see no evil."

As Heidegger says, "truth occurs as such in the opposition of clearing and double concealing"; that it is disclosed in difference or in primal conflict.[6] As the signifier of "double concealing," *The False Mirror* becomes the "passe-partout" to gender difference in Varnedoe's petit coin. In *Eye and Mind*, Maurice Merleau-Ponty says this of the mirror: "The mirror itself is the instrument of a universal magic that changes things into a spectacle, spectacles into things, myself into another, and an another into myself."[7] Is *The False Mirror* a stand-in for the male viewer in this space? Modernist objectivity, though largely unconscious, masks a particular masculine bias that privileges autonomy over community, the new over tradition, and materials over meaning. This bias is one of the characteristics essential to Modernism and to the institutions that support it. The slightest distraction in the institution's meticulously staged rituals of unified and neutral spectatorship would heave gender difference up from the background, shattering the carefully constructed, obsessively maintained perceptual framing. The institution takes no chances. The very presence of guards ensures that viewers control their behavior and, by extension, their affect; the regulation of the demeanor proper to contempla-

tion. How does this regulation function in the production of a specifically gendered experience of Modernism?

Even neophyte art patrons know to feign a properly disinterested contemplation before works of art. The shame and discomfort I experienced as a woman in Room 16 emphasized my difference from the presumed male viewer. Women are put off balance in much the same way when they encounter sexual taunts as children, later in social gatherings, and in the work place. They have been well-schooled to dismiss sexual threats as merely boorish jokes or signs of bad taste. They have been taught that the appropriate response is no response. Shame, like nakedness, has no language; it serves as the perfect foil to action. While learning to speak, we learn that we are permitted to express certain things and must silence others. Informal female socialization involves learning not to articulate the experience of shame, and this shame-silence dyad ensures submissiveness. The sense of menace and dislocation I sensed was appropriately surrealistic. I felt undressed—a paranoid, priggish fool—and I distrusted my own perceptions. Everyone else in the room seemed undisturbed, but so did I. Denial and the repression of psychic shame are constitutive of contemporary feminine identity. For women, the Surrealist experience (the proximity of the known but not-fully-known) reproduces the gendered experience (the human but not-fully-human). For this reason, viewer participation can never be gender neutral. Prompted by Kimmelman's review, I had come to the museum expressly to see what impact Kirk Varnedoe's reinstallation would have on my ideas about the packaging of modernist aesthetics. My viewer affect became of prime importance to a consideration of the Modernist aesthetic in its current repackaging. Therefore, it would be uncritical to leave my response to Room 16 unexamined.

Catalogues of previous Surrealist exhibitions in MoMA's research library show that curators maintained a consistent attitude to Surrealism. They recognized the misogynistic content but saw no need to address the issue further. Their facile acceptance of the erotic overtones in images of violence and death contributes to normalizing these images. The following catalogue excerpts demonstrate two points: Surrealist art is highly motivated and laboriously rationalized; and, Varnedoe's new arrangement did nothing new. It merely conformed to references in previous catalogue essays.

For example, Georges Hugnet, a Surrealist writer interested in the history of Surrealism wrote for the December 1936 - January 1937 exhibition, "Fantastic Art, Dada, Surrealism." I found the essay to be more than a little at odds with itself. Hugnet justified the absence of formal intentionality on one page and contradicted himself on the next.

> Objects with symbolical function leave no loophole for formal preoccupations. Only amorous imagination is responsible for them and they are extra-plastic.... The absence in their creation of all plastic endeavor must be borne in mind.[8]

If form is content, then the active verbs in Hugnet's next passage expose the artists'

intentionality in the production of their images.

> Arp in 1924 devised the 'planche Ö oeufs' (egg-board) and how to use it. As Tanguy *perfects* the creatures who live in the translucid air of his canvases, as Arp *polishes* his "objects to be lost" adorned with mustaches and mandolins, as new objects are *put into circulation for new purposes*, a new and increasingly complete mythology of desire comes into existence.[9] (emphases added)

In the last phrase, Hugnet remembers the passive voice; the phrase, "comes into existence," returns a bit sheepishly and a bit late.

In another catalogue essay, James Soby wrote for the 1956 Balthus exhibition in a straightforward biographical and iconographical style. He established Balthus as an artistic prodigy from the outset, recounting significant influences that were to inform Balthus' art: the books he read, his summer vacations in England, his possible relation to Lord Gordon by way of a Scottish grandmother. Balthus, we are to know, came from impeccable stock. This should silence any murmurings about impropriety in his paintings. Soby compared Balthus to "his [Balthus'] closest friend among artists, the sculptor and painter Alberto Giacometti." He also wrote that Balthus was influenced in particular by Courbet's realism.

> In his exclusive devotion to painting, Balthus recalls the man to whom his art perhaps owes most—Gustave Courbet, whose handling of the children in the *Portrait of P.J. Proud'hon and His Children* is an inescapable clue to Balthus' own interest in the choreographic grace of young awkwardness.[10]

In this reference, Soby was most brash in his dissembling. Courbet's painting is so different from Balthus' that the comparison strains credulity. Like the little girls in Balthus' paintings, Courbet's little girls are oblivious to the viewer, but they exhibit none of the sexual innuendo that Balthus projects onto his subjects. Later Soby told of Balthus' "indignant" response when someone referred to the children in his paintings as "bored." "'How can people feel these children are bored?' he asks incredulously. 'They are the opposite of bored.'" Would this be excited? If so, by what? The painter leaves this to the imagination of a presumed co-conspirator.

Soby categorized Balthus' work as "painstaking portraiture with only unelaborated realism as his goal—far closer to David's geometric calculation than Fragonard's headlong grace."[11] The only quarter given in this devotional to the artist's genius was a reference to "indications of a disciplined inner tumult and rage"[12] in a painting called *Still Life*. Soby also reported that *The Street*, one of Balthus' earliest paintings, was repainted from an earlier rendition of the scene, and that the artist subjected all unconscious generative aspects of the painting to a thorough editing process.

Another related article in the museum's archives, a queer *Life* magazine photo-biography of Balthus from the time of the exhibit, conveys a studied silence

about the eroticism of Balthus's subjects, calling them "youngsters," their poses "introspective" and "trancelike."[13] The article portrayed Balthus as merely unorthodox. There were photographs of him, of the French castle where he lived, of his cats and—as just another prop—his young niece who posed for him.

On the other hand, in the catalogue of the 1968 exhibition, *Dada, Surrealism, and Their Heritage*, William Rubin was not oblivious to the violent implications of Giacometti's *Woman with Her Throat Cut.*

> This free lying sculpture was first conceived to splay out on the floor, which is precisely the way Giacometti showed it in his studio. The elements of its vaguely crustacean female anatomy—and hence the reading of its sexually violent anatomy—can be apprehended only from above.[14]

However, Rubin, recovering his art historian detachment, devoted his attention to the work as an attempt by the sculptor to reconsider the confrontational stance between viewer and sculpture by lowering its base.

In 1965, MoMA mounted a one-man exhibition, "Alberto Giacometti." In his catalogue essay, Peter Selz also was fully aware of the content of *Woman with Her Throat Cut.*

> The violent and destructive aspects of his imagination and an obsession with sexual murder is revealed most clearly in the *Woman with Her Throat Cut*, a nightmarish image, part woman, part animal, part machine.[15]

Selz never intimates that Giacometti made his artworks in any but a fully deliberate frame of mind. He spoke of the artist's long hours of work in pursuit of solutions for clearly articulated formal as well as psychological problems.

In the same catalogue, Giacometti cryptically skirts the issue of violence in his work.

> There was nothing in these objects that was too precious, too classical; and I was disturbed by reality, which seemed to me to be different. Everything at that moment seemed a little grotesque, without value, to be thrown away.
>
> This is being said too briefly.
>
> Objects without pedestals and without value, to be thrown away. It was no longer the exterior forms that interested me but what I really felt.[16]

The "everything" that "seemed a little grotesque" to Giacometti could be any of a number of things, but the form in which he manifested this "everything" was specific. He named this body "without value, to be thrown away," *Woman with Her Throat Cut.*

James Soby also wrote the catalogue essay for Magritte's 1965 exhibition in a style similar to his Balthus essay. He spoke of Magritte on one page as "an artist whose inspiration so often travels by the subways of the mind."[17] On the next page, he said, "For Magritte's purpose, careful, even glossy definition of his subjects was more crucial than the tonal subtleties that Tanguy loved." Soby wrote at length about the shock Magritte intended to attain by way of ironic contrast to the work's extreme verism.

In one short, almost throw-away reference, the author mentions that Magritte's mother drowned herself in the Sambre River when the artist was only fourteen years old. "The tragic event may have given his sensitive mind a somber cast, reflected only very occasionally in pictures whose wit seems mordant as well as playful."[18] It seems his mother's suicide was just one among a list of occurrences in the artist's life—not particularly significant. Soby's description of the *Menaced Assassin* is equally impassive. (Clues to Varnedoe's arrangement of Surrealist artists in terms of their stated influences are found in this part of Soby's text.)

> Nevertheless, the script of the *Menaced Assassin* seems relatively clear. A nude women lies bleeding from the mouth on a sofa in the background. Her murderer calms his nerves by listening to a gramophone, not yet aware that his exit is blocked by three men peering over a grilled window at the rear of the room, while in the foreground his captors await him with bludgeon and net. The triple extension of perspective—from foyer to living room to distant landscape—reflects Magritte's continuing respect for de Chirico's extreme manipulations of space. But the *Menaced Assassin* has its own prophetic overtones. It foretells the somnambulant irrationality of certain figures in sculpture by Giacometti and in paintings by Balthus, whom Magritte is said to admire greatly. There is almost certainly no question of influence here, but only a shared rejection of the abstract premise.[19]

There were no catalogue essays in the museum library dealing with Hans Bellmer nor any photographs of *Poupée*, indicating some ambiguity in the institution's pride of ownership. In the catalogue of the permanent collection, William Rubin describes Bellmer's work.

> His strange "dolls" had been conceived earlier, but their development suggested a quasi-Expressionist counter-part to Surrealist objects, particularly those that included clothes dummies or the type of mannequins that were to play such a central role in the great Surrealist exhibition of 1938. Bellmer's work was known to Paris artists from photographs that had appeared in the December 1934 issue of *Minotaure* under the title *Poupée. Variations sur le montage d'une mineure articulée* (*Poupée. Variations on the Assembling of an Articulated Minor*)...A system of ball joints permitted the body to be dismantled and reassembled in all sorts of confused combinations. The photographs showed the doll in truncated, fragmentary form, as though violently torn apart. The dismountable wigs, clothes, and glass eyes made it appreciated as

> an ideal fetish-object in the Freudian sense.... Bellmer has also developed his erotic theme of the hallucinatory confusion of limbs in a number of extraordinary if unpublishable drawings of pubescent girls.[20]

I can only wonder what constitutes the limits of the publishable. Rubin maintains an appropriately disinterested tone while describing dismembered replicas of little girls' bodies.

Lucy Lippard's *Surrealists on Art* included Bellmer's own description of the doll.

> Would it not be in the doll which, despite its accommodating and limitless docility, would surround itself with a desperate reserve, would it not be in the doll's very reality that the imagination would find the joy, exaltation and fear it sought? Would it not be the final triumph over those adolescents with wide eyes turning away if, beneath the conscious stare that plunders their charms, the aggressive fingers were to assail their plastic form and construct slowly, limb by limb all that had been appropriated by the senses and the brain?[21]

These catalogue writers did not think the Surrealists worked in a dream state. Quite the contrary. The Surrealists selected their subject matter carefully, and studied and revised their objects until they produced a mood subsequently characterized as Surreal. Yet, in every art historical textbook account of the subject, Surrealism is described as dream, hallucination, un- or pre-conscious, the irrational. This description—their unconscious creative source—frees the artists from accountability for their images.

Dreams are fleeting. The primary dream or 'latent content' comes unbidden and hovers largely beyond the scope of human will. Yet after the dream was over, Balthus, Giacometti, Bellmer, and Magritte spent countless waking hours placing tiny brushstrokes in precise order, making plaster models from which bronze sculptures were cast years later, or demanding that models sit for hours so that every aspect of the painting would be as real as possible. This realness is both testimony to artistic deliberateness and the source of my discomfort.

In *The Interpretation of Dreams*, Freud explains how the deft manipulation of artistic techniques and conventions can be reconciled with dreaming or irrational behavior. The 'latent content' derived from unconscious desires, nocturnal physical responses, or waking memories is transformed through a 'secondary process' which becomes the 'dream' of literature and art. Freud called the images and narratives resulting from transformations during the secondary process, the 'manifest content.' The dream that is the font of Surrealism was followed by a conscious reworking of its contents during which the artists exerted total control. At the editing stage of artistic production, the artists made countless decisions and revisions on the way to the final art work. It is here at the conscious level that accountability enters the scene of artmaking.

The Surrealists' anxieties and repressions are not at issue. The more important question has to do with underlying issues of privilege and intimidation

surrounding the installation of their work in one corner of the Museum of Modern Art at the present moment. Does this specific discourse of sexual difference, so normal to our species, mask something else—a difference in the very essence of what it means to be fully human? Does the Surrealist depiction-discourse produce a taxonomy of human-differently-gendered or as differently-gendered, therefore, not-fully-human? Blaming the obvious and unpopulated abstraction, 'phallocentric power' fails to address women's complicity in their own oppression. As Bellmer so correctly observes, dolls as feminine surrogates project an aspect of "accommodating and limitless docility."

Wolfgang Lederer's *The Fear of Women* is one among volumes of psychoanalytic literature explaining male fear and loathing of woman as either the actual woman/mother or a feminine aspect of self that threatens the hard-won masculine construct. By comparison, very little theoretical attention addresses woman's self-loathing. If people usually get what they want, then Freud's question, "What does the woman want?," should interrogate woman's vicarious participation in her own violation.

In a seminar at the SUNY at Stony Brook Humanities Institute in the fall of 1993, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick used psychologist Silvan Tomkins' shame-interest polarity as the basis for her speculations about shame and feminine identity. Sedgwick, following Michel Foucault, considers affect, like sexuality, to be a product of discourse. Sexuality is a discipline of the body whose force depends on its assumed naturalness. Adults curtail early socially unacceptable behaviors in infants through shaming. This shame is then internalized as a psychic structure constitutive of identity.

While shame may have been used to socialize both male and female infants, it is reinforced during adolescence as a means of controlling emerging female sexuality. The silencing efficacy of shame ensures sexual and social passivity. Psycho-sexual differentiation is taught (but never securely fixed) in a complex of social and linguistic pedagogies whose point is to ensure difference.

Viewers in MoMA have been taught to consider images of women as visual tropes unrelated to the actual world of women when, in fact, these Modernist conventions conform to Foucault's maxim that discourse regulates what it claims only to express. Displays such as the one in Room 16 reinforce the silencing and shame constitutive of normal female embodiment. (Normal, in the Foucauldian sense, means produced in modernist conventions—not normal as "what humans just do.")

Women who articulate their dis-ease with violent images expect a set of pre-packaged responses trivializing and ridiculing their naiveté. With crime statistics rising exponentially, what new way of looking would bring the space between fantasy violence and actual violence into focus? What new strategies can be brought to bear on the psycho-social structures sustaining the lacuna between violent images and actual events? Both first amendment fundamentalism and the taint of political correctness deflect real debate in the artistic community. No one wants to be associated with either censorship or prudishness.

On the one hand, art world leaders insist that art plays a significant role in

both social and personal life, a role always clothed in aesthetic value. On the other, they belittle that impact when women probe possible connections between artistic validation of violent images and the real violence with which they live. In lieu of censorship and denial, speech is one way to address the destructive effects of aesthetizing violent images. Unobtrusive texts on the walls throughout the museum offer viewers supplemental information. A similar text in Room 16 addressing Surrealist sexual violence would signify a radical shift in Modernism's philosophy of relevance.

Room 16 enforces the affect of shame, silence and denial symptomatic of the behavior of women viewers. Most cloak their responses to violent imagery in silence and pretend that no harm will come of this. They want to believe that the sacrosanct space between the image and the act constitutes an unassailable barrier. Male viewers may look without culpability. The Museum of Modern Art designates a safe space in which misogynistic images are institutionally and aesthetically sanctioned. The space is more than safe; it is therapeutic—a space to ease supposedly normal sexual hostility repressed in the male psyche.

Using the aesthetically sanctioned rhetorical devices of oil painting and bronze casting, Surrealist images place 'woman' in the same prescribed position in the cultural world as in the material world. Museum spaces serve to legitimate the cultural production of that regime. Viewer protocols maintain an emotional distance, the learned attitudes appropriate to the apprehension of art.

Readers, like viewers, are different. My choice of personal anecdote as a meta-narrative framing this critique presumes a body of shared experience between story and readers. In *The Place of an Afterword—Someone Reading,* Frank Lentricchia explains that

> The teller of anecdotes has to presume the cultural currency of that large, containing biographical narrative which he draws upon for the sharp point he would give his anecdote, whose effect is ultimately political: to trigger a narrative sense of community that the anecdote evokes by evoking the master biography. In evoking the master biography, anecdote helps us to remember. And remembrance, so triggered, is the power which sustains, by retrieving, our basic cultural fiction.[22]

Women and men do not always share a "basic cultural fiction." The empathic connection that would enable past critics, Michael Kimmelman and Kirk Varnedoe, either to recognize or to seriously consider the threatening implications of Surrealism finds its source in a shared "master biography." The very term, 'master' biography, signals the flaw in connections between women viewers and Modernist institutions.

Too few women claim the credibility needed to effectively counter the effects of shame and trivialization from the artistic community. The absence of an active feminine voice is met by an equally reactive masculine refusal to listen. The psychological and social relations securing the gendered silence-deafness dyad constitutes an even more basic cultural reality.

Social responsibility, so necessary to the lived world, can be left at the door of the artificial world of imagination. In "An Essay in Aesthetics,"[23] Roger Fry intended his frank statement, "In art we have no such moral responsibility," to emphasize the separation of imagination from social and political reality. Art and social practice are even endowed with a certain will to separation in this observation by Theodor Adorno:

> So long as art declines to pass as cognition and is thus separated from practice, social practice tolerates it as it tolerates pleasure.[24]

Our constitutional rights to speech are founded on the belief in a substantive space between what we say or see and what we do. If thought and act are basically non-inflected, if their difference is natural law, then institutions such as the Museum of Modern Art would not need complex codes and behavioral scripts to enforce the distance between them.

Artist and philosopher Adrian Piper wrote, "While originality in analytic philosophy is a function of subject matter, originality in contemporary Euro-ethnic art is almost solely, according to its intellectual standards, a function of form."[25] The male-culture analogue embalmed in the Museum of Modern Art was old in Western culture at the time of its inscription in the Pythagorean Table of Opposites. Its relentlessly oppressive power depends on an equally relentless performance which enforces the acceptability of the inscription. This cultural ritual must be performed and re-performed according to a highly rationalized liturgy. Its practitioners and custodians mitigate their monotonous ritual through formal originality.

The foundational moment of culture is the control of irrationality/chaos/nature—woman. The agent of control is the autonomous male creator attempting to duplicate and surpass female reproduction. From Phidias' *Birth of Athena* to Bellmer's *Poupée*, variations on that theme construct the body of culture with a numbing single-mindedness.

Would accountability for violent Surrealist imagery diminish Modernist aesthetics? Can we imagine conceptual changes precluding a woman viewer's solitary and neutralized experience with these works? These changes do not call for censorship; on the contrary—they call for an end to self-censorship by the women and men who appreciate the power of images and question the potential effects of violent images. Images themselves do no harm, but the same may not hold for the climate which excuses or exalts violent images.

Varnedoe's arrangement of the permanent collection may show formal originality in its "messier, less elegant" narrative, but its normative purpose—the reassertion of individuated, male cultural authority, is resolutely familiar. Thus, while promoting the installation as a fresh new look at Modernism, what is in fact being produced is a shopworn but potent theme of gendered spaces and the unchallenged right to authorize values. Room 16 presses the point.

Addendum

After reading the catalogue essays in MoMA's research library, I wrote to Kirk Varnedoe requesting an appointment to hear his thoughts on the works in Room 16. On the evening of November 4th, 1993, after the ideas for this paper were formulated, Varnedoe responded by phone. What follows are Varnedoe's remarks reconstructed from notes taken during and immediately following our conversation.

> "You can only play with the cards in the deck you're given. The basic idea is to give a synoptic overview of any given moment in the history of the collection. I chose the best and strongest Surrealist pictures, the best Magrittes and Balthus' *Street,* which is the best picture in the Balthus' collection. These works were reflections of the preoccupations of that era catalyzed by the Giacometti. *Woman with Her Throat Cut* is the most horrific, sadistic fantasy—grippingly painful. It is the strongest piece from that period. It keeps the whole space together."
>
> "I planned to have *Spoon Woman* but the Max Ernst in the next room and the Giacometti framed the Wilfredo Lam (temporary exhibition) and the figuration was interesting. *Spoon Woman* will come back and the space will not be so radically violent."
>
> "I put the Balthus and the Magritte together because the scale of figural representation was similar. *The False Mirror* was a good target picture because it broke out of the figural scale of the other pictures and provided a horizontal balance to the extreme verticality of the Bellmer."

Varnedoe seemed completely surprised that I thought of *The False Mirror* as the lynch-pin of the works in the far end of Room 16. He considered this idea to be strange, and said he would never have thought of it as I had. Varnedoe concentrated on the influence of the World Wars and a shift in the works he detected because of the intrusion of social reality into private fantasy. Nothing in his installation could be lifted out of a pre-interpreted flow of history. The placement of works leading up to the far end of Room 16 and those in the next gallery were critical to the installation in their formal and historical interrelationship. Varnedoe's remarks supported the conclusions I had drawn from reading previous catalogue essays. The new installation is only a reinstallation of Modernist social disengagement.

Notes

1 Michael Kimmelman, "The Modern's New Look: From Solo to Symphony," *The New York Times*, 24 Sept. 1993, C1.
2 Ibid.
3 Jacques Derrida, *The Truth in Painting* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 18.
4 Vincent Descombes, "The Interpretive Text," in Hugh Silverman, ed. *Gadamer and Hermeneutics* (New York: Routledge, 1991), 249.
5 William Rubin, *The Catalogue to the Collection in the Archives of The Museum of*

Modern Art, (New York: Museum of Modern Art), 116.

6 Martin Heidegger, "The Origin of the Work of Art" in *An Anthology of Aesthetic Theory,* ed. Stephen Ross (New York: State University of New York Press, 1987), 280.

7 Maurice Merleau-Ponty, "Eye and Mind" in *The Primacy of Perception* (Chicago: Northwestern University Press, 1987), 296.

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THE SCREAM GIANT INFLATABLE

Robert Thill

I pulled off the gold ribbon, opened the pizza-sized gift box that came in the mail from my sister, and encountered THE SCREAM GIANT INFLATABLE; STANDS OVER 50" TALL! I had seen it before; once reproduced in a mail-order catalogue—probably the one she had ordered it from—and, again, blown up to full size in a Manhattan shop window. I recall rushing down the street, then hesitating for a moment when I saw the figure through the reflective glass. I did not stop, but the image stayed with me. It was more than just another museum-shop novelty based on a famous painting—totally different from van Gogh's *The Starry Night* coffee mug that my sister had also given me. THE SCREAM GIANT INFLATABLE is not the image of a painting reproduced on a utilitarian object. It is a fragment of a painting, enlarged and made into nonfunctional, collapsible statuary. Receiving this surprising incarnation of a haunting image that was created by the Norwegian artist Edvard Munch in 1893 prompted me to examine my perception of its connections to contemporary culture and to my own life.

Wearing a dark robe, the swirling pale figure at once melts into its claustrophobic surround and stands apart from it. The figure and landscape in the original painting are described in wavy forms with frayed strokes of lurid color, which create an appearance of a union between figure and environment. However, the figure's expressive gesture—hands held over its ears, mouth wide open, eyes averted from a full-faced confrontation with the viewer—contradict this union in a display of human detachment and terror. In the painting, Munch combines Naturalism, Symbolism, and Expressionism, through a blend of both objective and subjective color and form, to represent his emotionally charged perception of an unsettling experience on a cloudy evening while walking along a path between the city and the fjord. Joining stylistic manifestations of the subjective visions of Redon, Gauguin, and van Gogh, which he discovered through encountering their work while on a government-sponsored study scholarship in Paris in 1889, he visually articulated an intensely personal episode that he described as a scream passing through nature. This work has since moved from relative obscurity to become an international icon of modern anxiety.

Cut from its physical and psychological landscape, recast in plastic, and bicycle-pumped into the third dimension, THE SCREAM GIANT INFLATABLE is intended as a humorous decoration. It belongs to the traditional genre of artistic souvenirs. Yet I was struck by this image in another way. By merely existing, the cartooned figure becomes part of the cultural landscape. It easily could have been

made by an artist and displayed in a gallery as fine art. In a conceptual reversal of Jeff Koons's blowup palm trees and other preexisting images from popular culture which he crafts into art objects, this object transforms an image from the canon of modern art into a novelty item with no pretensions of art. Like many museum-shop products that turn art into cartoons and trinkets, it was created as an amusing item for consumers who may experience the painting for the first time through this latest incarnation, as well as those sophisticated enough to conjure the figure's context in the original painting: the flattened landscape; the disturbing diagonal composition, exaggerated by the receding railing; the two mysterious back-turned figures; the far-off boats; the tiny church steeple; the surrounding hills, behind the road that runs over the bruised blue water, bleeding upward into the blood-red sky—all the elements so familiar from slides, reproductions, touring exhibitions, and, of course, the National Museum in Oslo. But while there is a certain pleasure in viewing the plastic image and making these connections, what happens when you get it home?

When I opened the package, I was not sure whether to be disappointed or happy. What a coincidence that I had recently been struck by the sight of this blowup figure; now it was mine. But many people, most notably, Jacques Derrida, as revealed through his book of essays *Given Time*, which asks if giving is truly possible, are aware of the politics of gifts and exchange. Do I shelve it or display it? And what do I owe my sister in return? The cardboard box read: "Now you can bring Munch's masterpiece to life right in your own home or office with the unique THE SCREAM GIANT INFLATABLE! It's fun—THE SCREAM GIANT INFLATABLE will help you laugh instead of cry." What does this mean? Do I want this in my home or office? Besides, if everyone has one, it is no longer either funny or unique. And was it really mine? The image itself is everywhere. Andy Warhol included it in his oeuvre, traced in black on white paper. It was used in a 1992 political cartoon when John Frohnmayer was forced out of his position as Chairman of the National Endowment for the Arts, after things got hot over funding artwork viewed by some as obscene. In the sketch, the mysterious background figures were turned around to reveal their identities: George Bush and Jesse Helms, carrying baseball bats. John Frohnmayer was the screaming figure, in coat and tie, and a cartoon bubble contained his shriek: "I quit!!!" A print of the original image was used on a recent television news essay on racism in America to illustrate one's inner demons. Darlene Conner, the faux-Goth on the television show *Roseanne*, has a poster of the painting taped to the back of her bedroom door, among an indecipherable blend of rock music posters, bedroom stuff, and various symbols of teenage angst. Once again, its representation has surfaced, this time around as the subject of this very essay. How many have ordered the blow-up version? Still, a part of me wanted to accept THE SCREAM GIANT INFLATABLE and display it prominently—the same part of me that faithfully watched the Amy Fischer TV movies and longed to see *Jurassic Park*, for the visual thrills and so I could have something to say when everyone else, who hadn't hesitated to watch talked about it. This is culture. After all, THE SCREAM GIANT INFLATABLE is *le dernier cri*—even though it's been around since 1991.

Did I really see something of interest in this form as part of our cultural

landscape? Or was that perception simply a rationalization of something separate—my passive and entirely modern participation in the bourgeois pursuit of the new? However, the plastic scream is just postmodern enough in its humorous embracing of the artificial to distract from the obvious modernist desire that it represents (among other things). But this inclination is the real reason my sister sent THE SCREAM GIANT INFLATABLE. It's an impulse item, but first and foremost, it's an art joke—a high-class gee-gaw. It's fun to get and fun to say you gave. And, later you let the air out of it and put it in the back of a closet (if you're wise you keep the original box; it might by worth something some day). The plastic scream is not to be analyzed. I was told that my nine- and six-year-old nephews were consulted on the gift. After carefully examining the tiny photographic reproduction in the catalogue, both thought it was a good idea. Their names were included on the card, signed by an anonymous hand in the gift-wrapping section of Signals's catalogue product inventory warehouse. "Congratulations on your graduation," the hand wrote. My nephews play Nintendo and started using computers early in their lives; I trust their aesthetic judgment. It is unencumbered by insecure second guesses or sentimentality. Still, one cannot avoid the painting that generated THE SCREAM GIANT INFLATABLE or the simple fact that this is more than just a Precious Moments® figurine; it is a plastic blowup figurative sculpture, and I wanted to consider the meanings in this image.

If Anselm Kiefer, in a 1987 interview with art critic Donald Kuspit, could see his artwork as the completion of Minimalism and Conceptualism, I thought that THE SCREAM GIANT INFLATABLE could be understood as an unexpected nonartistic conclusion to Neo-expressionism and the style of Postmodernism. It met all the criteria. It critically combined strategies from both movements. Through humorously simulating one element of a late-nineteenth-century Expressionist masterpiece that voiced intense personal feelings through figure and color and matter-of-factly making it available for sale through the mail, THE SCREAM GIANT INFLATABLE was historical, regressive in style, international, acquirable, unoriginal, humorous, and full of ambivalence. Part of its message is in its unique dependence on its collector.

By its very nature, THE SCREAM GIANT INFLATABLE demands both intellectual and physical interaction. But the interaction is simple and mechanical, and could never fall into the category of performance art. This object is applied art that has to be completed by exhaling forcefully into a small hole, like an exercise in cardiopulmonary resuscitation with disturbing results, to "bring Munch's masterpiece to life right in your own home or office," and upon inflation would be—as one earnest canine-walking woman commented to me while standing in front of an Ashley Bickerton at Sonnabend Gallery—"very poignant, don't you think?" With its blowup feature and plastic form, I made superficial associations with Claes Oldenburg's soft sculptures, Dennis Oppenheim's floor-bound hair-dryer spirits, and Cindy Sherman's plastic anatomies drenched in non-naturalistic lighting. But those were works of art; each had very specific intentions. This balloon figure was not intended to be art; it's a cartoon. However, one could never quite imagine seeing THE SCREAM GIANT INFLATABLE forty feet long, drifting down Fifth

Avenue preceding Barney the dinosaur and after Garfield the cat in Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade. To deepen my understanding, I carefully read the text on the box:

> Did Edvard Munch predict life in the 1990's a century ago? Did he imagine how quickly peaceful farms could turn into parking lots? Had he heard about Edison's invention of the motion picture and looked ahead to game show and shopping channels? Did he have a sneaking suspicion about a hole in the ozone layer? Was he familiar with the legal theories of Murphy? He must have seen it all coming when he created "The Scream," the timeless work of art that sums up all the stress, tension, frustration, and just plain AUUGGHH!! that we all feel now and then. Now you can bring Munch's masterpiece to life right in your own home or office with the unique SCREAM GIANT INFLATABLE! It's fun—THE SCREAM GIANT INFLATABLE will help you laugh instead of cry. It's educational—THE SCREAM GIANT INFLATABLE will prepare your children for the realities of adult life. It's therapeutic—THE SCREAM GIANT INFLATABLE will be the one who understands you when no one else does.

What a relief—a readymade relationship that emotes, projects consistency, stores easily, and can live on air. I opened the package and blew form into *The Scream*. Fully expanded, my understanding companion became an amusing expression of angst. Its punching-bag shape and brightly colored brush strokes against its shiny robe and pink hands and face were genuinely funny. But, strangely, the horror of the image was not entirely gone. Later, walking into the room and re-encountering the large—STANDS OVER 50" TALL!—figure was disconcerting. It had a living presence. The figure had been liberated from its sanguine landscape and ballooned into a large assertive individual, with a bold suggestion of contrapposto. Yet, as in the painting, the figure is frontal, designed to be seen from one direction. Its back has no painted details, only the blowhole and some small white type; seen from behind, it is more abstract, yet still threatening in an alien, mysterious way, not unlike the back-turned figures in the original painting. However, instead of being freed from the context of the painting, this body moves the visceral anguish forward into the present. Its perverted comic form rends the air in a dull farting squeak, then giggles. Placed in my apartment between the television set and the window, THE SCREAM GIANT INFLATABLE projects its newly evolved plastic-wrapped horror.

What kind of relationship did I have with this object? Was the figure a reflection of me or a completely separate entity? After all, I did not choose this imposing representation. While I blew my lung-air into the object, the toxic fragrance of plastic was powerful. As the body took shape, I could not help but make associations between it and a blow-up sex doll. I wondered if it had another orifice. With my lips on its backside, I felt self-conscious. Yet, as it reached its full height and form, I noticed that the dynamic expression of fear on the figure's face had nothing in common with the blank physiognomy of a blow-up sex doll (also, it did

not have fake yellow hair). Was it then a blowup rape doll? It came complete with an expression of victim-terror brushed on it face, and with patch kit included. It shares with a blow-up sex doll the startled countenance achieved by a prominent open mouth. However, THE SCREAM GIANT INFLATABLE'S mouth was a flat blue stroke on its palette-shaped face which was congruous with the uneasy expression of its averted eyes—not a deep red mouth-hole, stuck below a blank stare, like a sex doll.

In addition, the figure has no clear sexual feature. What sex is it? It appears to be bald, but the hair could be pulled back or very short. It seems innocent, childlike and hairless, without aggressive genitals or imposing breast. From another point of view, THE SCREAM GIANT INFLATABLE, with its tubular legless body, plastic skin with blue and red veiny brush strokes, and pink rounded head, more closely resembles a larger-than-life-size disembodied erect penis, cloaked in the second skin of a condom. Its ability to transform from a slack sack to a smooth salute took on new meaning. Caught in a constant state of erection, with fingerless animated hands both pushing up and off, painfully cupped along the glans to magnify the cry of anguish, and all with the kind of graphic cartoon violence—where no one really gets hurt—loved by many consumers. The humorous encasement in colorful plastic skin seemed both funny and scary, as though the artificial skin could securely protect one from disease, while the expression on the face is of one being forcefully guided into exposure. If things go wrong it could pop and the patch kit would be too late. I am reminded by this of the recent news story of the woman who asked her rapist to wear a condom.

The cartoon form changed the gesture and expression of this icon of artistic anxiety and expanded my association into a third direction. If you squint to blend the colors into an even tone, THE SCREAM GIANT INFLATABLE becomes the child actor Macaulay Culkin in the movies *Home Alone* and *Home Alone II*. *The Scream* expresses the identical gesture of the towel-wrapped innocent's now famous pose. The shiny processed "Scream" allowed me to make this connection. Could I ever see Munch's painting in the same way again? Has my relationship with the masterpiece forever been polluted by the television commercials and print ads for *Home Alone* and *Home Alone II*? Or did the new connection, through my encounter with the mail-order SCREAM GIANT INFLATABLE, simply distinguish the painted image through comparison and expand my vision? I have actually never seen the painting except in reproductions. So, now I guess the blow-up reproduction is what I know. It is only slightly different from the black-and-white version photographically reproduced and printed in my old edition of Janson's *History of Art*, page 658, lower left-hand corner. At least THE SCREAM GIANT INFLATABLE is in color. Still, I did notice that Janson's newest edition (1991) has elevated Munch's *The Scream* to full-page-color-reproduction status in the new Key-Monuments-in-the-History-of-Art section at the beginning of the text. Is this a sign of the times politically or simply a matter of image fame? What would Walter Benjamin, author of the seminal essay *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*, say?

The findings of Benjamin's investigations into the mass production of

fine art images argued that the reproductions would alter our perception and understanding of the work of art on which they were based. THE SCREAM GIANT INFLATABLE embodies the kind of form that can evolve when an image is cut loose from its reference and allowed to float into the mutation-rich industry of reproduction, reinterpretation, and reincarnation. Like the painting on van Gogh's *The Starry Night* coffee mug, the image of *The Scream* on the air figure is not simply a photographic reproduction of the original. It is an artistic interpretation by a graphic designer, who has repainted it in the spirit of the original. The attenuated wrap-around landscape on the mug, colorfully signed "Vincent," was designed by D. Burrows© for Chaleur Masters Collection, all rights reserved, and the image of THE SCREAM GIANT INFLATABLE was painted by Sarah Linquist and the form was designed by Robert Fishbone, Copyright© On the Wall Productions Inc., St. Louis MO, USA; each was made in Taiwan. These ambitious designers are among many other copiers and drawers, croppers and stretchers, casters and patinators, printers and embroiderers, inkers and decalers on the ever-accelerating art-historical bauble manufacturing assembly line. The images and forms chosen by these designers and their collaborative buyers embody a salient aspect of consumerism that mirrors contemporary culture. The image of *The Scream* is so closely associated with the overwhelming anxiety of contemporary life that it is hard to separate the image from its own continual process of transformation. The figure appears to be reacting to both its context and it own latest form—all for the consumer's amusement. Fame has both its rewards and punishments.

Unlike the cute scene in *Home Alone*, when the character Kevin, aping his father's shaving ritual, uses both hands to splash alcohol-rich after-shave lotion onto his razor-raked virgin skin, freezes and screams "AUUGGHH!!," his eyes bulging at his own image in the mirror, the identical gesture of *The Scream* comes not from the plastic appearances associated with late-20th-century Hollywood, but out of the plastic art of late-19th-century Norway via Paris. What we might now call THE SCREAM HOME ALONE SEX DOLL GIANT INFLATABLE II seems to embody all of these references and more. Its only limitation underscores the distance that this image has traveled from the landscape that the figure seemed at once a part of and apart from, as it confronts the viewer while trapped at the edge of the railing over a body of water, and it comes in the form of a legal warning label (that tiny white type on the back of the figure), which becomes a stupid joke: THIS PRODUCT IS NOT TO BE USED AS A FLOATATION DEVICE.

Like the popular keychain with a pre-programmed voice which, at the press of a button, sends out your choice of four expressions of rage: "Fuck you," "You're an asshole," "Eat shit," "Fuckin' jerk" (G-rated version also available), THE SCREAM GIANT INFLATABLE "sums up all the stress, tension, frustration, and just plain AUUGGHH!! that we all feel now and then." The ad for the keychain reads, "Anytime you need to vent your frustrations, let 'Sound Off' do your dirty work." The austerely designed keychain gadget speaks for you from the palm of your hand at arm's length, relieving you of the direct responsibility and burden of negative self-expression and depersonalizing insults and hate; it is not surprising that another version of this item projects the sound of missiles launching

and hitting their target with a loud and satisfying "boom!" However, THE SCREAM GIANT INFLATABLE is not an image that expresses aggression toward others, but one that makes visual an internal rage or turmoil. *The Scream* is conceptually comparable to Giacometti's symbolic use of negative space to suggest mystery and angst in the sculpture *The Invisible Object (Hands Holding The Void)*, 1934, in which the hands of an uneasily balanced frontal figure are positioned to indicate an unseen form. It is an image in support of the unseeable; it is an image named for a sound—a sound associated with terror, madness, and, at times, comedy. In the tragicomic tradition, this blow-up reproduction of *The Scream* at once humorously expresses poignant feelings while reminding the viewer of his or her own difficulties confronting or expressing limits and fears.

The figure's simultaneous psychological union with nature through the cry and its separation from the landscape, seen through its responsive expression, can be understood as an echo of Munch's statement of 1907-08 describing art as the opposite of nature. THE SCREAM GIANT INFLATABLE seems to be a literal illustration of that idea, with a Postmodern sense of irony. Preceding *Anxiety* of 1894 and after *Despair* of 1892, this painting was one element in Munch's large and ambitious project entitled *The Frieze of Life*. In the blow-up version, the painting has been further reduced as a fragment, while, simultaneously, expanded in size and dimension. Today, at the centennial of Munch's creation of this image, it's fin-de-siecle, all over again.

I have THE SCREAM GIANT INFLATABLE on display, sitting on the Neo-Victorian patterns formed by layers of newspapers, empty plastic gallon containers, and trash on my apartment's carpeting, where I contemplate it. Sometimes I gaze at it as one considers one's own image in a mirror; my perceptions change, depending on how my life is proceeding. At other times, the meaning becomes apparent simply by how I have positioned the figure in relationship to different objects in the room and from what perspective I decide to view it. In an elementary illustration of Wittgenstein's observation that meaning comes through usage, THE SCREAM GIANT INFLATABLE'S expression appears to be a reaction to what it is near in the narrative of interior objects: the arid houseplant graveyard; the narrow walls, distorted by the flickering light of the outdated computer; the blank television screen; the silent telephone and answering machine; the crumpled student loan bill on the floor near the bathroom ("Congratulations on your graduation!" the hand had written); the glowing blue digital numbers of the Sony clock radio, below the window with a view of a burnt-out building with the word "SHAFT" written vertically in white spray paint on dirty plywood, rhythmically repeated by hand on each floor. "THE SCREAM GIANT INFLATABLE will help you laugh instead of cry." Still, I am afraid of *The Scream*. When the lights are off in the apartment, the figure's strong silhouette, which appears to be experiencing a scream so terrifying and profound that the figure has no recourse but to cover his or her ears and cry out, activates the atmosphere in my third-floor brownstone apartment and sends a dart of panic through my body. Then I recognize the image, and I laugh. I am both joined with and separated from this scream.

[1993]

In Search of Kitaj

David Cohen*

Much of what I have to say this evening hinges on the result of a boxing match modelled on George Bellows' *Dempsey vs. Firpo*. We know that Firpo, who fell out of the ring at the moment frozen in the painting, went on to win. And we know that Whistler won his derisory shilling from Ruskin, after which the painter went bankrupt and the critic went insane. But there is another contest, still being fought. Kitaj casts himself as referee, but surely he is only neutral by virtue of its undecidedness. He is as keen as any for a result.

With Whistler, who followed him at the Tate last summer with a major exhibition, there are tribal affinities—they are both Americans in London—as well as the professional one. Kitaj has had his brushes with the critics, and there are a few whose jaw he would like to break. But this is also a conflict between formalism, the art-for-art's sake creed, represented by Whistler, and a life-inclusive, moral approach to art. Even if Kitaj's life-inclusiveness entails joyous trespass as much as truth-seeking, we would suspect him to tilt towards Ruskin, for whom art was more than mere "aesthesis," pleasuring the senses, and has to convey "theoria," ideas and purposes. But maybe not. Maybe the jury is still out on the referee.

The form of this lecture is suggested by its subject, Kitaj's art. It takes on bigger ideas than some people feel comfortable with; it will start off looking rather fragmentary; sometimes it is robustly clumsy in the way it's drawn, and it's gratuitously allusive and referential. Just as Kitaj's *oeuvre* has three phases, so my lecture comes in three parts. In Kitaj, there is the period of citational, fragmentary pictures, from the early 1960s to the mid-1970s; the Jewish history painting period which starts around then and dominates the 1980s; and his self-described "old age" period, taking us up to the present.

My first lecture within a lecture I will call "Some Motifs in Kitaj." Seeing so many of his pictures at once drives home the connections and obsessions which run across his sprawling *oeuvre* and competing phases. My title, of course, is an allusion to Walter Benjamin's essay on Baudelaire. Kitaj's great vice, according to his critics, is the way he drops names, so I thought I would too.

"In Kitaj's world-picture," according to Richard Wollheim, "the term 'modernity' has a denotation that has been distended over time: it is used to refer to everything that it has ever been used to refer to since it gained circulation as a tool of criticism, now more than a hundred years ago." Wollheim is right to sense in Kitaj's idyll of the city nostalgia for yesterday's modernity; to insist that, as a painter of modern life, his scope is historically deep enough to include modern life as experienced by Baudelaire and all the noctambulists and flaneurs who followed in

*Lecture delivered at the Metropolitan Museum of Art New York, April 7, 1995.

his wake.

The first visual motif that I want to call attention to is the chair. The seating arrangements in Kitaj's paintings virtually amount to the history of modern furniture. Sure, and significantly, *Marynka Smoking* has upholstery of the same vintage as the artist who inspired it, Degas, but elsewhere, twentieth-century chairs predominate. Chairs are selected and depicted with such loving care, it is impossible to dismiss them as mere detail. In some pictures, they take on a life of their own; they are real characters. In other they are such insistent framing devices as to inform on the people sitting in them. The armchair in *His Hour*, 1975; the train sets in *Jewish Rider*, 1984-5; and of course the chaise-lounge in *Cecil Court*, 1984, are unique sites of reverie. Like so much that Kitaj paints, the chairs juggle a sense of actuality and symbolism. Often they are drawn from life, being chairs he owns, but their connotations as historically particular chairs cannot be discounted. The Aalto 406 in *The Hispanist (Nissa Torrents)*; The Saarinen(ish) moulded plastic office-chair in *Ohio Gang*; and Corbusier's chaise lounge. As he reclines in the paradigmatic, hi-tech modernist chair, Kitaj dreams of refugees, madness, and the Holocaust of 1.5 million children (the green-haired Bellmer doll giving birth to a still-born child is a macabre symbol of this). "I do find myself tending to the opposite of Matisse's most famous ambition," Kitaj has told Richard Morphet. "You know, his line about an art of balance like a good armchair." Here, Le Corbusier, like Matisse, gets it for being a false messiah of balance.

Kitaj's chairs indict formalism and conceptualism alike. In contrast to Joseph Kosuth's stark, banal structuralist reductions of "chair" to three actualities of a chair itself, a dictionary definition, a photo (1965), Kitaj's picture making allows for symbolic depth. His determination to depict so many types of chairs, to invest them with symbolic resonances, and yet realize them in such a way as to acknowledge their status as depictions, deals at a more profound level with the signified-signifier dichotomy than Kosuth's bland statement. One begins to think that Kitaj is taking on Plato, the first enemy of the open society, with this proliferation of furniture making. Plato, you may remember, argued for excluding artists from his ideal Republic, for the artist is doubly fraudulent, in that he makes copies of objects which are themselves copies of their own archetype. Plato's example was the painter who copies a chair which itself is a duplicate of the notion of "chair." Look at the foreground chairs in *Autumn of Central Paris (After Walter Benjamin)* 1972-3, this homage to Kitaj's old hero, the 1930s literary critic, which embodies Benjamin's notion of the cafe as "open-air interior." The chairs flatten out, become virtually pictograms, but in this process they also become like Russian Constructivist designs, in contrast to the more relaxed realism, with its convincing perspective, further off into the horizon of Parisian urbanity.

On whose side is formalism here: state revolution or the flaneur? For out of the constructivist pattern making emerges a social realist worker with pick-axe, which is read as ice-pick, making the figure a symbol of Stalinist terror. Such politicized confrontation of styles is true to another Benjamin principle, that of "agitational usage."

There is more one could say about chairs as symbols of transient repose,

about the modernist chairs in particular as cosmopolitan comforts. "The Diasporist...is even taken up here and there and shown a nice life," he writes in "First Diasporist Manifesto." Elsewhere, he describes his cities as "wondrous safe havens for a transient, alien, vulnerable, modern aesthetic" which we may think of in terms of his Diasporists and the chairs they sit on. But often allied with the chair motif, playing snakes and ladders with it, are precarious walkways, incongruous ladders, gangplanks, sinister stairwells. *Autumn of Central Paris*, with its jagged, panes shattered internal walkway; *Walter Lipmann*, with its unwelcome ladder; *Smyrana Greek (Nikos)*, with its vertiginous, disappearing flights of steps; *Against Slander* with its intimidatingly exposed and oversized staircase and menacing, hand-held step ladder; and *The Sniper*. Less iconologically layered than his chairs, Kitaj's stairs more forcibly betoken his aesthetic of being ill at ease. "I do like to watch people who are un-at home." Steps introduce the element of imbalance, risk, the need for hasty escapes.

A chair that might have felt at home in *From London (James Joll and John Golding)*, 1975-6 is the classic Rietveld Chair, but actually it would be superfluous. Exquisite serenity and order are suggested by the Mondrian poster on the wall and the artful arrangement of books signifying the interests of the sitters and their community with the artist. Kitaj maintains a respectful distance from Mondrian and his aesthetic. In the catalog for the drawings exhibition he curated called "The Human Clay," which he was writing at the time of painting this picture, he advocates life-drawing and art about people with vehemence and insistence, but confesses nonetheless how Mondrian's life has always fascinated him, especially the attempt in his life-style to egg on his prophecy that art will disappear as life gains equilibrium.

But, according to Kitaj, "It has always seemed to me that maybe an even larger spiritual purity than an art of detachment may lie in the very direction of sweating people in their unbalance." There is no evidence of perspiration, but notice the artful swagger of John Golding's mannerist pose. And the late James Joll sports a thick green tie. Mondrian banished the color green from his studio. But what of the books, with their elegant, primary-color, rectilinear cover designs. Are they not Mondrian come to life, life gaining a Mondrian-like equilibrium?

When books become a motif, these exemplars of content bow in the direction of form. The book motif is not about ideas per se, but bookishness at large, the aura of books, bibliophilia. Wollheim gently prods his friend for buying more books than he will ever read. Fifty titles we can assume he did read are those forming the series of screenprints, *In Our Time*, 1970, which consists simply of blown up reproductions of original book covers from his library. These very "literal" collages include left wing tracts, antisemitic pamphlets, popular novels, and critical essays. This pantheon, at once neutral in its presentation and idiosyncratic in its selection, recalls Gerhard Richter's *48 Portraits*, done two years later, in 1972, painted after encyclopedia photographs of various men of culture. A bizarre cross-section of Kitaj's reading, *In Our Time* is well-nigh impossible to interpret in a cogent fashion. The battered covers can only allude to the mystique of reading, of a vicarious, if sought after, encounter with intellectual history. Tom Phillips

reckons that in 1963, "single-handed and one with exhibition, Kitaj brought the intellect back into the forum of British art." This may be true, but the motif of bookishness has different connotations. Kitaj is closer to the mark when he declares: "For me, books are what trees are for the landscape painter." Coming back to the structuralist dichotomy, the point here is that Kitaj the painter gives back to the signifiers of letters, words, designs, typographies, actual copies of published books their own life away from the signified: the idea, author, ideology, *etc.* denoted by the book. Again, it is this jostling of symbolism and actuality that keeps him at odds equally with formalism and conceptualism. Kitaj is a master of what I would like to call informational texture.

In his preface to *Cecil Court* Kitaj writes: "I wish I could continue to paint the shop signs in the spirit of a distinction made by my favourite antisemite, Pound, who said that the symbols quickly exhaust their references, while signs renew theirs." It is hard to reconcile this idea with the major development that took place in Kitaj's paintings in the "Passion" series: the contrived introduction of a symbol to denote the Holocaust. Noting how Christianity took four centuries to incorporate the cross as the symbol of Christ's Passion, he demanded "why wait four hundred years after our (Jewish) Passion?" The symbol he has taken to using is the chimney, "my own very primitive attempt at an equivalent symbol, like the cross, both, after all, having contained the human remains in death." The chimney emerges sometimes in sharp disguises: in *The Jewish Rider*, for instance, as the long red carpet along the corridor of a train, carrying his friend the art historian Michael Podro through the idyllic countryside to Auschwitz. Kitaj is captivated by the notion that "Buchenwald was constructed on the very hill where Goethe often walked with Eckermann," and its implications for an appreciation of this, and by extension any, landscape. This frission of beauty and horror already came to the surface in *If Not, Not*, 1975-6. And here is the chimney motif again, in *Germania (The Tunnel)*, 1985, this time as the corridor leading through arches borrowed from van Gogh's San Remy paintings which double as the passageway to the gas chambers—a typical meeting in Kitaj of obsessions and identifications, a constellation of the artist's own history, the history of the Jews, and van Gogh as scapegoat, as "outsider." As a form, then, the chimney is capable of opening out, but as a symbol it proved too blatant, unequivocal, precisely unopen to the ambiguities and layers of meaning in other motifs. The tragedy Kitaj was seeking to come to terms with so overwhelmed him he surprised himself with the heavy handedness of his symbolic solution. A motif which is neither sign nor symbol but which operates in a subtle and disturbing way in relation to his Holocaust obsession is that of physiognomy and its related motifs, caricature and type. These are things that interested Kitaj from the outset of his career.

Under the influence of Willem de Kooning, Kitaj's *Erasmus Variations* pursue strange distortions in the human face. *Where the Railroad Leaves the Sea*, 1964, juggles expressive drawing in one figure against cartoon-like flatness in another. His psychotic *Bathers* of the late 1970s force us to equate nervous expressionist drawing with disturbed mental states. They drive home Kitaj's audacious claim, that he seeks to redo Cezanne again, after Auschwitz (recalling Cezanne's

dictum, that he would redo Poussin after nature). A fascination with quirky systems of classification and with cartoon-like B-movie types in his early work all point to an ambiguous attitude towards deformity and type that foreshadows his later engagement with the Holocaust, because of the relationship between genocide and the pseudo-science of eugenics. Kitaj at his best has this way of seeming dangerous and prophetic. The moral aspect of his formal interests is always blurred, ambiguous.

What is the status, we might ask, of his touching, sexy little picture of *Unity Mitford*? You will have gathered by now that I have arrived at Kitaj's poetics of Diaspora, his Jewish theme, by an erratic route, looking at chairs, stairways, books, shop signs, and via these, at last, his chimney motif. But I have my reasons for writing my Kitaj lecture in a sort of equivalent way to a Kitaj painting. I guess I am claiming that in Kitaj's oeuvre, Jews and Jewishness are not so much the subject, but a motif; they do not encompass a whole set of themes so much as they constitute one, albeit very strong, motif that nestles with others. But then, at a certain level, it becomes difficult to disentangle form and content. Clement Greenberg has written of how "The Jewish condition becomes the subject of Kafka's art, it informs its form," an idea Kitaj has quoted with enthusiasm. But which is form and which is subject in Kitaj? He has dramatized the dilemma for us in his little drawing of a copulating couple, ironically titled *Form and Content*.

It all goes back to the boxing match with which we started. I want you to think of Kitaj's Jews as being Whistler's Mother: much loved, of seminal importance to his being, but ultimately subservient to painting concerns, more explicitly in the case of Whistler color schemes and compositional harmonies, more vaguely in Kitaj's the whole nebulous project of being an artist. We must examine carefully Kitaj's throw away announcement that he wants "to do for Jews what Morandi did for jars." Morandi did nothing for jars: the greatest lover of Morandi is unlikely to treat jars differently as a result of the Italian's paintings of them. But jars did a great deal for Morandi: they provided him with the necessarily neutral vehicle for a lifetime's exploration of phenomena and light, balance, relationship, the texture of sight. In "First Diasporist Manifesto" Kitaj quotes Isaiah Berlin at length on the Jewish problem. "No people can develop without distortion in an atmosphere of intermittent uneasiness. When people fidget, they are apt to irritate and be kicked, and because they are kicked, they fidget." Kitaj follows by saying, "I would reclaim the Jews and our little 'problem' for my corner of the painting art, when I can."

The Birth of Jewish Tragedy Painting

British philosopher Andrew Benjamin writes:

> One of the major difficulties that confronts any attempt to dwell on the problem of Jewish identity lies in the relationship between that identity and the history of antisemitism. Is Jewish identity the identity given to Judiasm and hence to the Jew by that history, or is there a confirmative

> conception that seeks to overcome the continual historical enactment of antisemitism? While there is a straightforward theological answer to this question...it is one that does not confront the contemporary reality of the problem.

Kitaj identifies himself as a Jew in secular terms. He likes to quote Kafka: "I have never made a frank deposit in the bank of belief." Furthermore, "The phenomenal history of antisemitism," he said in a lecture in the Oxford synagogue in 1983, "tantalizes me more than a faith I never knew...my art has turned in the shadow of our infernal history." In Kitaj's work, the conflation of Jewish identity and antisemitism runs deeper than joking references to Pound or Degas as "my favourite antisemite," the inclusion of a Henry Ford pamphlet in the series *In Our Time*; or a flattering portrait of *Unity Mitford*.

In *The Jewish School (Drawing a Golem)*, 1980-1, the very composition is derived from an antisemitic nineteenth century caricature, Opitz's *Die Judenschule*, an image which he has turned on its head. The original is concerned with the disruptiveness of the Jewish character; the reworked version has the boys trying frantically to create a Golem, the folkloric Jewish Frankenstein monster they hope will save them from their impending peril. There is much to say about the Golem as metaphor for art, but what concerns me here is that a construction of identity in adversity animates Kitaj's painting. Incidentally, he encountered the cartoon in a Warburg Institute Survey; I should mention that Kitaj has special affection for the followers of Aby Warburg, such as Ernst Gombrich, whose portrait he has drawn, and Edgar Wind, who taught him at Oxford, not just because he was interested in iconology in his early, quotational, fragmentary work, but because these are the sort of men whose "dispersed lives have broken mediocre patterns and searched out cosmopolitan treasure," to quote from the Diasporist Manifesto.

If Kitaj seems knowingly to skirt the boundaries between affirmative Jewish identity and imposed Jewish stereotype, then Marc Chagall occupies a similarly precarious position between the two. Chagall's supposedly naive roots in chasidism and folklore, it is now clear, actually amounted to a well-calculated primitivism: his first inspiration was Gauguin, and the poetic notions that prompted his pantheistic jumble of lyrical symbolism was shared with gentile peers, Robert and Sonia Delaunay, Apollinaire and company. When he searched for a symbol to express his passionate concern for the persecution of Jewry in the build up to the Holocaust, the symbol he turned to was the Crucifixion. It returned, as he painted crucifixions before and after, in different contexts. None of this prevented interpretations attaching themselves to him which rely on racial stereotype.

Herbert Read, for instance, could conclude from the single example of Chagall that

> The Jew still retains the essential mobility of temperament, and the inquietude, that distinguished his forefathers; but he is hemmed in, repressed. So, late in the day, he takes to plastic art, and the art he creates is...essentially romantic, and is not ashamed of its romanticism. It sees

> in painting, not a means of interpreting the outer world, but a means of expressing the inner self. That is why is uses the essential types of individualist art-lyricism and symbolism.

And the psychologist Erich Neumann, a Jew who set up his Jungian practice in Tel Aviv in 1933, also took a racial view of what he took to be Chagall's intuitive, spontaneous lyricism and symbolism. There is

> a central Jewish paradox in Chagall: a prophecy in which the godhead does not, as from time immemorial speak in words, but in mystery and image—an unmistakable sign of the upheaval that has taken place in the Jewish soul... This strange people, with its mixture of youth and age, primitivism and differentiation, prophetic fervour and worldly, world-building ethos, of extreme materialism and timeless spirituality—and Chagall is eminently an expression of all these traits—is engaged in a transformation

The complementary positions of Read and Neumann could each be mapped backwards a century, to their respective sources in the various responses to the phenomenon of emancipation. For just as Kitaj asked in his Oxford lecture, "Why is there no Jewish art of any real consequence? I mean *great* Jewish art? Why do we not have a Chartres or a Sistine Chapel or a Hokusai or a Goya or a Degas, or a Matisse?" so Richard Wagner asked why the Jews are incapable of great music. Bryan Magee has convincingly shown that, buried under the notoriously antisemitic composer's waffle and vituperation, there is actually a quite sound argument in his "Judaism in Music," much more than in Marx's equally antisemitic pamphlet, "On the Jewish Problem." Magee summarizes Wagner thus:

> A really great creative artist is one who, in freely expressing his own fantasies, needs, aspiration, and conflicts, articulates those of a whole society. This is made possible by the fact that, through his earliest relationships, mother tongue, upbringing, and all his first experience of life, the cultural heritage on which he has entered at birth is woven into the whole fabric of his personality. He has a thousand roots in it of which he is unaware, nourishing him below the level of consciousness, so that when he speaks for himself he quite unconsciously speaks for others.

In Wagner's time, Jews were newcomers to the society in which they now mixed, and often spoke the host language with an alien accent. Kitaj tells Richard Morphet that "Western painting tradition from the caves to now...is my host language."

According to Bryan Magee, what has happened since Wagner is that "while with the passage of generations Jews were integrating with the Western cultural tradition, that tradition was disintegrating to meet them half way." As this century is characterized by war and genocide, further eroding that tradition, Jews either *are*, or identify with the victims of these calamities. "At last they are in a position to articulate...the age they live in. The Jew has become the archetypal modern

man." In other words, the mastersong of modern angst and alienation is to sound more like the jumbled confusions sung by Beckmesser (who some believe an anti-semitic caricature of the music critic Hanslick) in *Die Meistersinger* rather than the smooth, seamless, efforts of "Die Deutschen Meister," the German masters.

But to complete the backwards mapping which took us from Herbert Read to Wagner, the counterpart of the Jewish psychologist Erich Neumann in the mid-nineteenth century would have been the early Zionist writers who anticipated Theodor Herzl, among them Leo Pinkster, an emancipated Russian Jew who developed the theory of Auto-Emancipation in response to the first pogroms. He argued that liberal emancipation was not enough; the Jews had to reconstitute themselves as a living nation. And this brings us full circle back to Kitaj: in his "First Diasporist Manifesto" we read, in a context that seems to have little to do with the politics of national identity, "The Diasporist painter might as well make up his painting mode as he goes along and not depend too much on what the Romans do. That's how I try to get through each painting day now. It's called Auto-Emancipation in an important pamphlet by Leo Pinsker, which can be taken as a document of a modern art, as I do. Sometimes I think upon its terms while I paint, the way some painters listen to a piece of music." Actually, it is well-nigh impossible to treat Pinsker's practical and unequivocal essay as a "document of modern art" and I can't help suspecting that Kitaj reckoned that not many readers of *his* manifesto would have access to Pinsker's! In which case, his quirky citation of Pinsker might be a case of "the aestheticizing of politics" which his hero Walter Benjamin warned against. But perhaps it is appropriate that the painter responsible for "the Birth of (Jewish) Tragedy" should manifest as a central aspect of his painterly style and compositional strategy what Richard Wagner called "the emotionalizing of the intellect."

So, Diasporism does not mean, as its strange name might imply, an alternative to Zionism. On the contrary, Kitaj feels a close affinity with those thinkers who sought a "creative negation to exile." But still, he never clearly defines his idiosyncratic new word. We are told instead that "Diasporism is my mode. It is the way I do my pictures"; and we are told, "You don't have to be a Jew to be a Diasporist"; we learn that, "The Diasporist (Jew, Black, Arab, Homosexual, Gypsy, Asian, emigré from despotism, bad luck, *etc.*) is widely despised, disliked, mistrusted, sometimes tolerated, even taken up here and there and shown a nice life." But these are examples, not definitions. And by extending Diasporism to color and sexual preference, Kitaj has effectively found another term for "otherness," or "difference." Revealing, in this context, is Kitaj's fondness for describing Jewishness as "my Tahiti," alluding to Gauguin's South Sea Island. And a good way to illustrate that point is with this beautiful drawing of his adopted Indian daughter Dominie. Adopted at the time of his interest in jumbled fragments and the found object, it then transpired that Dominie is a "readymade" Diasporist.

We have established, then, that Jewishness in Kitaj is more concerned with the "problem," the "condition," of modern Jewishness—the endurance of antisemitism—than it is with the positive cultural or theological aspects of Judaism. What excited him was the tension within modern Jewish identity, which perhaps reflected his personal situation, and which certainly accorded with the mood of his

art. Gerschom Scholem, Benjamin's friend and the great authority on Jewish mysticism, described "this 'being elsewhere' combined with the desperate wish to 'be at home' in a manner at once intense, fruitful, and destructive." Remember that for Kitaj the best definition of art is Nietzsche's: "The desire to be different, the desire to be elsewhere."

At decisive moments in his career we detect conflations within Kitaj's imagination, and rhetoric, of the Jewish condition and his avowals as an artist. Most significantly, the years of his conscious rediscovery of his Jewish origins were also the years (following the 1969 suicide of his first wife) of intense drawing from the single figure. Of course, he had drawn figures before. And indeed, it cannot entirely be coincidental that so many of the subjects and mentors—Rosa Luxembourg, Walter Lipmann, Isaac Babel, Aby Warburg, Walter Benjamin, *et al*—were Jewish. But in the early '70s a new focus entered his work, with humane, observational drawings of single figures. Perhaps witnessing the effects of confusion on the mind of a loved one dampened enthusiasm for the presentation of jumbled states of mind. He took up pastel at the suggestion of his new partner, and later wife Sandra Fisher, whose sister is depicted in *Dancer (Margaret)*. What is remarkable is how Kitaj came to conflate the reconnection with artistic tradition and religious tradition. He announced his discovery of drawing with his exhibition "The Human Clay," taking as its title a line from Auden: "To me Art's subject is the human clay." The words "human clay" clearly mean human form, but in his 1985 catalog essay which accompanied the "Passion" (Chimney) paintings, and where he quoted Schoenberg's dictum, "I have long since resolved to be a Jew...I regard that as more important than my art," the meaning becomes ethnic origins: "Art begins with what you are and the clay you come from." In his interviews with Julian Rios, Kitaj forces the equation even harder. Of Rembrandt's *Polish Rider* in the Frick (the source for his *Jewish Rider*) he says: "Revisionist historians say it is not by Rembrandt. Revisionist historians say there was no Holocaust."

And Kitaj's family romance continues. Whatever reason he had for painting himself in military garb, epaulettes and all, in this "Ronald" picture (one of the ongoing series in the spirit of Vincent which explores his personal ailments) it is hard not to think now of Alfred Dreyfus, and the classic photos of the captain being disgraced (stripped of decorations) or more palatably being redecorated as a lieutenant after his rehabilitation. For since his near crucifixion at the hand of British art critics, Kitaj has somewhat theoretically described himself as an artworld Dreyfus. He told the *Jewish Daily Forward* that his detractors were "antisemitic, anti-foreign, anti-American, anti-outsider, anti-intellectual." He lamented that there was no Zola to come to his rescue.

Ironically, the critic who gave him the worst mauling, Andrew Graham-Dixon of the *Independent*, once wrote a full-page article defending himself against alleged double standards as a Turner Prize juror. The title of his piece? "*Je m'accuse,*" a reference to the classic Dreyfisard intervention of Emile Zola. The basic thrust of his critique of Kitaj, beyond not thinking he is any good, concerns his inauthenticity: the presumption with which he thinks, by alluding to their forms, or even just quoting their statements, Kitaj taps into the greatness of the masters of

whom he is so fond: Cezanne, Degas, Rembrandt, Michelangelo. The way in which he thinks he can enter his "old age style" by choice. "The man who would leapfrog his way into History on the backs of giants stands exposed." With a touch of character assassination, Graham-Dixon compares Kitaj to the Wizard of Oz: "a small man with a megaphone held to his lips."

I don't quote this criticism to refute it and certainly not in approval, but instead to note its inadvertent relationship to the Wagnerian critique of Jewish expression taken on board—aestheticized, one might say—by Kitaj himself. For it is my contention that one of the things that makes Kitaj so alive and vital an artist *in our time* is that he internalizes the crisis of authenticity, a malaise which defines his identity. For Kitaj, "Diasporist painting is problematic...each brushstroke is a benerved Diasporist signature." By contrast, for his "School of London" comrades (the term was invented by Kitaj) such as Frank Auerbach or Leon Kossoff, authenticity is sacred; a single brushstroke lacking charge and expressive purpose leads to these painters scraping down of the whole canvas. Several of his comrades are depicted here in a joyous canvas that celebrates his marriage to Sandra Fisher, who tragically died in the summer of 1994. Whereas these painters, or Freud or Bacon, seek a painterly language which can assume the burden of their alienations, Kitaj's alienation is from expression itself.

But is Kitaj's Jewishness to be understood solely in negative terms, as a dramatization of certain "problems"? Is Jewishness just a metaphor for irony and angst? I would suggest that, although the "problematics" of his identity are what attract him, as a painter, to his Jewishness, there are aspects of his approach that he at least would argue as Jewish in an affirmative sense. Firstly, his reading in Jewish theology, although typically heterodox as his artistic misreading of texts and other paintings tends to be, has made positive use of the exegetical tradition within Rabbinic Judaism, as a license for his creative re-readings (his prefaces) of his own earlier work. He like to quote the Zohar, a mystical text, which says The Book (*i.e.*, The Bible) changes its meaning each year. He likes too the Talmudic idea of 49 layers of meaning within the Bible. He came across Midrash, he says, well after he discovered Benjamin and Warburg and before learning about the "Diasporists of the *Ecole de Yale*," a wordy way of saying the American deconstructionists of whom he is fond. "Things sure do only connect." One might also account for his appropriation of the outward structure of forms from the old masters which he then completely turns to his own use for the Rabbinic quotation of biblical texts in unlikely ways. The falling figure of Ruskin in *Whistler and Ruskin* apparently derives from a Rembrandt Deposition, itself borrowed from a Rubens.

Also somewhat Rabbinic is the compulsive authorization from his artistic saints. A later rabbi would always want to find that an earlier scholar has formulated a phrase that says what he wants to say. Kitaj, however, usually has the authorization as a sting in the tail of self-deprecatory remarks:

> I play at being a refugee, at studying, at painting. All this is pretence in the sense Picasso meant when he said: 'The artist must know the manner whereby to convince others of the truthfulness of his lies.'

And:

> Painters are brought up to believe that frankness must be wholly expanded and exhausted in the way one daubs, leaving no energy for making a fool of yourself, as Tolstoy says artists should be prepared to do.

Rethinking Site-Specificity:
Some Critical and Philosophical Problems

Kevin Melchionne

A Nineteenth century French academic painter prepares his canvas for next year's Salon, determining its scale, composition, colors and theme so that it will stand out from the hoard of competing images.[1] A late Twentieth century New York painter constructs just four large pictures for display in the cavernous white cube that is her dealer's SoHo gallery. Finally, in that caricature of philistinism, a painter is asked by a friend to paint a picture that goes with the decor of the friend's living room.

In each case, the making of an easel painting (by which I mean a portable-sized painting made for the most part on canvas supports mounted on stretcher bars and hung on walls) is closely linked to the setting for its display. The paintings have been made for the locations, which, in turn, influence what the paintings will look like. That the setting for the exhibition of a painting should play such an influential role is hardly controversial. It is a commonplace of contemporary art historical method to take into consideration the institutional and material context of works of art.[2] The physical place where the work is displayed—a competitive exhibition, a commercial gallery, a modest, middle-class living room—can be an important part of that context. Most art, it can be argued, is influenced by and evolves symbiotically with the places for which it is made and in which it is appreciated. Are these paintings, then, site-specific?

As art historians dig deeper into the institutional and material context of painting, the notion of site-specificity in contemporary artistic circles tends not to include easel paintings. Earthworks, installations, performances, occasionally murals and increasingly gardens tend to be the formats upon which critical attention and artistic practice centers. The notion of site-specificity is tied up conceptually with what Rosalind Krauss famously termed "sculpture in the expanded field."[3] In other words, the notion of site-specificity has emerged as part of the cultural situation in which the artist pushes sculpture off its pedestal (and, as Krauss argues, beyond the very usefulness of the term "sculpture") in order to establish new relationships between the work of art, landscape and built space. Painting has played only a limited role in this important development, which perhaps explains why so many critics and practitioners of contemporary art have pronounced it dead. Easel paintings tend to be thought of as "site-general": since easel paintings are portable and flat walls are almost universal, the question of site is thought to be insignificant to

the ontology of easel painting and, more significantly, the possibilities for understanding and appreciation.

There is, then, a conflict between the methodological assumptions of academic art history and the polemical opposition between painting and site-specific art operating within the contemporary art world. We can put the problem this way: if paintings can be interpreted as made, intentionally or unintentionally, for specific sites, then site-specificity *per se* does not identify a particularly innovative contemporary practice. If so, then what to make of the currency of the term, "site-specific," its attractiveness to practitioners, as well as the intriguing art that has been done in its name? If site-specificity is more than a meaningless buzzword of the moment, then how shall we characterize it?

This paper addresses two problems in characterizing site-specific art. The first is critical and the second is philosophical. The first problem is the relation between the recent expansion of site-specific strategies and the historical roots of site-specific art in the minimalist avant-garde. Current artistic practice has exploded site-specificity beyond the borders of its minimalist roots. This proliferation of site-specific practices requires of the critic a broader descriptive repertoire. To this end, I provide a pluralistic list of site-specific qualities in order to indicate some of the critical and creative possibilities. The second problem is that of the ontological relation of the work to its location. It is commonly thought that, by definition, a site-specific work is what I shall term here "essentially rooted" in its location. Thus, to move the work is in effect to destroy it. I argue that relocation does not necessarily imply destruction and I provide a means of judging the significance of relocation in particular cases.

Critical Pluralism

Sorting Out Site-Specificity

There is probably no better place to begin to explore the questions surrounding site-specific art than with the most famous and well-documented case, Richard Serra's *Tilted Arc*. As is well known, *Tilted Arc* was—depending on your views on site-specificity—either removed or destroyed when it was cut out of its anchoring in the architectural sub-structure of the Javits Federal Plaza in lower Manhattan in 1989. Indeed, more than anything else, the controversy surrounding *Tilted Arc* is responsible for the widespread use of the term, "site-specific." The essential rootedness of the work in its site was the main art theoretical (in contrast to legal or political) argument against removing *Tilted Arc* from the Javits Plaza. Serra explicitly made this claim about the piece on the occasion of the preposterous show-trial that determined the work's fate.[4]

This is what the artist said at the so-called "hearing" that determined the work's fate:

> I don't make portable objects; I don't make works that can be relocated or site adjusted. I make works that deal with the environmental components of given places. Scale, size, and location of my site specific works are determined by the topography of the site, whether it is urban, land-

> scape, or an architectural enclosure. My works become part of and are built into the structure of a site, and often restructure, both conceptually and perceptually, the organization of the site.[5]

Already in this short statement there are several senses of the term "site-specific" at work: intention, scale or size, location, the fact that the work is physically built-in, as well as the more hermetic notions of the way the work conceptually and perceptually restructures the site. This proliferation of site-specific qualities is the first problem that we have to contend with. How do we sort out the congeries of site-specific qualities that Serra presents us with?

Douglas Crimp has attempted to provide some critical order to the plurality of site-specific qualities commonly found in the work of Serra and other artists of his generation.[6] Rather than the formal considerations of "scale" or "location," the real specificity of *Tilted Arc*, according to Crimp, lies in the way that it performs a subversive political function. The brand of site-specificity that Crimp sees in Serra's work, along with that of Daniel Buren, Hans Haacke, and Michael Asher, belongs to a "materialist" or "institutional critique of art." According to Crimp, such works seek to reveal the political and economic conditions of making and displaying art in our society. The mobility of the typical high modernist work (easel painting or pedestal sculpture) allows for its circulation between the studio, commercial gallery, collector's home, and the museum. As Crimp puts it, "the real material condition of modern art, masked by its pretense to universality, is that of the specialized luxury commodity. Engendered under capitalism, modern art becomes subject to the commodification from which nothing fully escapes."[7] Thus, the immobility presumably designed into the very essence of *Tilted Arc* functions as a critical refusal of the commodification of art.

The status of *Tilted Arc* as public art brings up a second dimension of the role of site-specificity in the institutional critique of art. Crimp argues that traditional public art plays the special role of presenting the "private sensibility" of the artist as a universal model of possessive individualism, reflecting "the shared belief that all individuals are unique but can exist in harmony with one another by assenting to the benign regulation of the state."[8] This role for traditional public art serves to hide what, in a slightly simplistic formulation, Crimp sees as the "real" role of the state, namely, the defense of private property. According to Crimp, *Tilted Arc* "refuses to play the prescribed role of falsely reconciling contradictions."[9] The work evades the ideological functions of traditional public art, which Crimp sees as a tool of the capitalist state's self-legitimation as public benefactor. Like a bar struck across the plaza, *Tilted Arc* cancels out the ideological function while retaining the more prosaic one of access. While Serra is not unequivocally committed to this interpretation of his art, it clearly figures in his thinking:

> Site-specific works invariably manifest a value judgment about the larger social and political context of which they are a part. Based on the interdependence of work and site, site-specific works address the content and context of their site critically. A new behavioral and percep-

> tual orientation to a site demands a new critical adjustment to one's experience of the place.[10]

Thus, the site-specificity of *Tilted Arc* lies in the "new behavioral and perceptual orientation" to the Federal Plaza through which Serra was forcing the viewer/pedestrian to confront her expectations for art in public spaces. Ironically, the ferociousness of the response of the higher level bureaucrats to the work and, ultimately, the work's destruction, may be the very signs of its success.

A Critical Repertoire

Serra is interested in several different registers of site-specificity, which range from the formal dimensions of place, to the perceptual implications of the moving viewer/pedestrian, to instilling a critical awareness of place. Indeed, Serra seems to believe that the shift in perceptual orientation of the viewer/pedestrian is essentially linked to the politically-charged "critical adjustment."

What is of importance to us in Serra's presentation is that when we move beyond the general claim of the essential rootedness of site-specific work in order to examine how any particular work realizes this claim, there is a proliferation of qualities that are held to perform this rooting function. This plurality of qualities poses art critical as well as philosophical problems. We should presume that any serious account of a complex site-specific work will distinguish and analyze those site-specific qualities which are most significant for the work, or at least, most germane to the agenda of the critic. Some works may provoke discussion of the ecology of a place, others its history. Certain intellectual frameworks—such as Crimp's—will draw out political meaning, others, formal qualities. Of course, this is the very work of the critic. However, too often, this work never gets done. The analysis of site-specificity remains a vague and self-congratulating invocation of all things critical and progressive. For instance, this passage from a recent discussion of Serra's work:

> Serra offers no moment of closure, only the endless deferral of the unsatiated glance... Serra's sculptures do not end where the metal ends, since they are conceived for particular sites. This openness to the physical surrounding (or awareness of the space in which the spectator stands) further frustrates a totalizing rationality, which prefers artworks to be carefully sutured off from their environment.[11]

This rather extravagant interpretation tells us nothing about the nature of site-specificity in Serra's work. That we need to go beyond such platitudes should be clear not only from the equivocation in Serra's own discourse but also from the rich schema of site-specific possibilities that I present below. I have assembled a list, a critical repertoire, of ways in which site-specificity has been or could be conceived. In contrast to Crimp's preference for a politicized site-specificity, this list is pluralistic. It is a tool with which critics can clarify the site-specific qualities of works as well as build positions advocating for certain qualities over others.

1. **Occasional or Intentional.** Instead of just "siting" a previously made work, the artist is commissioned by the owners or curators of the space to do a work for it. The patron or the artist wants to do a site-specific work.

2. **Built-In.** The work is physically built into the site. While we typically think of huge steel sculptures anchored into plazas, the garden is the best example. Parts of the garden are "built in" through the trying art of horticulture. Rootedness is, then, literal, as in Agnes Denes's *The Wheatfield.*

3. **Site-Adjusted.** The artist takes into consideration the dimensions of the place in determining the scale of her work. However, the work is primarily determined by its place in the artist's own development. The term is used by Serra and probably owes its origin to Robert Irwin.[12]

4. **Formal.** The work echoes or engages the formal structure of its site. This is Crimp's reading of Carl Andre's work.[13] Maya Lin's *Vietnam Veterans Memorial* is formally site-specific in so far as it stands at the intersection of lines emanating from the Lincoln and Washington monuments.[14] Michelangelo's design for the *Campigdoglio* also reflects in part a formalist solution.

5. **Material.** The artist uses and transforms the characteristic material of the site, as in Andy Goldsworthy's work with leaves, twigs and stones or Beverly Pepper's *Thel,* which creates planes of green grass jutting out of the lawn at Dartmouth.

6. **Indexical.** The work points to or marks its own location, as in a gravestone, to use the most common example. In William Anastasi's 1967 Exhibition at Dwan Gallery in New York, in which the paintings were replicas at a slightly smaller scale of the walls on which they hung, can be seen as instantiating an indexical relation between work and place.[15] Christian Boltanski's *The Missing House* in Berlin memorializes the former residents of a bombed out house, who were killed not by Allied bombs, but in Nazi death camps, is a piece of indexical site-specific art possessing a powerful historical character as well. Christo's wrappings also function as indexical site-markers.

7. **Functional or Situational.** The artist takes into consideration the use of the place, how people move through or rest in it or why they are there: for the mourner, Lin's *Vietnam Veterans Memorial*; for the motorist, Irwin's *Portal Park Slice* in Dallas; Isamu Noguchi's *Playscapes* for children and their caregivers.

8. **Subversive-Political.** The piece works against the implicit ideological purpose of its site. We can class Crimp's reading of Serra's *Tilted Arc* here as well as the work of Buren, Haacke, and Asher. In an utopian-affirmative rather than critical-negative way, Acconci's *Carson City Supreme Court Proposal* can be placed here as well. Martha Schwartz's *Splice Garden* atop the M.I.T. Genetics Building responds to its location by satirizing the genetic manipulation of nature.

9. **Historical-Political.** The artists seeks to respond to, evoke or recover the history or political meaning of a place. For example, Shimon Attie's *Writing on the Wall Project* consisted of slide projections of pre-war photographs of Berlin's Jewish quarter onto the traces of the neighborhood today.

10. **Accidental or Pseudo-Accidental.** The artist discovers or gives the

impression that she discovers the site while wandering about. The site of the work is the result of a real or fictional process of exploration (Richard Long, Andy Goldsworthy).

11. **Phenomenological**. The artist seeks to exploit or enhance the inherent aesthetic qualities of the place as built space, landscape, or even weather, rather than to place something in the place as a point of focus (Robert Irwin, James Turrell, Walter de Maria's *The Lightning Field*).

12. **Entrenchment**. Works can become site-specific by virtue of tradition, such as the Mona Lisa sitting cozily behind her bullet-proof glass at the Louvre.

A list of site-specific qualities does not provide us with necessary and sufficient conditions for site-specificity. Instead, it suggests a rich array of critical questions that can be raised in all sorts of contexts where site-specificity seems important. Critics must be prepared to give reasons for believing works of art are site-specific and must be able to describe how they are site-specific. The critical repertoire is a list of reasons. From the perspective of the artist, it is a list of strategies. The list has more of a practical than taxonomic value. A taxonomic approach is problematic since works are often site-specific is several, vastly different ways. Rather than allowing us to create genres of site-specific art, the list will help the critic to ask which site-specific qualities have been deployed, and whether or how these site-specific aspects contribute to what the work is. Conversely, these critical questions can be asked by considering the work through the space as well: how does the fact that this work is now in this place effect one's sense of the place itself? The important point is to avoid merely invoking "site-specificity" as some vaguely progressive aesthetic goal and instead describe and evaluate it in any particular case.

While this pluralistic tack has the virtue of imparting complexity to the notion of site-specificity and accounting for the ways that sites influence the shape and meaning of works not normally thought to be site-specific, it can be argued that it also has the drawback of inflating the category of site-specificity to the point of losing its *historical* specificity. From the standpoint of the historian or theorist of the avant-garde, my account of site-specificity makes it a historically transcendent category of all art, divorced from its roots in the avant-garde of the Sixties and Seventies. This objection is understandable but not acceptable. As more artists adopt site-specific approaches and more institutions respond by inviting artists to transform their spaces, the term "site-specificity" has come to be used in increasingly diverse ways.[16] The genealogical roots of site-specificity are often obscured or nullified by the very kinds of institutional attention the work increasingly receives. Site-specificity as a tool of the institutional or materialist critique of art has been decentered by other, sometimes derivative, forms of site-specific art that engage their locations in a number of vastly different ways. It is this very diversity and new institutionalization that most threatens the "authentic" notion of site-specificity as institutional critique. In this light, the justification for the proposed trade of historical precision for analytical flexibility comes from the fact that the concept

of site-specificity is currently being stretched, de-historicized, rearticulated by artists.

More or Less Site-Specific

Of these possible senses of the term, "site-specific," some are clearly more profoundly "specific" than others. For example, taken by itself, the first, "intention," may not really be adequate at all. The fact that an artist claims to make site-specific art does not mean that the artist *succeeds* in making the work site-specific. At least in its more ambitious strains, site-specificity is like rendering a likeness: it's something that you have to pull off and you can fail in the attempt. Unfortunately, it is easier to tell if a rendering has succeeded for we have a better sense of what we are after. Yet, for critical accounts of site-specific works, such an intention can be an important piece of knowledge so I include it.[17]

At the other end, "entrenchment" may also appear inappropriate since it is not even a quality that an artist can create. Yet to deny the role of time and habit in the process of a work becoming intimately linked to a place is to deny the most common and perhaps most powerful way that works of art, especially architectural works, relate to their locations.

The ubiquity of entrenched site-specific works presents a sobering reminder about what makes for a powerful connection of art to place. The most profound connections between works of art and locations are those that accrue over time. The power of entrenchment reveals a certain arrogance in the current discourse of site-specificity. The champions of site-specificity are quick to criticize pedestal sculpture as "sutured off" from the environment and thus less powerfully engaged with its location. But in their haste to dismiss pedestal sculpture as rootless, they have missed the vital and important ways that pedestal sculptures often become linked to their locations. Many of these works come to be local landmarks, meeting places, sources of shade on hot summer afternoons, familiar faces on a walk home from the train, or points of nostalgic fixation for the departed native.

Yet, the affection of the inhabitant for the local landmark does not render the questions of avant-gardist site-specific practice moot. Instead, the banality of site-specificity requires us to clarify just what are the important questions. In the presentation of his theory of "conditional art," the artist Robert Irwin ups the ante by arguing that the real challenge of site-specificity lies in finding a way of bringing out some latent aesthetic value of the place instead of installing an art object that is simply appropriate for the site.[18] This approach implies a radical break with traditional artistic method and aesthetic perception. For Irwin, to genuinely respond to a place means that the artist must put aside concern with her own stylistic signature, with the evolution of her own *oeuvre* and consider any number of aspects of the place including not just scale and formal configuration but also weather, sound, and history. These and other such considerations should *entirely* determine, for Irwin, "whether the response should be monumental or ephemeral, aggressive or gentle, useful or useless, sculptural, architectural, or simply the planting of a

tree, or maybe doing nothing at all."[19]

How to account for the breadth of site-specific qualities while also recognizing that there may be a kind of art that is so deeply site-specific that it represents a radical departure in artistic practice? Following a suggestion by Stephanie Ross, we can understand the possibilities of site-specificity as lying on a continuum.[20] We can speak of strongly or weakly site-specific works, that is, works tightly bound to their sites in terms of genesis, meaning, and experience and those which are, to one degree or another, less tightly bound. In this way, it becomes possible to account for why some easel paintings or pedestal sculptures—by intention or tradition—reflect their sites of display while recognizing that other—and not necessarily more recent—art forms address the issue more ambitiously and self-consciously. Thus, a monumental sculptural commission like a Henry Moore may be thought of as site-specific in that its dimensions may have been determined in consideration of its site. Still more simply, pedestal sculpture, by tradition, has a symbiotic relationship to the Plazas and Greens on which they are invariably sited; artists who make these sculptures inevitably have an idea of "public space" in the back of their mind. However, this symbiotic site-specificity is considerably less site-specific than a thoroughgoing response to the political, historical or aesthetic quality of a place through which the site itself becomes the content of the work.

Of course, it is possible that a conventional easel painting may reflect a site in a similarly responsive, sensitive, way. Indeed, this is commonly what landscape painters claim to be doing. Landscape paintings are site-generated in almost every important sense of the term. However, a landscape painting cannot be thought of as site-specific unless it remains with the scene that was painted and is viewed along with the scene. Site-specificity means that the work is in and for the place; strong site-specificity adds to this the fact that the work is in some sense about the place. We can represent these distinctions in a three-part schema:

1. about but not for place (*not* site-specific, for example, landscape painting)
2. for but not about place (weakly site-specific art)
3. for and about place (strongly site-specific art)

A weakly site-specific work is not necessarily a weak work of art. That is, a powerful work of art can be weakly site-specific. The issues of site-specificity are simply not a significant part of what the piece is about. Much easel painting is weakly site-specific in this sense. The lack of seriousness or depth to claims about site-specificity is not necessarily a problem. A work with weak site-specific qualities may speak to us at many other ultimately more important levels. Nor does a weakly site-specific work mean that it is badly site-specific or fails in its site-specific aspect. An artist may exploit the slightest possibilities of site-specificity (for instance, scale) so successfully that the piece comes off very well. Conversely, a strongly site-specific piece, profoundly immersed in its site, may still turn out to be lame as a work of art once we find ourselves distanced from the pieties of current fashion.

Essential Rootedness

The Philosophical Problem

On Crimp's view, in order for a work of site-specific art to function as an institutional critique of art, it must be what I have called "essentially rooted" in its location. But how are we to know whether a particular work is essentially rooted? It is commonly held that, *by definition*, a work of site-specific art is essentially rooted in its location. In site-specific works, location is typically thought to be an *essential* characteristic of the work. On some views, the work of art is no longer just the physical object introduced into the space by the artist but includes the place itself. Conversely as well, site-specific art is thought to inhere in its setting, becoming an essential part of the place. Through the work's presence, the place is transformed not just physically but in how we experience it and what it means. In all, the claim for site-specific work is usually that *this* work is for *this* place and no other. Site-specific art cannot exist and be appreciated for what it is anywhere else but where it is intended to be located. As Michael Archer puts it:

> Site-specificity implies neither simply that a work is to be found in a particular place, nor, quite, that it is that place. It means, rather, that what the work looks like and what it means is dependent in large part on the configuration of the space in which it is realized. In other words, if the same objects were arranged in the same way in another location, they would constitute a different work.[21]

The essential rootedness of site-specific art ought to be a troubling claim for not just for philosophers but also for curators and art historians. For, if applied retroactively to many works of art in museums for which the original site of display was crucial to their genesis (altarpieces, for example), then many of these works no longer exist! Of course, the notion that art "dies" when it enters the museum is a recurring theme in contemporary cultural criticism. The position is closely associated with Theodor Adorno, who famously remarked that "the museum and mausoleum are connected by more than phonetic association."[22] In the context of this widespread criticism of the museum, site-specific practices can be seen as last-ditch efforts to keep art alive by resisting the process of institutionalization. In so far as site-specificity implies essential rootedness, the consequent immobility of the work rules out its being transferred to a "final resting place" in the museum.

What is it about *Tilted Arc* or any site-specific work, for that matter, that makes this claim of essential rootedness possible? Was *Tilted Arc* essentially rooted in its site in a way that an altarpiece or a grand salon painting or a minimalist color field is not? Does site-specificity by itself imply essential rootedness, regardless of the way it is manifested in a particular work? Or, is Serra's assertion that moving *Titled Arc* is equivalent to destroying it a self-serving definitional *fiat*? Site can determine countless qualities of a painting but removal from the intended site of display, as in the case of numerous altarpieces now in museums, does not typically lead us to say that the works no longer exist. Granted, an important contextual element—the devotional setting and its attendant rituals—is now absent, but the

common intuition is that such works still exist. The justification for that intuition will emerge in the course of this examination of the supposed immobility of site-specific art.

The Relocation Test

What kind, or what extent of site-specificity is sufficient for us to accept a claim that to move a work is to destroy it? There is probably no single, universal criterion to be applied here. But I think we can begin by asking ourselves, as a kind of thought-experiment, what it would be like to move a given work to another site. This "relocation test" can be a tool for determining whether claims of essential rootedness are plausible. From the Carnegie International to the Venice Biennial, works shipped from all over the world are subject to shifting architectural dimensions, lighting values, and other broadly environmental forces as well as those of local culture. But do such changes imply that the works cease to exist or change identity from one locale to the next? Just as these works should be thought of as surviving these changes, I think it is possible for many site-specific works held to be essentially rooted to survive relocation. In such cases, the claim of rootedness is mistaken.

Works survive re-location when they continue to function as basically the same work of art, that is, when they continue to give rise to the same experiences with the same inter-subjectively accessible meanings. So long as we can articulate what counts as the meaning of the work—and if this is not possible, then art criticism is not possible—then we should be able to perform a relocation test. (I suspect that controversies surrounding the relocation test will often be reducible to controversies in how we define the meaning of the work, i.e., critical controversies.)

On these terms, the essential rootedness of site-specific art lies in the fact that the work can only "make its meaning" in the place for which it was designed. We may be able to move the object. But away from its original site, the work cannot convey its meaning because it is cut loose from its determinate relation to the qualities of its location which "activate" the work. However, it is dogmatic to insist that a work planned for a definite site cannot convey its meaning in other sites. In other words, it is possible that other places with similar qualities can activate the work in similar ways. Thus, the possibility of relocating site-specific works depends on an alternative conception of the relation between the ontology of space and the meaning of the work. Typically, in discussions of site-specificity, it is assumed that the meaning of the work relies on qualities that define a particular place as unique. But this is not always the case. Many works are better thought of as site-type-specific instead of strictly site-specific because what they address is not a quality characteristic of a single place but rather of a *kind* of space or place. For instance, many works can be seen as region-specific rather than site-specific since they exploit qualities inherent in a region rather than a particular place. The *actual* location of the work is based on a host of other conditions ranging from property rights to the peripatetic course of the artist through the territory. Ex-

amples include many of the Earthworks of the Seventies in the Western desert, and the landscape-situated work of Goldsworthy and Long. Similarly, Robert Irwin's beautiful *Filigreed Line* on the campus of Wellesley might be appropriate for any number of lakeside grassy knolls, a common feature of campus and park landscapes in North America. Scandalous though it sounds, *Filigreed Line* could conceivably be relocated to the shore of the Harlem Meere in Central Park. The new location might not be optimal but the meaning of the work and the experience that it provokes would not necessarily be eclipsed. The piece would still be able to *function as a work of art* much in the way it does at Wellesley: as a response to light reflected in water and cutting through leaves of the trees that surround it. *There is no necessary connection between a work's being profoundly evocative of its site and the work's being essentially rooted in it.*

Likewise, if we are to accept Crimp's assertion that the real site-specificity of *Tilted Arc* lies in it's subversive function rather than its formal implication on the Javits Plaza, then I do not see how the work is at all essentially rooted. The huge, curving wall of Cor-Ten steel would likely subvert expectations for public art on any plaza on which it could physically fit, regardless of whether it fits as gracefully as it once did on the Javits Plaza. This is not to deny that *Tilted Arc* fulfills a political function, or that it is engaged with its site in political ways, but only that such aspects are not essentially rooted.

Ironically, the biggest barrier in imagining these hypothetical moves is often the works' formal dimensions, which Crimp sees as a relatively insignificant kind of site-specificity. It turns out that many site-specific pieces can't be moved not so much because their meaning will be lost but because they are unlikely to physically fit in many other places than the one for which they were built.

As for works made for devotional settings, the issue is more complicated. In the case of a Renaissance altarpiece, part of the difficulty lies in the fact that it is unclear whether our problem lies in the fact that we moved the work to a new location, or the fact that the art was made 400 years ago for and by very different people. In such cases, the museumification of art belongs to a still more extensive cultural shift whose interpretive problems are legion. Relocation to a museum may very well be the least of our problems. But what if the work of devotional art, say, an altarpiece, was made by a contemporary artist? When such a work is removed from its religious setting, it is no longer playing a role in the life of the worshipper. But the recontextualization of the work in a museum does not eliminate religious content and does not eliminate the possibility of experiencing the pictures religiously. In its new location, the altarpiece still retains much of its previous meaning and spiritual value. Thus, it is not for the sake of art that such moves are to be lamented. Rather, if we are to regret them at all, it is because the works are irreplaceable and their removal impoverishes devotional practice.

It is important to note that if, upon performing the relocation test, we determine the work can be moved, it doesn't follow that the work may be moved. There are other factors that should be weighed when considering the relocation of site-specific work. Would the move violate the moral rights of the artist based upon legitimate expectations of the work remaining in a particular place? Does the

convention of the immobility of public art commissions have other values less closely related to art-theoretical issues? What kind of precedence would this particular move set? How would it effect the concerned communities? These are important legal and moral concerns that cannot be adequately dealt with through art theory alone.

Conclusion

These considerations require us to re-think the role of place in site-specific art. *Places are singular virtually by definition but singularity is not their only quality. Those aspects of the place which constitute its singularity may not be the most relevant for a work of art made for the place.* Instead of thinking of places as absolutely singular, it may be more appropriate to think of "generic classes of spaces" as does the sculptor, Carl Andre: "inside gallery spaces, inside private dwelling spaces, inside museum spaces, inside large public spaces, and outside spaces of various kinds."[23] Andre's list may be too generic for many contemporary concerns but more concrete categories are possible: desert mesa, New England woodlands, English pasture, playing fields, plazas, auditoria, bathrooms. Crimp's mistaken ontology of place leads him to wrongly chide Andre for his "failure to see the singularity of the 'generic classes of spaces.'" But Crimp is compelled to assume the absolute singularity of place because he holds that resistance to the commodification of art is one of the prime goals of contemporary artistic practice. Without this absolute site-specificity, art is movable, saleable, whereby it is reducible to a commodity, a luxury good for the rich. Essential rootedness implies an impossibility of exchange, a uselessness to the system of art market speculation and private property at the core of modern bourgeois egoism, and presumably, many of our social and cultural problems. I have not addressed the overall cogency of this version of the institutional critique of art. However, we can now say that it is not possible for adherents to the institutional critique of art view to assume that site-specificity by itself achieves the immobility warranted by the theory. Finally, due to the political significance attached to it, the immobility of the site-specific work has received a degree of attention disproportionate with its role in artistic practice. Site-specificity denotes an increasingly complex set of practices requiring of critics a richer repertoire of critical categories.

Notes

1 Special thanks to Amy Baehr and Stephanie Ross for commenting on drafts of this paper.

2 I have in mind the vast literature on art institutions, economic and material culture since the publication of Francis Haskell's *Patrons and Painters: A Study in the Relations between Italian Art and Society in the Age of the Baroque*, (1963) (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1980). In terms of contemporary art, Brian O'Doherty presents a compelling account of the role of the modern gallery in the evolution of contemporary art. See *Inside the White Cube: The Ideology of the Gallery Space*, (1976) (San Francisco: The Lapis Press, 1986).

3 Rosalind Krauss, "Sculpture in the Expanded Field," *The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on*

Post-Modern Culture, ed. Hal Foster (Port Townsend, Washington: Bay Press, 1983), 31-42.

4 "To remove *Tilted Arc*, therefore, is to destroy it." Richard Serra, "Statement in Support of *Tilted Arc*," *The Destruction of Tilted Arc: Documents*, ed. Clara Weyergraf-Serra and Martha Buskirk (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1991), 67.

5 *Ibid.*, 65.

6 Douglas Crimp "Redefining Site-Specificity," ***On the Museum's Ruins***, (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1993), 150-186.

7 *Ibid.*, 155.

8 *Ibid.*, 180.

9 *Ibid.*

10 Richard Serra, "*Tilted Arc* Destroyed," *Writings Interviews*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 202. In an interview with Crimp, Serra repeatedly side-steps Crimp's attempts to have him endorse the subversionist view of his work, only to accede to them at the end. "Richard Serra's Urban Sculpture: An Interview with Douglas Crimp" (1980), *Writings Interviews*, 123-39.

11 David Clarke, "The Gaze and the Glance: Competing Understandings of Visuality in the Theory and Practice of Late Modernist Art," *Art History*, 15 (March 1992): 89.

12 Robert Irwin, "Introduction," *Being and Circumstance: Notes Toward a Conditional Art*, ed. Lawrence Weschler, (Larkspur Landing, California: The Lapis Press, 1985), 26-27. For Irwin and Serra, site-adjusted and site-specific are mutually exclusive, but , in many cases, what counts as adjusting one's work to a site can be seen as a kind of site-specificity in so far as adjustment informs how the work appears.

13 Crimp, "Redefining Site-Specificity," 154-55.

14 As observed by Michael North, "The Public as Sculpture," *Critical Inquiry*, 16, no. 4 (Summer, 1990): 860-879.

15 Anastasi's exhibition owes its place in recent art history to O'Doherty's analysis of it. See *Inside the White Cube*, 13-34. For an indexical interpretation of the exhibition, see Eileen Neff, "Anastasi's Presence," *William Anastasi: A Retrospective, 1960-1995*, (Philadelphia: Moore College of Art, 1995), 4-22. See also Rosalind E. Krauss, "Notes on the Index," *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths*, (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1985), 196-219.

16 Miwon Kwon, "On Site-Specificity," Public Lecture, Whitney Museum of Art, April, 1995.

17 "Intention" is the only member of the list that, by itself, is not sufficient for site-specificity.

18 Irwin presents a four-part schema in which the term "site-specific" is just one option, in other words, a species of site-related art rather than the genus, as I am using the term in this essay. Irwin seeks to de-center site-specificity by introducing terms like "site-adjusted" and "site-generated" art. My terminological choice in this essay is based upon current art world usage rather than Irwin's technical adaptation. Robert Irwin, "Introduction," *Being and Circumstance: Notes Toward a Conditional Art*, 26-27.

19 *Ibid.*, 27.

20 Stephanie Ross, "Gardens, Earthworks and Environmental Art," *Landscape, Natural Beauty and the Arts*, ed .Salim Kemal and Ivan Gaskell (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 158-182.

21 Michael Archer, "Site," ***Installation Art***, ed. Nicolas de Oliveira, Nicola Oxley and Michael Petry (London: Thames and London, 1994), 35.

22 Theodor W. Adorno, "Valéry Proust Museum," *Prisms*, (1955) trans. Samuel and Shierry Weber (Cambridge, MIT Press, 1981), 173-185.

23 Quoted in Phyllis Tuchman, "An Interview with Carl Andre," *Artforum* 7, no. 10 (June, 1970): 55. Cited by Crimp, "Redefining Site-Specificity," 155.

Factory Seconds:
Diane Arbus and the Imperfections in Mass Culture

Ariella Budick

Inside a cardboard box, in a back room of the Robert Miller Gallery in New York, there is an unpublished Diane Arbus photograph titled *Transvestite With a Picture of Marilyn Monroe, 1967.* It is a photograph of a man with plucked eyebrows, wearing only his underwear, posing cheek-to-cheek with a life-sized head shot of Marilyn Monroe. The face in the photograph, and the face in the photograph-within-the-photograph have the same come-hither pucker to their mouths, languorously half-closed eyes, and flirtatiously tilted heads. Marilyn and the man are both trying to seduce the viewer with their stylized hyper-femininity, and his adoring and self-mocking impersonation seems no less fake than the real thing. Taken together, the transvestite and the sexpot seem like parodies of each other.

This double portrait is a compendium of Arbus trademarks. The undressed cross-dresser is a stock character in her cast of subjects: shot backstage at a drag club or at home, the man in mid-transformation hovers between genders, between public image and private desires, between being costumed and unmasked. In the unpublished photograph, the line across his bare stomach where his pantyhose had been is part of the debris left from the construction of feminine allure. Marilyn is his blueprint: we are watching a sexual prototype in the process of being reproduced. The transvestite in Arbus's picture is piecing together an identity from the flotsam of mass culture.

The real subject of the photograph is neither Marilyn nor the man, but the relationship between them: the comic tension that derives from juxtaposing idol and idolater. Visually, this is a simple picture, starkly lit and crudely composed, but it is full of opposites straining to fuse: a man wants nothing so badly as to become a woman; his disheveled squalor aspires to the ultimate in glamour; a character on society's fringes compares himself to an American icon; and Arbus's art photograph comes face to face with its more crass, commercial cousin, the Hollywood glossy, and finds that they share some of the same concerns. In this photograph, Arbus refers not only to the real Marilyn—an elusive figure, in any case—but to Warhol's silkscreen variations of Marilyn, and thus to the translation of people into disembodied images by means of merchandising, mass production, and art.

In the past, critics have tended to discuss Diane Arbus as an expressionist who voices her own existential angst through the suffering and alienation of her subjects. All of her photographs can accordingly be de-coded as self-portraits,

designed to communicate the ambivalent mix of loathing and love she felt for herself and others. In this view she exists in a psychoanalytic twilight world, out of time, in which her pictures carry a charge of pain that is both highly subjective and transhistorical. Even the most sophisticated writing on Arbus generally ignores the place and period that were the cradle for her work.[1] But Arbus's photographs comment trenchantly on the social and political realities of America in the 1950s and 60s, and particularly on the burgeoning of an all-subsuming mass culture. The homogenization of regional and personal identity through a system of mass production, distribution, and communication deeply troubled a broad group of critics and intellectuals. The question of cultural and social uniformity provoked commentary from writers and artists across the political spectrum, and, as the polemic escalated throughout the 1950s and early 60s, it established itself as perhaps *the* defining issue in postwar American society.

Starting in the 1950s, Americans finally enjoyed a spring-like prosperity after the wintery deprivations of depression and war. Those previously prevented from banqueting at the tables of wealth were becoming economically emancipated, now able to choose from a vast, overflowing, cornucopia of consumer goods. Instead of thriftily saving their earnings, these newly enfranchised workers were enjoined to spend freely, even profligately.[2] While undoubtedly liberating for those it embraced, this ethos of consumption proved deeply worrying to the intelligentsia, who saw the progressive homogenization of a mass society, and the increasing proliferation of mass culture, as its inevitable result.

In 1952, the *Partisan Review* convened a symposium, tellingly titled Our Country and Our Culture, to examine the possibilities for criticism in an overwhelmingly affirmative society. There was near universal agreement with the editorial statement, which decreed that: "mass culture not only weakens the position of the artist and the intellectual profoundly by separating him from his natural audience, but it also removes the mass of people from the kind of art which might express their human and aesthetic needs. Its tendency is to exclude everything which does not conform to popular norms, it creates and satisfies artificial appetites in the entire populace; it has grown into a major industry which converts culture to commodity."[3] The replies of the various respondents emphasized that mass culture could at once suppress dissent among its consumers, and jeopardize the very integrity of its creators.

This symposium's critique, coming from what was left of the Left in the 1950s, echoes the much more hardheaded position of Theodor Adorno, who, as a refugee from Nazism living in the United States in 1947, argued that industrial production and the exchange of commodities had produced an essentially lobotomized horde of cultural consumers. Liberal capitalism and the ideology of the free market had, he thought, reduced culture to the level of commodity. The technologies of mass production and distribution, which in order to operate effectively must eliminate difference, had devoured genuine regional and popular cultures while simultaneously co-opting any other forms of opposition to the rule of the commodity. Culture, like the means of production themselves, had become routinized, regulated, and administered as an agent of social control.[4] This system could only

lead to the complete obsolescence of the individual: "Now any person signifies only those attributes by which he can replace everybody else: he is interchangeable, a copy. As an individual he is completely expendable and utterly insignificant."[5] For Adorno, nothing could escape the standardization of commodity logic. In the aftermath of fascism, subjectivity itself, having fallen behind the state of technology, had been "liquidated."[6]

While Adorno and the *Partisan Review* crowd swiped at mass culture from the high-brow perspective of theoretical inquiry, best-selling authors attacked conformity at gut level. *The Organization Man* (1956), by William Whyte, Jr. has been called "the locus classicus of the 1950s critique of conformity."[7] Whyte, an editor at *Fortune* magazine, attacked corporate-induced uniformity, bemoaned the lost age of the aggressive entrepreneur, and advised his readers on how to cheat on those corporate personality tests used to determine the ability of potential employees to "fit in" and be "team players." He advised his readers to

> answer as if you were like everybody else is supposed to be. This is not always easy to figure out, of course... When in doubt, however, there are two general rules you can follow. (1) When asked for word associations or comments about the world, give the most conventional, run-of-the-mill pedestrian answers possible. (2) To settle on the most beneficial answer to any question, repeat to yourself:
>
> a) I loved my father and my mother, but my father a little bit more.
> b) I like things pretty well as they are.
> c) I never worry much about anything.
> d) I don't care for books or music much.
> e) I love my wife and children.
> f) I don't let them get in the way of company work.[8]

Commentators of various brow heights, on both left and right, saw the repressive threat represented by mass culture as comparable to Soviet totalitarianism in its assault on individuality. E.A. Mowrer reasoned that "If the American can be further bullied or bribed into renouncing his individuality, then it becomes hard to explain his hostility to governments based on mass anonymity."[9] Louis Kronenberger expressed a similar sentiment in the *Partisan Review* symposium: "in the exact same way that we oppose regimentations of thought on political grounds, we must oppose regimentation of taste on cultural ones."[10] Kronenberger sees taste as crucial in the formation of individual identity—essential for self-definition. Regulation of taste was tantamount to thought control.

Kronenberger's remark indicates one of the few paths of resistance open to critics of mass culture. In a postwar America where democratic principles could no longer be questioned, dissent shifted from the political arena to the less charged realm of taste. The aesthetic emphasis on consumption presented a politically safe and intellectually satisfying way for critics and artists to exert some residual influence.[11]

In 1950, David Riesman observed that "the taste of the most advanced

sections of the population is ever more rapidly diffused—perhaps *Life* magazine is the most striking agent in this process—to strata formerly excluded from all but the most primitive exercises in taste, who are now taught to discriminate between varieties of modern architecture, modern furniture, and modern art."[12]

In the politics of taste, a preference for modern art and architecture illustrated a certain level of enlightenment and signified a degree of resistance. This idea of modernism as a point of dialectical opposition to mass culture ultimately derives from Adorno, who considered it the only antidote to the poisons of the culture industry. For Adorno and other intellectuals like Clement Greenberg, Modernist high art represented the antitheses of kitsch, the saving remnant, the only hope for the preservation of the individual in the face of totalitarianism. Historically, modernism had evolved from the 19th century as a reaction to the growth of mass culture, and had always presented an alternative to it. Artists therefore had to find their bearings between the twin poles of Modernism and mass culture; distance from one implied closeness to the other.

Diane Arbus sets herself against the incursions of mass culture in various ways. She consistently concerns herself with individuality and its survival, documenting the often pathetic attempts by her subjects to piece together identities out of cultural fragments and detritus. Sometimes she focused on the individual's irreducibility, choosing as subjects people who, because of certain mental or physical peculiarities, do not conform to societal norms. In many of her photographs of celebrities, particularly her pictures of Mae West, Arbus subverts mass media icons at the source, exposing the individual beneath the mythology, transforming the commodified personality back into a person. At the same time, she often seems to equivocate over the possibilities for individuality: how can the individual form an identity except through consumption? Isn't he or she therefore simply the sum of the various ready-made personas available in the marketplace for immediate purchase?

In her photographs, Arbus clearly registers these ambiguities, but never muddies her focus or shifts it away from the plight of the individual. In her formal practice as well, Arbus negotiates a position with regard to modernist photography from which she can at once articulate her critique of mass culture without succumbing completely to the male-dominated domain of Modernism. This position mirrored, to a certain extent, her ambiguous role as both critic of and full-scale participant in mass culture. To support herself as a photographer, Arbus published her pictures in various mass-market magazines, including *Harper's Bazaar, The New York Times Magazine, Esquire, Show,* and *New York Magazine.* Many of her most famous art photographs were originally intended for these same mass media outlets that gradually gnawed away at the individuality she so tried to protect. Arbus resolved this ambiguity by attacking mass culture from within, using her experience as a fashion photographer and her position as an insider to photograph American totems and fetishes against the grain.

Given this interest in the idiosyncratic, it follows that Arbus would dig beneath the smooth surfaces of the faces and lives of her subjects—whether celebrities or housewives—to reveal the jagged edges that inevitably deform every one

of us. Georges Bataille pointed out that a composite image of the typical face, made up of the morphing of 20 average faces, is a perfectly proportioned thing of Praxitelian beauty; it follows that the *common denominator* itself provides a kind of platonic ideal. He stipulates, however, that "each individual form escapes this common measure and is, to a certain degree, a monster."[13] Arbus's photographs, whether in magazines or museums, engage with the monstrosity of each individual life.

Arbus photographed a number of freaks including a group of Russian midget friends, a Mexican dwarf, a Jewish giant, and a hermaphrodite. For these people, individuality is determined at the level of biology; they cannot under any circumstances conform. Yet even here, Arbus strikes a note of ambiguity: these people are finally—like all other Americans—consumers, whose self-definition still involves the exercise of taste.

Even in her titles, Arbus begins to suggest that individuality begins at the level of experience rather than biology. The deadpan title *Russian Midget Friends in a Living Room on 100th Street, N.Y.C., 1963*, gives equal emphasis to each of her subjects' various characteristics: the neighborhood they live in assumes a parity of significance with their status as midgets.

The photograph shows the three figures seated in one of the high-ceilinged rooms typical of pre-war New York buildings. Though small, the midgets assume a monumentality out of proportion to their actual size. They wear the kinds of clothes one would expect of older immigrants to this country: the man is fastidiously dressed in button-down shirt, dark-rimmed glasses and heavy dark shoes, while the women, their print dresses hidden by aprons and their feet encased in orthopedic shoes and slippers, look appropriately dowdy. Yet the attire makes no concessions to their minuscule size. Their choice of clothing, meticulously documented by Arbus, indicates the substance of their background and class; its very ordinariness clashes with the extraordinary evidence of their deformity.

The midgets are surrounded by a host of objects cluttering the surfaces around them: a kitschy lamp, whose base, a cute animal of indeterminate species, oddly resembles the midget seated directly below it; one of those water-filled glass globes that snow inside when shaken, plants growing out of Breakstone's butter containers; photographs stuck haphazardly into a mirror, piles of unknowable stuff on the floor. These homely objects speak to the accumulated experience of a person's life. On the surface Arbus seems to credit physical trauma with producing an absolute individuality, but her argument is much more complex than that. Individuality, for her, consists of a kind of melding of what we bring to life, our raw materials, with the substance and flotsam of the culture which surrounds us. A person can no more be reduced to an accident of birth than to a mass-produced clone. People, she shows, adapt themselves to circumstances and adopt elements of their milieu in ways that indicate a kind of subjectivity.

Arbus demonstrates this subjectivity by situating the midgets in an environment of their own construction, instead of the carnival backdrop one might expect. In the conventional—one might say mass cultural—context of the sideshow, freaks are nothing more than commodities, objects of the collective gaze.

Arbus avoids the stale iconography of the circus setting with its overheated atmosphere of decadence redolent of Toulouse-Lautrec. By removing her subjects from this context, by juxtaposing their marvelous physiognomies with the mundanity of ordinary life, she restores to them a subjectivity previously denied—and it is this that gives the photograph its *frisson*. At the same time, these midgets wish to be seen as far more normal than they actually *are*, and Arbus points up what she called "the gap between intention and effect." The clashing objectives of subject and photographer—one's desire to mask difference and the other's to expose it—heightens the impact of these midgets' particularity.

Arbus addresses the clash of conformity with individuality differently in her photograph of two Coney Island friends sporting identical, ready-to-wear-bikinis. The two women stand next to each other, roughly symmetrical in their pose with respect to the frame. But the bold, irregular pattern of their suits undercuts bilateral symmetry in favor of a kind of syncopated repetition: striped breast—flesh—black—pause—repeat. Instead of equivalent right and left halves divided along a central axis, the effect is of a series of endlessly repeating parts never adding up to a single whole: industrial-style reproduction substitutes for a sense of organic completion. Yet despite the mass-engineered uniformity implied by the swimsuits, the women themselves cannot be traced to a single prototype. Physically and temperamentally they remain quite different from each other. If anything, the sameness of their clothing exaggerates the discrepancies between them, in much the same way identical bridesmaid dresses highlight, rather than suppress, real differences in body and facial type. Hair, facial expression—physiognomy itself—all insist upon the uniqueness of the individual against the forces of conformity. Their idiosyncracy militates against industrial capitalism's implied inner logic, which dictates that goods are not *for* individuals, but rather that we are what we buy; industry produces cultural identity, which can be exchanged at will.[14]

In Arbus's group portraits of New Jersey twins and triplets, the forces of mass production seem to have taken another step in their clamp-down on individuality. The two photographs seem to imply that individuals, like industrial products, can be literally reproduced. In both cases, Arbus positions the siblings side by side, their bodies overlapping at the arms. The sisters wear identical outfits, with large contrasting dark and white areas juxtaposed. The triplets sit in a room with three indistinguishable beds, each covered by a white counterpane. Both groups of girls, with their identical faces, haircuts, and clothing, resemble the output of an assembly line. In her posing of the sisters in just this way, calling to mind advertisements for Doublemint gum (which commodify the very phenomenon of identical twins), Arbus shows how genes and the mass market conspire to wipe out individuality. The multiples serve as a kind of metaphor, an exaggeration of the plight of the individual in commodity culture.

A closer look however reveals the full complexity of the metaphor, as it becomes clear that subtle distinctions of character and expression differentiate the siblings. One of the twins opens her eyes wide as she smiles serenely at the camera, while the other's heavy-lidded gaze indicates a somewhat more dyspeptic sensibility. Each of the three triplets communicates, through bodily and facial posture, a

substantially different outlook. The one on the left poses formally, her body erect (which makes her seem larger), one genteel hand resting in the other. Her face has an inexpressive, adult cast, and she looks older than the others—she alone wears jewelry. And the prim clothing suits her posture best. The central sister appears more relaxed, sitting casually, her lips graced with the slightest shadow of a vaguely sardonic smile. The sister on the far right has dark, unhappy, eyes, both larger and more recessed than her siblings. Her clenched lips turn downward in a frown, and as the thinnest of the sisters, she seems much slighter—younger.

It is impossible to ignore the unarguable fact of the twins' and triplets' morphological identity—they have the same genes, as well as the same parents and even the same culture. So individuality, if it exists at all, must be the sum of physiology and personal experience. In the face of the mass market's unremitting pressure to conform, in opposition to the dictates of biological symmetry, subjectivity persists.

Arbus's images of multiple, repetitive, figures also function as a metaphor for the medium of photography itself, the quintessential "work of art in the age of mechanical reproduction." Just as technology had completely transformed life since World War II, it had an equally strong impact on the art-making process. Walter Benjamin noted that the invasion of the art object by technology found its ultimate fulfillment in photography. In the same way that Arbus's images of "multiples" raise questions about individual authenticity, they bring up the issue of genuineness with regard to the original work of art. For example: does the duplication inherent in the photographic process negate a picture's integrity as a single, authentic work? Doesn't the commodification of the work of art roughly correspond to the looming commodification of the individual, as the reference to the Doublemint twins suggests? The double is an artistic motif that represents a challenge to individual identity, signifying, as Freud put it, a "dividing and interchanging of the self."[15] In Arbus, as in Freud, the doubled subject—the *Doppelgänger*—undermines the perception of individuality, but Arbus also draws a clear parallel between the individual and the photographic print, leaving the implications about the essence of both ambiguous.

Andy Warhol, a rough contemporary of Arbus's, demonstrated a similar interest in discovering the trace of the commodity in art and life, and his silk-screen serial portraits resemble Arbus's experiments with doubles and triples.[16] Just as Arbus had developed her trade in the fashion industry, Warhol's background lay in graphic design and advertising, and he used this experience in commercial art as a basis for his practice. He deliberately employed the technology of mass production, revealing in the process the commodity character of contemporary art.[17] Warhol reproduced reproductions of pop-cultural icons, using mechanical means and repeating forms; his work suggests that the notion of authenticity is an empty concept, as outmoded as individuality itself. In a 1963 interview with G.R. Swenson, Warhol explained:

> Someone said that Brecht wanted everybody to think alike. I want everybody to think alike. But Brecht wanted to do it through Commu-

> nism, in a way. Russia is doing it under Government: it's happening here all by itself without being under a strict government; so if it's working without trying, why can't it work without being Communist? Everybody looks alike and acts alike, and we're getting more and more that way. I think everybody should be a machine. I think everybody should be like everybody.[18]

In his deadpan, tongue-in-cheek way, Warhol demonstrates his awareness of the theory that advertising and media tend to smooth out the edges of idiosyncrasy and harmonize the dissonances of separate selves. Like Arbus, he is clearly tuned in to the raging debate over mass culture and the rhetoric (both popular and highbrow) proclaiming it the progenitor of total conformity. For Warhol, the media assault breeds the same kind of thought control prevalent in the Soviet Union: the conversion of the individual into an automaton.

Like his art, Warhol's statement seems on the surface to promote conformity, but both might equally be read as ironic commentary on the contemporary scene. Warhol and Arbus explore the same terrain: the absurdities and contradictions of authenticity in a world of copies, and both artists take the mythology of Marilyn Monroe as a point of departure. Warhol enlarges her into a symbol of commodified sex and stardom, a stand-in for the fate of the individual—person or painting—in a mass mediated world. Arbus looks at how Hollywood icons affect the construction of a person's identity.

Arbus's photograph *Nudist Lady Wearing Swan Sunglasses, Pa.*[19] shows a Rubenesque bleached blonde in classic Hollywood sex-pot contrapposto. Her not inconsiderable weight rests on her right, slingback-clad foot, while her left leg curves seductively at the front—knees together, ankles apart. Her left hand teasingly reposes on her jutting, rounded hip, and her shoulders are thrown back to completely expose her chest. She wears dark, winged, baroque sunglasses. Even without the benefit of costuming, she is a Marilyn look-alike.

The title informs us that the woman is a nudist—a principled rejector of the affectations of clothing in favor of the body's natural beauty. She has shunned the mass-produced world, retreating to a prelapsarian Eden untainted by technology. But the residue of mass culture trespasses even in this exhibitionist's paradise. Its intrusions can be felt at the level of the inviting pose, the way the nudist (consciously or not) mimes the gestures of the pinned-up movie star. Within the strict limits imposed by the colony, she constructs, through grooming, adornment and body language, a crude rendering of Hollywood glamour.

Mass culture thus circumvents the naked body's privileged status as the irreducible locus of individuality.[20] It engages at the most intimate level, coating the exposed body with a palpable armor, replacing ego with attitude and person with persona. But even here, Arbus manages to reinsert a fragile subjectivity, focusing unflinchingly on the nudist's failure to be live up to her prototype. Mercilessly, Arbus bears this one body's imperfections and asymmetries: one breast slightly larger than another, a flap of sagging skin at the armpit, rows of two-toned teeth. Her flash picks up the skin's every pucker, bump, ripple, and crease. She deliber-

ately exposes areas to light that any photographer to the stars would surely leave in shadow or airbrush out. She concentrates on the divergence between the desired identity and what the unrelenting camera sees. In this small space lies the kernel of subjectivity.

While the nudists attempt to retreat into a world untouched by the ravages of the marketplace, they must, like everyone else, negotiate its temptations. Only Arbus's pictures of mental retardates, taken just before her death, finally show what real separation from the world of mass culture would look like. More than the nudists, who simply exchange one form of signification for another, these people, cut off as they are, preserve their integrity. Their imperviousness to the seductions of the commodity is evident in the complete absence of tension within the photographs between "intention and effect," between the self assembled for the camera and what the camera in fact reveals. Here identity, located at the level of both culture and biology, is inalienable. But the cost of innocence is higher than most of us would want to pay.

In the same year she photographed the nudist "Marilyn," Arbus turned her critical lens upon Mae West, one of the great icons who had inspired generations of imitators. West told her: "I am the original Sex Symbol. The others are counterfeit."[21] In her 1965 feature for *Show* magazine on the star (for which she also composed the text), Arbus took her at her word, allowing the magazine's readers to see that the Hollywood prototype is as real as the rest of us.

Show published three photographs of West in her white satin bedroom, dressed in a white satin and lace negligée, bleached hair white against her shoulders. She is shown stretching next to her bed; in that same bed with one of her pet monkeys (an interesting commentary on the bedfellows of icons); and close-up, seated in a chair. In this last picture, Arbus unsparingly reveals West in all of her mortal lack of glamour. The text informs us that the actress' white carpeting is smeared with the droppings of her untrained monkeys, an apt metaphor for Arbus's soiling of a manufactured image. In the extraordinarily bright light of the rooms, West's skin looks as wrinkled as the fine fabrics shrouding her body. The furrows on her hand echo the satin pleats across her chest; the lines around her mouth and chin mimic the patterning of lace on her shoulders. The grotesquely adorned eyes, the only dark spot in the room, bear insect-like lashes that seem to crawl across her face. The artificial lightness and stiffness of her hair (almost certainly a wig), is exaggerated by dark, penciled-in eyebrows, just as the chipped and worn white paint of the chair exposes its dark wood core.

In this image of failure and decay, the most striking element is the artificiality, the futile attempt to paper over a sad reality with expensive but tawdry wrapping. Yet West simply tries to weave her mystique the way she always had, using grease paint and powder as warp and woof, adapting the techniques of artifice de rigueur for movie stars. West's appeal had rested upon a tension between affectation and reality, and the success of her persona demanded a certain suspension of disbelief. She had no pretensions to authenticity—the genuineness was all in the act itself. Now both sides of her—the authentic and the fake—have intensified, and their delicate balance no longer holds. West has aged, and the changes in her

body and eyes cannot be hidden. Meanwhile, the techniques she employs to stop the clock have coarsened. The gap between West's desired self and the one she presents to the camera has widened beyond repair. By focusing on her wrinkles and eccentricities, Arbus makes West both more and less authentic—the "real" Mae West is an icon, not a person. As in her photograph of midgets, Arbus transforms a self-proclaimed object—"the original," no less—back into a subject, a commodity (for what else is a movie star?) into a person. She conveys the desperation of someone who, like the rest of us, struggles to construct herself out of the fragments of myth. Only in this case, the myth is her own. Not surprisingly, West detested the photographs, and when they appeared in *Show* she had her lawyers threaten the magazine's publisher.[22] Arbus's sensationalistic photographs of Viva, an Andy Warhol superstar, also created a scandal when they appeared in *New York Magazine* in 1968. These de-mythologizing nudes similarly provoked threats of a lawsuit from their subject, who had subsequent bookings for *Vogue* abruptly canceled.[23] Clearly, it is difficult to reinstate the allure once it has been stripped away—and what use is the commodity without it?

Arbus's criticism of mass culture comes across as nostalgic, and her work, like Robert Frank's *The Americans*, Kerouac's *On the Road,* Nabokov's *Lolita*, many of Chuck Berry's songs, and James Agee's *A Death in the Family* has a vaguely elegiac cast to it. These artists all deal with the impact of mass culture on the individual psyche, and the symbols of mass culture loom threateningly large. Frank employs the recurring motif of the television set broadcasting to empty cafés and studios.[24] And in his stage directions for *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, Tennessee Williams underscores the ability of the mass media to soak into the very fabric of life:

> Against the wall space between two huge double doors upstage: a monumental monstrosity peculiar to our times, a *huge* console combination of radio-phonograph...TV set and Liquor cabinet...all in one piece...This piece of furniture (?!), this monument, is a very complete and compact little shrine to virtually all the comforts and illusions behind which we hide from such things as the characters in the play are faced with.[25]

Arbus's photograph of the unpeopled middle class living room in Levittown, is essentially a portrait of a television set. If the absent family assembles around this modern hearth, it is only to imbibe the words and jingles of "our sponsor." Another photograph of the same year (1963), *Retired Man and His Wife in a Nudist Camp one Morning, N.J.* shows a couple—both naked—sitting in the sun-filled living room of their suburban-style home. As with the photograph of the midgets, the disconcerting aspect here lies in the odd juxtaposition between the utter conventionality of the room itself, and the unlovely bodies of its inhabitants. In the center of the image stands the television. The top, like the typical mantle above a fireplace, supports some framed pictures, one of which appears to be a photo of the seated matron herself—also nude: family snapshots with a twist. Even

in this nudist retreat, television occupies the place of honor, dictating orthodoxy to the unconventional.[26]

In her 1963 Guggenheim application, Diane Arbus wrote that she wanted to explore "American rites and customs, contests, festivals...These are our symptoms and our monuments. I want to gather them like somebody's grandmother putting up preserves because they will have been so beautiful. I want to save these things, for what is ceremonious and curious and commonplace will be legendary."[27]

Arbus wanted to record for posterity a rapidly vanishing American culture, as Atget had painstakingly documented a fugitive Paris.[28] Her search for evidence brought her to the people and places of old New York, the leftovers and eccentrics who resisted, as much as they could, the influx of modern mass culture. She haunted the Coney Island boardwalk, the decaying movie theaters along 42nd street, Roseland Dance Palace, the morgue at Bellevue. Her favorite hangout, Hubert's Freak Museum, famous home of Prof. Heckler and His Trained Fleas, operated for 40 years at the corner of Broadway and 42nd before it finally closed in 1965. In an obituary for Hubert's she wrote:

> Medical Science being what it is they don't hardly make 'em like that anymore and the laws prevent pretending or people are rich enough nowadays to hide their relatives away instead of selling them to the Carnival like they used to. I told you not to cry. If you feel like it you can go on over to Hubert's tonight, anyway. The price is back to a dime like it was in the beginning...No one is there except the pictures on the walls of all the people who used to be there. As Mr. Schaefer the owner points out: prices being what they are these days, at a dime, even if you just want to go to the bathroom it's worth it.[29]

Arbus's photographs of freaks are like those pictures on the walls, a testament to the disappearing worlds of carnival, sideshow, and traveling circus, entertainments made obsolete by a squeamish and sanitized mass culture.

An important influence on Arbus was the journalist Joseph Mitchell, who wrote a series of essays on unusual people and places for the *New Yorker* in the early forties, later collected in book form as *McSorley's Wonderful Saloon*. These essays, like a literary equivalent to Atget, transcribe a New York that was fading even as Mitchell was describing it, a city of ghosts and oddities. He writes with mixed sadness and humor about the Fulton Street Market, Olga the Bearded Lady, the City's forgotten waterfront, Maizie the guardian angel of Bowery drunks, the history of the New York "Beefsteak," a place called "Captain Charlie's Private Museum for Intelligent People," and a street preacher whose main audience consists of elderly women and spinsters.[30] Mitchell's sensibility, his yeasty brew of nostalgia, curiosity and dark humor, inspired Arbus to contact him at his *New Yorker* office in 1960. She was anxious to track down and photograph some of his subjects, "people who were anomalies, who were quixotic, who believed in the impossible, who made their mark on themselves."[31]

Arbus was not, however, interested in dissidence and eccentricity that became a new standard of conformity. For example, in the overheated summer of 1967, Arbus went to San Francisco's Haight-Ashbury, nucleus of flower power and the geographical heart of the counter-culture. She wandered throughout the neighborhood for several days, looking at the stoned hippies and other pilgrims to the Summer of Love, but had no patience with this new generation of freaks or their lifestyle, which she found degrading and commercialized. The media—T.V. cameras, *Life* and *Look*—turned out in full force to report on the new youth phenomenon, and *Newsweek* called to offer her a large spread on Hippies. She refused and instead went to North Beach to take pictures of a topless dancer.[32]

Upon returning from a 1969 trip to London where she was assigned to photograph mods and rockers, Arbus complained to her friend John Putnam: "There were no more freaks in England. Where are the freaks?"[33] She appears to have had little patience with the institutionalized nature of the youth rebellion, its character as a mass culture phenomenon. She rejected this new brand of conformity in favor of life at the old-fashioned margins: the carnival denizen, the oddball, the nudist, the practitioner of the dying art of burlesque. She mourned the steady attrition of an older, perhaps more romantic, kind of counter-culture, where eccentrics were by definition unique, and non-conformity a more individual affair.

Pop Art also evinces a powerful strain of nostalgia: Warhol's elegiac portraits of the deceased Marilyn as a pitiful victim of the mass media's poisonous embrace; Lichtenstein's reworkings of old comic books and his streamlined *Modern* works of 1965-67 which summon up the forms of the thirties as symbols of a naive modernist ideal. Lawrence Alloway describes Lichtenstein as an archeologist of his own life and place, resurrecting an antique period to explore both its charming ingenuousness and contemporary relevance.[34] Warhol, Lichtenstein and Arbus look fondly backwards, but not very far: to an era just before their slick, banal, and utterly commercialized present. Products like the Campbell's soup can belonged to an earlier, more innocent mass cultural moment, and bore a slight patina of age. The same is true of the carnival side show, which Arbus herself recognized as exploitative and cruel, yet which nevertheless carried on an unbroken rapport with the past.[35]

Arbus's similarities to certain Pop artists raises the question of her relationship to Modernism, which unlike Pop constructed itself in direct opposition to mass culture. What is Arbus's place, if any, in the Modernist continuum? One might expect that as an enemy of commodified culture, Arbus would embrace Modernism's alternative as an attractive critical vantage point. Yet Modernism, or at least the Greenbergian variant that exerted so much influence in the 50s and 60s, insisted upon a discrete distance between art and meaning in any concrete sense, and in any case was almost by definition a resolutely masculine domain. John Szarkowski, curator of photography at the Museum of Modern Art and a Modernist in the Greenberg mold, claimed that photographs refer only to each other, and ignored their ties to history and culture outside the rarefied realm of art.[36] Szarkowski articulated his conception of the photographer's task as "to push it, to advance it—the tradition, the line, the sense of what is possible. The general, generic problem

of what is this funny medium and what you can do with it and what are its potentials."[37] The Modernist avoids mass culture through a kind of ritual immersion in the medium itself. For Szarkowski, Garry Winogrand (the consummate street photographer) is "the most outrageously thoroughgoing formalist... What he is trying to figure out is what that machine will do by putting it to the most extreme tests under the greatest possible pressure."[38] Szarkowski pointed to the role of the street in Friedlander's work as a laboratory for formal experimentation with reflection and multiple surfaces.

Jonathan Green, historian of post-war American photography, explains Szarkowski and Winogrand's credo as a "belief that a photographer whose intention is meaning rather than description will ultimately be defeated by the process. Their position," Green elaborates, "is anti-meaning."[39] But Arbus's vision cannot in any way be described in these terms. As we have seen, her work deeply engages with some of the most controversial political and cultural issues of the time.

As Andreas Huyssen has pointed out in his essay "Mass Culture as Woman," Modernism had from the beginning constituted itself as the authentic, masculine alternative to mass culture's femininity, a loaded dichotomy which only increased in potency as time passed.[40] Given the masculine connotations of Modernism (not to mention the sex of most of its practitioners, especially in photography), it was difficult, and not necessarily even desirable, for female artists like Arbus to gain entry. Walter Silver, a documentary photographer and friend of Arbus's, describes evenings of coffee drinking at the Limelight, a village hangout for photographers like Weegee, Robert Frank, and Louis Faurer: "We'd all sit together at a big table and Diane would sit with us. She'd never say a word—she'd just listen and then suddenly you'd look up and she'd be gone. She was the only woman who was ever in our little group."[41]

A silent female presence in a world of men, Arbus adopted a half-way position, appropriating certain aspects of Modernism and rejecting others. She created a style that at once accommodated her distaste for mass culture and her need to comment meaningfully upon it, that was simultaneously authentic and commercial, and that allowed her an autonomous femininity in a male-dominated field.

Arbus's directorial approach—posing subjects and arranging settings—sharply distinguishes her from Friedlander, Winogrand, and the established modernist tradition of straight photography. What gives straight—vs. manipulated—photography its claim to authenticity, its purity, is the presumed spontaneity of the image—the idea that the photographer serendipitously captures a fleeting fragment of truth. If purity of medium was the Holy Grail of Modernism, and the medium of photography was reality, then the goal of producing an unmanipulated snapshot acquired a powerful theoretical rational. While her male contemporaries prowled the streets of New York hunting for the "decisive moment" to snap the shutter, Arbus disarmingly cajoled her way into the bedrooms of her subjects, persuading them to pose for hours at a time until she had exactly what she wanted.[42]

Arbus's years of fashion work had provided her with a stylist's skills: while her husband actually shot and developed the pictures, she choreographed them—set the scene, acquired the props, chose and posed the models.[43] Designing

her own photographs later therefore came naturally to her. They show a studied intentionality, a carefully calculated effect of static, monumental, symmetry. Critics of the 1967 "New Documents" show at MoMA, which presented her work along with Winogrand's and Friedlander's, took note of its carefully contrived quality: Max Kozloff commented upon its "hieratic freezing" of the motif, and how it "leans deliberately and unashamedly toward the monumental."[44] Jacob Deschin of *The New York Times*, pointed out that the unusually "static and haunting" character of Arbus's work necessitated its placement in a separate room, while her [male] colleagues, who treated people in a much more "familiar and natural," even "casual," manner were paired off in an adjoining gallery.[45]

Directorial photography has traditionally served a commercial function; advertising, fashion, and pornography all rely upon preconceived and carefully constructed scenarios for their impact, their power to manipulate. For modernists, this connection with commerce has implicated the approach itself, rendering it guilty by association. They cannot permit the purity of their work to be compromised by a tainted formula.[46] Garry Winogrand, who throughout the 1950s and into the 60s had worked in advertising and photojournalism, distrusted the "manipulative" aspects of both.[47] John Szarkowski, in *Figments from the Real World,* informs us that at a certain point, Winogrand "consciously gave up commercial assignments" (presumably as soon as he could afford to financially). In any case, Szarkowski implies, the firm line Winogrand drew between art and commerce ensured that "after about 1960, the work for which he is known was done for himself, generally without any idea of where, or if, a broader audience might exist."[48] In 1967, the year of the "New Documents" exhibition, Szarkowski wrote: "It can be reported *without prejudice* that many of today's best photographers are fundamentally bored with the mass media and do not view it as a creative opportunity...Their livelihoods are made according to the standards set by magazines and agencies; their serious work is done on weekends and between assignments [emphasis mine]."[49] Szarkowski's evident need to disclaim all prejudice winds up calling attention to his modernist stake in segregating art from commerce.

But Arbus, as we have seen, embraces the poses and iconography of commercial photography to disassemble the constructions of mass culture, to analyze its operation on individual identity. She did not distinguish between high and low outlets for her work and many of the photographs originally taken for magazine assignments eventually resurfaced in her 1972 MoMA retrospective.[50] Often, as with her nudists or her images of families, she would try to get magazines to support a project she was already pursuing on her own. A magazine assignment not only assured financial remuneration but could guarantee access to people who would otherwise be off-limits. She always tried to make her relationships with magazines serve her own ends as a photographer.[51]

The pictures themselves retained their subversive value regardless of the context. They provoked museum visitors into spitting on them, subjects into threatening lawsuits, and magazine readers into canceling subscriptions. Norman Mailer, after seeing the photographs Arbus took of him in 1963, reportedly exclaimed: "Giving a camera to Diane Arbus is like putting a live grenade in the hands of a

child."[52] She clearly did not feel compelled by circumstance to limit her personal vision.[53]

Like certain female Postmodernists of the 1980's, Arbus's ability to coexist with, and even to make use of, the mass media without compromising her artistic integrity may have been possible because of her gender. Already excluded to a certain extent from Modernism, she opted out of the quest for purity and authenticity. This enabled her to take a critical stance toward mass culture without the fear of being implicated in it. Like Pop Art, Arbus's work engages in the highly topical, charged, debate over mass culture, and like Warhol's, it succeeds in being simultaneously commercial and subversive.[54]

Pop Artists were the first explicitly to take up the challenge posed by mass culture and address it in their notoriously deadpan (ironic? approbatory?) style.[55] They derived both their technique and their iconography from the commercial art they had, for the most part, been trained in. And for the very reason that it wallowed in the world of mass culture, Pop Art was condemned by Greenberg and others as regressively anti-modernist. He saw its resurrection of representation—of subject matter—as two steps backward in the teleological evolution of art.

Arbus, too, has been seen by some reductive critics as a retrogressive figure. A *Newsweek* review of her 1972 retrospective labeled her a "subject" photographer. "Her art had to do with what you see in her subjects, not with the way she held her camera or focused the lens or maneuvered her subjects into striking compositional structures."[56] Jonathan Green, in his history of American photography, quotes Diane Arbus as saying: "For me the subject of the photograph is always more important than the picture; I really think about what it is, what it's about." He then interpolates: "In spite of the advanced theory and practice of Szarkowski, Winogrand and Friedlander, photography in the 60s continued to exist for the public as subject matter...The public was fascinated with literal fact."[57] Green implies that Arbus's art, by virtue of its "literalness" can appeal only to the philistine "public"—not to the sophisticated critics capable of keeping up with modernist "advances."

The characterization of women as "literal" and "concrete" has a long history. Holding the secrets of reproduction, close to Mother Earth, they have always played Nature to men's Culture. Men for their part have succeeded in the arts thanks to their presumably innate and superior qualities of abstract reasoning. Leslie Fiedler has referred to the 19th century "struggle of high art and low" as a "battle of the sexes," in which the serious male author was "condemned to poverty by a culture simultaneously commercialized and feminized."[58] Green takes up arms in that same struggle, resorting to the usual clichés in his characterization of Arbus's work. Arbus was simply not ready to commit herself to an abstract, formalist aesthetic; as a woman and as an artist she had too much at stake. The comment quoted by Green indicates that she reserved the right to emphasize her subject matter, and we have seen that she often chose to use it, in conjunction with her technique, to communicate a political or cultural point of view. Kenneth Silver has effectively shown that Warhol, Johns, and Rauschenberg, gay artists excluded by the machismo and political apathy of Abstract Expressionism, opted instead for the representational modes

of Pop as a coded expression of their sexuality.[59] Modernism, mass culture, and sexuality clearly formed a complex matrix with respect to which artists as well as critics felt obliged to orient themselves.

Many Pop artists struck a kind of balance between Modernism and its negation, adopting much of Modernism's form while rejecting aspects of its content. Johns and Rauschenberg never banished the Abstract Expressionist gesture from their art, for example, and Warhol and Lichtenstein share pronounced formal affinities with hard-edged abstraction.[60] Arbus adopted a similar stance, integrating aspects of mainstream modernism into her style.

Although she posed and directed her subjects, she also planted herself firmly in the Modernist realm of the real. Like Winogrand and Frank, her expressivity was derived from objective description and unmanipulated prints. Like them, she integrated meticulous attention to formal detail with compositional effects brought on by the simplest of means: placing the subject near the center of the viewfinder, as in a family snapshot; lighting the subject by the crude, head-on glare of the flash. "An impersonal, completely artless camera record is aesthetically irreproachable," wrote Siegfried Kracauer in 1960.[61] Arbus may not have been a saint in the modernist canon, but she certainly had her virtues.

When John Szarkowski presented her work in the 1967 "New Documents" show, he dwelt exclusively on its modernist aspects, and its commonalities with Winogrand's and Friedlander's output. In an introductory wall label for the show he wrote: "In the past decade a new generation of photographers has directed the documentary approach toward more personal ends. Their aim has been not to reform life but to know it...They like the real world, in spite of its terrors, as the source of all wonder and fascination and value—no less precious for being irrational."[62] Szarkowski strips Arbus's work of any political meaning at the same moment that he touts its artistic power, which for him lies in its expressionistic realism. For Szarkowski, Arbus's setting and subjects serve only as the raw material for personal and formal experimentation.[63]

But Arbus is neither a documentarian nor an expressionist. Deeply enmeshed in cultural and political issues, she does indeed aim to "reform life," or at least to critique it. Her work speaks eloquently to the threatened individual beset by homogeneity and tries to resuscitate subjectivity in the face of its imminent demise. She consistently demonstrates that personal identity, though not invulnerable, can survive encroaching conformity. Nevertheless, her work wistfully summons up an era before personal idiosyncrasies had to be so staunchly defended. Her New York is fleeting, evanescent, dissolving; much of it belongs already to the past.

Arbus's work may seem like a last gasp of the same dying humanism boldly articulated by Steichen's "Family of Man" exhibit of 1955 which affirmed people's indomitable spirit as World War III loomed. Yet as Roland Barthes perceived so astutely, the message of the Family of Man decodes into: "Man is born, works, laughs and dies everywhere the same way." Any peculiarities simply mask an identical "nature," and whatever diversity does exist is "only formal and does not belie the existence of a common mould."[64] Ultimately, it glorifies Mass Man,

and justifies standardized production and marketing. Nothing, as we have seen, could be farther from Arbus's own attitude. Her work consistently and emphatically insists upon the viability of the uniquely situated, experientially saturated, and historically buffeted individual.

Notes

1 A notable exception is James Guimond's *American Photography and the American Dream* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991).

2 Jackson Lears, "A Matter of Taste: Corporate Cultural Hegemony in a Mass-Consumption Society," in *Recasting America: Culture and Politics in the Age of Cold War*, ed. Lary May (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 39.

3 "Our Country and Our Culture," *Partisan Review* 19, no.3 (May-June 1952), 285.

4 Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, trans. John Cumming (New York: Herder and Herder, 1972), 121. See also Andreas Huyssen's discussion of Adorno in "Adorno in Reverse: From Hollywood to Richard Wagner," in *After the Great Divide: Modernism, Mass Culture, Postmodernism* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1986), 21-25.

5 Horkheimer and Adorno, 129f.

6 Theodor Adorno, *Minima Moralia: Reflections from a Damaged Life*, trans. E.F.N. Jephcott (London: Verso, 1993), 129.

7 Lears, 44.

8 William H. Whyte Jr., *The Organization Man* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1956), 405. The mainstream discourse's critique of mass society included C. Wright Mills' books *White Collar* (1951) and *The Power Elite* (1956), Eric Fromm's *The Sane Society* (1955), and David Riesman's bestselling *The Lonely Crowd* (1950). The writer Richard Shickel remembers that: "*The Lonely Crowd* was anatomized in 1950, and the fear of drifting into its clutches was lively in us. *White Collar* was on our brick and board bookshelves, and we saw how the eponymous object seemed to be choking the life out of earlier generations. *The Man in the Grey Flannel Suit* stalked our nightmares and soon enough *The Organization Man* would join him there." In 1951, Marshall McLuhan published *The Mechanical Bride*, in which he analyzed how advertising connived to "keep everybody in a helpless state." He, too, recognized the threat to individuality posed by mass consumption: "When men and women have become accustomed to uniform products, it is hard to see how any individualism remains." See Richard Shickel, *Brando, A Life in Our Times* (New York: Atheneum, 1991), 6; and Marshall McLuhan, *The Mechanical Bride* (New York: Vanguard Press), 55.

9 E.A. Mowrer, "Return to Integrity," *Saturday Review*, 5 February 1955, 8.

10 "Our Country and Our Culture," 445.

11 Jackson Lears, 45-46.

12 David Riesman, *The Lonely Crowd*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1961), 298.

13 Georges Bataille, "The Deviations of Nature," in *Visions of Excess: Selected Writings, 1927-1939*, trans. and ed. Alan Stoekl (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1985), 55. The monstrous, for Bataille, is the definition of individuality, and lies at the core his aesthetic. He saw Beauty as "always the result of resemblance," while ugliness, like *informe*, "resembles nothing. That is its definition." Essentially an anti-aesthete, he valued ugliness over beauty. See Denis Hollier, "The Use-Value of the Impossible," *October* 60 (Spring, 1992), 19.

14 For a discussion of the individual and industry in the era of late capitalism see Ian

Angus, "Circumscribing Post-Modern Culture" in *Cultural Politics in Contemporary America,* ed. Ian Angus and Sut Jhally (New York: Routledge, 1989), 100.

15 See Sigmund Freud, "The 'Uncanny'" (1919), in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud,* ed. James Strachey (London: Hogarth Press and the Institute for Psycho-Analysis, 1953-1973), vol.17, p.234.

16 Arbus knew Warhol, having worked on several photographic projects involving Factory regulars. She photographed Gerard Malanga in 1966, and Viva for *New York Magazine* in 1968. For the latter assignment, she went to the Warhol's Factory where, according to Patricia Bosworth, she was far less interested in Warhol's druggy entourage than in "studying Warhol's death image paintings—Marilyn's still smile on dozens of silk screens." See Patricia Bosworth, *Diane Arbus: A Biography* (New York: Avon Books, 1984), 305. According to Barbara Goldsmith, author of the text for the Viva article, Arbus found the Warhol scene "extremely interesting." Interview with Barbara Goldsmith, June 2, 1994.

17 Huyssen, "The Cultural Politics of Pop," in *After the Great Divide*, 149.

18 See John Russell and Susi Gablik, *Pop Art Redefined* (New York: Praeger, 1969), 116. Also quoted in Huyssen, 148.

19 Arbus photographed nudists for five years, from 1962 until 1967, in camps around New Jersey and Pennsylvania. See Bosworth, 227.

20 For an unpublished 1965 feature on nudists for *Esquire,* Arbus wrote: "Nudists are fond of saying that when you come right down to it everyone is alike, and, again, that when you come right down to it everyone is different. As one man put it, no one is a hundred percent perfectly formed. You get so you recognize people by their bodies instead of their faces." See *Diane Arbus Magazine Work*, ed. Doon Arbus and Marvin Israel (New York: Aperture, 1984), 69.

21 Diane Arbus, "Emotion in Motion," *Show*, January 1965, reprinted in *Diane Arbus Magazine Work*, 61.

22 Arbus got access to Mae West through Dan Talbot, who ran the New Yorker Film Society, and whom she met during the New Yorker's week-long revival of *Freaks*. Talbot had gained West's trust despite her notorious reclusiveness through a correspondence that developed when he revived certain of her films. When Arbus's photographs ran, Talbot received an enraged postcard from West. See David Skal, *The Monster Show: A Cultural History of Horror* (New York: Penguin, 1993), 21.

23 Bosworth, 308.

24 W.T. Llamon, Jr., *Deliberate Speed: The Origins of a Cultural Style in the 1950s* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1990), 19.

25 Tennessee Williams, *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* (New York: Signet, 1953), p. xiv, quoted in Llamon Jr., 19-20.

26 Flannery O'Connor, a Southern novelist whose work has been likened to Arbus's for its grotesque sensibility (and who, like Arbus, had her work published in *Harpers' Bazaar*), also bemoaned the increasing homogenization of American life, and her fiction expresses tremendous anxiety about the survival of individual and regional identity in consumer culture. In her novels *Wise Blood* and *The Violent Bear it Away* she specifically rejected the ideology that tied consumption to individuality. She blamed television for displacing a regional idiom from Southern fiction, indicting her compatriots for "producing television stories written in television language for a television world." See Jon Lance Bacon, *Flannery O'Connor and Cold War Culture* (Cambridge University Press, 1993), 120-131.

27 Diane Arbus, Guggenheim application, 1963, quoted in Bosworth, 249.

28 Arbus took a photography course in the mid-1940s with Berenice Abbot, who

salvaged Atget's work, brought it to New York, and promoted it in America, and who was herself engaged in a similar project—to preserve for posterity the vanishing New York of the 1930s. "What Atget did for Paris," she told the *New York Sun*, " I want to do for New York." Her 1939 book, *Changing New York,* was meant to document New York's older buildings on the verge of destruction. Quoted in Colin Westerbeck and Joel Meyerowitz, *Bystander: A History of Street Photography* (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1994), 273.

29 Diane Arbus, *Hubert's Obituary or This Was Where We Came In* (Unpublished, 1966), in *Diane Arbus Magazine Work*, 80.

30 See Joseph Mitchell, *Up in the Old Hotel* (New York: Random House, 1993).

31 Quoted in Bosworth, 207.

32 Bosworth, 302.

33 See Bosworth, 339.

34 See Kirk Varnedoe and Adam Gopnik, *High and Low: Modern Art and Popular Culture* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1990) 335, 344; and Lawrence Alloway, *Topics in American Art Since 1945* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1975), 146.

35 In a sense, she is nostalgic for a time when only some people (freaks) were commodified, but everybody else was not.

36 In a review of a 1972 exhibit of Atget photographs, A.D. Coleman complained that "Szarkowski is out to prove. . . that Atget's work is about itself — not about Paris, or Atget's life, or being enchanted by reality and trying to preserve some slice of it." See A.D. Coleman, "Not Seeing Atget for the Trees," *Village Voice* (July 27, 1972), 23, quoted in Maren Strange, "Photography and the Institution: Szarkowski at the Modern," *Massachusetts Review* 19 (Winter 1978), 695-6.

37 John Szarkowski, quoted in Strange, 701.

38 John Szarkowski, quoted in Strange, 702. Winogrand's work has been read for content, but against the grain. See Kenneth Silver, "The Witness," *Art in America* (October 1988), 148-157.

39 Jonathan Green, *American Photography (*New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1984), 101.

40 See Andreas Huyssen, "Mass Culture as Woman," in *After the Great Divide*, 44-62.

41 Quoted in Bosworth, 243.

42 Meyerowitz and Westerbeck, 374-392. Sandra Matthews notes that throughout the history of photography, women photographers have tended to work with the knowledge and cooperation of their subjects. See "Some Thoughts On Women's Photographs," *Journal* (Sept./Oct. 1979), 38.

43 Thomas W. Southall, "The Magazine Years, 1960-1971," in *Diane Arbus Magazine Work*, 152.

44 Max Kozloff, rev. of "New Documents," *The Nation*, 1 May, 1967, 572-3.

45 Jacob Deschin, "People Seen as Curiosity," *New York Times*, 5 March, 1967, Sec. D, 21. Note how Arbus was literally marginalized by placing her photographs in a separate room, mirroring her position on the margins of high art.

46 According to Coleman, "a presumption of moral righteousness has accrued to [Straight Photography]...above and beyond its legitimacy as a creative choice." A.D. Coleman, "The Directorial Mode: Notes Toward a Definition" *Artforum* 15 (September 1976), 57-58. See also Patricia Leigton, "Critical Attitudes Toward Overtly Manipulated Photographs in the 20th Century, in two parts, *Art Journal,* 37 (Winter 1977/78 and Summer 1978), 133-138, 313-321.

47 Garry Winogrand, *Public Relations,* introd. Tod Papageorge (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1977), 11.

48 John Szarkowski, *Winogrand: Figments from the Real World* (New York: Museum of

Modern Art, 1988), 30.

49 John Szarkowski, *Dot Zero* (Spring 1967), quoted in Southall, 166. The denigration of commercial work is common to many curators of photography. For example Marguerite Welch, in her critique of Jane Livingston's 1986 "New York School" exhibit at the Corcoran Gallery, noted the curator's implication that "this work was 'formidable, audacious, innovative and heroically ambitious' to the degree to which these photographers broke away from the constrictions of the commercial world and declared themselves 'simply artists.'" See Marguerite Welch, "After Evans and Before Frank, *Afterimage* (Summer 1996), 15.

50 According to Gisele Freund, the popularity of photojournalism was based upon "changes that had taken place in the condition of modern man and the tendency toward greater standardization of modern life. As the individual became less important to society, his need to affirm himself as an individual became greater." Illustrated magazines "presented stories about ordinary people...As the relations among men became more dehumanized, the journalist tended to give the individual an artificial importance." See Gisele Freund, *Photography and Society* (Boston: David R. Godine, 1980), 47. Arbus's goals, her almost tabloid interest in the extraordinary within the ordinary, must be understood in the context of magazine photography in general.

51 Southall, 162-3

52 See Harold Hayes, "Editor's Notes," *Esquire* (November 1971), 8, for the Norman Mailer comment. According to Yubin Yee, the librarian of MoMA's photography department, when three of Arbus's photos were exhibited in a 1965 "Recent Acquisitions" show, he would have to come in especially early every morning to wipe the spit off of them. Quoted in Bosworth, 274.

53 According to Thomas Southall: "While the consistently distinctive style of her work earned her the respect and cooperation of her editors and was frequently responsible for getting her certain assignments, it also narrowed the range of the sorts of jobs the editors considered suited to, or worthy of her talents...her work for *Harper's Bazaar* remained almost entirely limited to her portraits of artists, writers, and other cultural figures." *Esquire* similarly considered certain subjects, like politicians, inappropriate. Yet the editors at *Esquire* were at times willing to support articles that she proposed —for example a story on a nudist camp—and to pay her expenses, despite the unlikelihood of their actual publication (the story on nudists never appeared). They endorsed her work even when the magazine itself was not likely to benefit in any concrete way. See Southall, 161-163.

54 Ian Jeffrey observed in 1974 that "any connoisseur of Radical Pop and underground films might well take the Arbus photographs as a matter of course." See Ian Jeffrey, "Diane Arbus and the American Grotesque," *Photographic Journal*, May 1974, 224.

55 Sidra Stich, in *Made in the U.S.A.*, her study of post-war American art, explains that the 1952 *Partisan Review* symposium, though widely discussed in artistic circles, had little impact on art practice until "as if in direct response to it, the generation after the Abstract Expressionists began to explore issues the intellectuals had raised." See Sidra Stich, *Made in the U.S.A.: An Americanization in Modern Art, The 50s and 60s* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1987), 9.

56 Douglas Davis, "Beyond the Fringe," *Newsweek*, 13 November, 1972, 113.

57 Green, 115.

58 Quoted in Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Grubar, "Tradition and the Female Talent," *The Poetics of Gender*, ed. Nancy K. Miller (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), 196.

59 See Kenneth Silver, "Modes of Disclosure: the Construction of Gay Identity and the Rise of Pop" in *Hand-Painted Pop* (Los Angeles: Museum of Contemporary Art, 1992).

60 See Robert Rosenblum, "Pop Art and Non-Pop Art," in Russell and Gablik, *Pop Art Redefined*, 53-56.

61 Seigfried Kracauer,"Photography," in *Classic Essays on Photography*, ed. Alan Trachtenberg (New Haven CT: Leete's Island Books, 1980), 257.

62 John Szarkowski, Wall Label for "New Documents," February 28-May 7, 1967, The Museum of Modern Art, New York.

63 Green, 107.

64 Roland Barthes, *Mythologies*, trans. Anette Lavers (New York: Noonday Press, 1993), 100.

Genre-lizing about Realism

Stephen M. Leuthold

This article seeks to discover the ways that contemporary representational art challenges and requires an extension of the critical reception of realism in the late twentieth century. On the one hand, the article demonstrates the resilience of a way of working in art; on the other, the article examines the way that traditions change in new contexts and require new forms of understanding. Naturalism in art and the mimetic theories that sought to account for naturalism had been the dominant force in Western art from Classical Greece through the nineteenth century. Despite strong challenges to naturalism from formal, conceptual and expressionist styles and theories in the twentieth century, we are witnessing a resurgence of representational art at the end of the century. A striking feature of this resurgence is that it is international in scope. Artists from Australia, Canada, Germany, Spain, Switzerland, Portugal, France, Italy, Greece, Poland, England, the United States and elsewhere have demonstrated a renewed interest in representational art. Do traditional mimetic theories of art help explain this surge of renewed interest and activity in representational art? If not, has recent aesthetic theory kept apace of this resurgence? I will demonstrate the need for a new examination of naturalistic representation in art and discuss current representational art in the light of genre theory, a socially oriented theory of art.

Realism can be defined as the reproduction or imitation of what one sees in reality: a portrayal of people, places, and objects as they 'really are' with a minimal imposition of the artist's fantasies, visions, and imagination. Realist art reflects philosophical realism in two ways. In classical realism artists sought to represent universals that philosophers assumed have an objective reality. More recently, since the mid-nineteenth century, artists have simply attempted to represent material objects and social relations in themselves, without reference to the assumed universals that fascinated classical artists and philosophers. This second kind of realism can be contrasted with philosophical idealism and its corollaries in art such as Romanticism, Symbolism, Expressionism and so on.

Why do artists imitate what they see? That imitation is a basic human activity in art is apparent from the earliest evidence of cave art, where animals are represented with relative faithfulness, at least in contrast to the representations of humans by paleolithic artists. These paintings/images may have been part of an attempt to control reality by influencing the actions of the animals through representing them. In this line of reasoning, the knowledge required to accurately represent reality may also help one master life in some way. One linking mechanism here may be the role of observation in prediction. If we can observe something closely enough to represent it well, we may be able to predict further actions in-

volving the observed phenomenon. In this sense, representation in art is not unlike experimentation in science, where repeated observations lead to a greater ability to predict the likelihood of an event.

One can see, then, that imitation is not just a mirroring of reality but a process of gaining knowledge and control of reality. In the most positive definition of the term, imitation is a form of learning. The idea that imitation is a way to know and, therefore, predict reality was strongly challenged by Plato who had serious doubts about the knowledge that one gains through the 'mere' imitation of appearances. Even if we disagree with Plato and argue that you do need *some* knowledge of reality in order to accurately represent it, it could be argued that science now is a stronger means of investigating and predicting reality than art. Holding on to the idea that artists represent reality in order to control or predict it may have the effect of turning art into 'weak science'. A possible exception to this may be found in the representation of specifically human qualities in art. It might be argued in an Aristotelian vein that art is a way of gaining knowledge about human nature. One could extend this argument in a contemporary context by stating that art is a stronger way of gaining knowledge about human nature than the so-called human sciences because it involves a kind of emotional observation and formulation of ideas that is difficult to achieve though the arid symbolic conventions of social science. While this is an interesting idea, it does not seem broad enough to explain contemporary representation in art because a) the subject of this representation is not always human and b) contemporary representations do not always seem to be 'emotional' formulations about human nature.

If realist art is not solely or even primarily a way of gaining knowledge, what other motives may be present? In realism we often find artists working in a storytelling mode. One of the strong contrasts between realism and formalism is its narrative potential. However, this explanation about realism's attraction for artists may be better suited to film or literature than painting and sculpture because of the temporal nature of the former. While it is true that realist painters often seem to be telling us something about the world through their art, it is also true that what they tell us rarely amounts to a complete story (we will have to turn to the exhibition catalog or text for this, if there is a narrative to be found at all.) At the most, the artist can depict an important point in a narrative or summarize several events in a kind of 'double exposure' of multiple instances in time in the same painting. Narrative is *implied* rather than *present* in painting or sculpture. And, increasingly, the narratives that are implied are much more personal to the artist than tied to allegories, myths, or stories that we might all know. For some viewers, contemporary narrative painting can be as interpretively impenetrable as abstract, non-referential painting has been in the past.

If realist paintings do not represent scientific truths or narratives, what do they portray and why? Realist paintings are *selections*—of objects, people, events, places—that the artist felt were important or felt attracted to paint, often because the act of painting them in itself was of interest. In either case, through the object rendered or through the rendering process, an act of selected attention toward one's environment is evident. The painting may reflect the artist's personal experience

or detached observation, but in both cases the careful selection and attention to (or deletion of) detail, the composition, the choice of subject matter and of a technique of rendering indicate that the artist has engaged in a process of selected attention. *Through this combination of attention and intention (individual control), realism expresses consciousness in important and fundamental ways, which is part of its appeal to artists in several historical periods and cultures.* It is this capacity to deeply focus one's attention upon one's environment and render that environment in a way that seems 'believable' to the viewer that seems to be the hallmark of realism. I will address the second of these conditions, believability, in a moment, but first I must anticipate these questions: why would artists want to become 'focused' on an environment or another human being in the way required to make a realist work of art, and how does this focus differ from those daily states of 'focus' we all achieve in order to get things done?

Often the artist seems to represent our environment as a field that is psychologically charged in some way. By saying this I do not mean that realists use expressionist techniques to impart psychological meaning where it would not otherwise be present. Rather, the process of prolonged, involved perception itself animates the 'field' that the artist represents. Attentive selection imparts a sense of vitality or importance to an aspect of our environment that we may normally overlook in our daily habits of perception. The act of representation makes that perceptual field seem more vital, more alive, more engaging than it might appear to us in passing by virtue of the selected attention that the artist brings to it. Attentive selectivity is a particular state of consciousness that attracts some artists. The artist's representation of a perceptual field is not necessarily intended to achieve another end beyond the mere act of representing it. It is not necessarily intended to persuade, educate, move, or subvert us, although other ends such as persuasion, criticism and so on my also be present. (While disinterestedness is a necessary quality of aesthetic contemplation and creation in neo-Kantian formalist theory, I do not intend it in this way here. Rather, the process of selected attention or 'focus' in representational work is not *necessarily* instrumental in its motivation.) Usually we focus our attention in our daily activities as part of a process of 'getting things done'. But realist artists focus their attention because that is the nature of the representational act, not necessarily to achieve a further end. If the artist's aim is rhetorical in nature, representation takes place takes in a new dimension: it becomes a presentation, description, or statement of ideas designed to influence action in some way and corresponds to the political sense of the term representation. However, this meaning of the term extends beyond realist representation in its most basic sense, and it seems to be wrong to conflate the two meanings of the term even though they may be related in interesting ways.

Another way that the selected attention of realism in art is different than our daily periods of focused attention is that particular *techniques* are used as part of this process. These techniques are designed to create a sense of identification for the viewer. Because the artist is concerned with creating a focus on the perceptual field, a kind of concealment of technique—a denial of the nature of the medium in order to focus our attention on the subject—is common in realist art. Un-

like formal and expressivist approaches, realists may feel that the viewer's awareness of technique is a failure of the artwork. Though realism is conventional, another hallmark of the style is the way that it successfully masks its conventions of representation, as Nelson Goodman has noted.[1]

Realists use many visual techniques to make their subjects seem natural. These include 1) the modification of size and shape relations so that objects or areas in a composition seem 'right' even though these relationships may differ from reality, 2) the control of light and darkness to give two-dimensional images the appearance of volume, 3) variation in the focus (sharpness, distinctness) within the same composition to draw our attention to important areas and allow objects to move 'back' or 'forward' within the visual field, 4) the use of color for similar reasons (to make forms appear to recede and advance), 5) and depth cues such as linear perspective, overlap and so on. All of these devices are not necessarily found in the reality that the artist seeks to represent. Even in those cases where they are suggested in reality, the artist may exaggerate certain devices to make the scene even more 'real' or 'believable' in its two-dimensional format. However, these devices have such a firm historical grounding in Western art, and seem so 'natural' as a part of representation, that viewers may overlook the visual conventions that the artist employs and focus on the subject matter. Or viewers may comment on the ways that the conventions make the image seem so real rather than how the conventions account for the distance between the representation and that which is represented.

Just as conventions both distance us from and invite us to the reality of that which is depicted, so have the values of people in different historical periods affected the notion of 'the real' that is worth representing with paint (and film, drama or literature). Earlier movements in twentieth century realism represented urban realities; technological, industrial realities; regional identities; consumerist reality; and the technological reality of information.[2] By contrast, much realism of the eighties and nineties is a departure not only from abstraction, but from urbanism, commercialism and technology as central to our understanding of reality. In both cases representational art is not simply a recording of reality but an expression of what the artist *values* or considers worthy of representation.

Re-Genrelizing Realism

The reasons why artists selectively attend to certain aspects of their environment change according to what they consider important in general and according to the devices and conventions of representation that interest them. Unlike earlier twentieth century periods, when modern themes such as the urban setting and the technical influence of the camera fascinated artists, the last two decades have witnessed a return to traditional genres of realist representation: landscape, still life, figure drawing, interiors, portraiture, and self-portraiture. Why would artists turn to traditional genres of realism given the twentieth century's intense questioning of the value of representation in art? The relationship of a realism based in traditional genres to modernist art movements is undoubtedly complex. Is contemporary real-

ism reactionary or does it take modernist developments into account? There is something about the externally defined conventions of traditional genres that interests artists working today. New realists are increasingly artists who have unabashedly chosen to work within the constraints of a genre that was developed before the modern period. Though they may often innovate within or subvert those conventions, the framework of *genre* is becoming firmly re-established in representational painting.

This acknowledgment of genre raises the charge of academicism because the artist is responding to, even relying upon, structures that are often seen as 'externally imposed' rather than internally motivated, as would be the case in formal or expressive modes of working. The artists' work would be academic if it relied upon the institutional validation traditionally associated with genres as a way of establishing the value of the work. Is a return to traditional representational genres an artistic flight into the suburbs: a seeking of security and comfort within the walls of closed communities in response to the late twentieth century's messy urbanism and stylistic decay? Or does genre focus one's attention in a way that is not possible through self-consciously 'modern' means and subject matter. (It is obvious that it does, but how and why have artists turned to genres at this point in history?)

Landscape is an interesting example of this re-genrelization of American representational art. Landscape had all but died out as an important form of representation by mid-century. The pop artists and photo-realists certainly were not drawn to it as a subject. But beginning with artists such as Fairfield Porter and Neil Welliver and continuing with painters such as James Butler, Catherine Murphy, James Valerio, Rackstraw Downes and others we have seen a rapid revitalization of the genre. Similar statements could be made about figure painting, portraiture, self-portraiture, and still life.

This renewal of genres raises interesting questions about the purpose of genres in general. What is a genre? Why should art at certain periods be more genre-lized than at others? Genre is related to the notion of 'types' or 'kinds' of communication. It involves a conventionalized set of interactions that have rules or norms which function as communicative constraints. Because they involve the recurrence of formal, strategic, substantive, or symbolic elements in a patterned way, genres are normative: they respond to normative expectations within a culture about how communicative instances or products *ought* to appear/occur. Normative expectations comprise traditions that become embedded in and, in turn, are generated by institutions. Genre refers to systems of classification and communication based on formal aspects of expression but also upon the social function of the expressive acts or the products of those acts. The relationship between conventionalized formal qualities and social life lies at the heart of the question of genre's function in art.[3] Given this traditional tie between genres and social structures it will not be surprising if we find that contemporary realists are careful to avoid an association with the 'academic art' against which modernists reacted so strongly. At the turn of the century academic realism was perceived as conservative, old-fashioned and dull. Thus, it is tempting to view today's realism as a 'new realism', not a return to the realism of the nineteenth century. Given the century of intense

experimentation that has interceded between the rejection of academic realism and 'today's realism', a return to traditional genres can itself be experienced as fresh or new. But is it a fair question to ask whether new realism is an academic revival or a fresh new movement that pushes beyond modernism and is a major part of 'post-modernism'?

Even though many artists are working representationally, it is true that, until very recently, realists have been estranged from the art establishment. Is this estrangement being overcome? Is realism once again being accepted within the artworld and within academic circles? Given the nature of genres, it seems that they would have to gain acceptance in these social environments in order to function effectively on their own terms. Genres, comprised of recurring formal and thematic characteristics, are communicative codes. A principal feature of codes is their dependency upon prior learning, which sets up social, physical and psychological assumptions as to how to perceive and communicate about the world. Many of these assumptions are formed in institutional contexts: educational, religious, political, commercial—artworld—or otherwise. "The system of generic expectations amounts to a code...In fact, genre serves the purposes of communication as much as those of taxonomy or classification."[4] Generic codes exist within institutional frameworks and the 'preference' for a given genre depends on how closely it fits with the ideology of the time. Thus, the current genre-lizing of realism may point to major changes in the social structures of artworlds.

In addition to requiring the artist to selectively focus her attention in ways that are different than non-objective painting, realism establishes a different relationship between artists and audiences than earlier modernist forms. Realism is generally perceived as more accessible for general audiences (which may be one of the reasons that highly educated, specific audiences often reject realism). Realism can present to audiences a way of looking at art without having art 'in the way'. For example, in the landscape genre there is an identification with the feel of a place, in addition to a concentration on the 'artiness' or technique of the art. Some audiences like this accessibility; others reject it. Significantly, realism has reached audiences not ordinarily exposed to art through the populist medium of the mural, the commercial portrait, and so on. Thus, the aesthetic question of genres and the functions that they serve is closely tied to conditions of production and reception. Too often in areas such as literary or artistic criticism, generic categories are imposed by critics and scholars. By contrast, genres come from the material conditions of artmaking and viewing. Following this social approach, the re-emergence of genres may reveal value conflicts within a society or within societal formations such as the 'artworld': The identifying feature of a genre is its cultural context.

However, this social approach to genre—which could quickly lead to a deterministic, materialist analysis of generic art—tends to deny the question of intentionality, the individual artist's intentional selection of subject and technique. As such, a generic approach could be seen as contradicting the fundamental characteristic of realism, the artist's process of attentive selection, that I argued for at the beginning of this article. However, it may also be possible that both of these

conditions can hold true. If the artist is unaware of social factors that influence his or her attention, then genre functions deterministically. By contrast, if the artist can gain critical detachment through an understanding of the nature of genre itself, it may be possible to work within the constraints of genre while still focusing one's attention intentionally (and with an eye towards social and personal change). Thus, while the goal of the early avant-garde was to undermine genre through experimental, often nihilistic forms of expression (as in Dadaist art), *genres themselves become important sites of contestation in the late twentieth century.* Thomas Schatz has argued in his generic analysis of film that genres always point toward arenas of conflicting social values.[5] The production and reception of generic communication is a way in which a) social forms are replicated through the audience's normative expectations of structure, theme, values, etc., or b) a way in which social change is enacted.

A realization of late twentieth century artists is that much early avant-garde art was unable to create social change from without. The radical experiments of the Expressionists, Constructivists, Dadaists, Futurists and Surrealists, which were enacted to create social change, never had the social effect that the artists hoped for because these movements operated completely outside of a generic code that audiences could share. (Even today, students and audiences respond to popularized movements such as Surrealism as expressions of the private self (the subconscious), not as art intended to create social change, which is how many of the surrealists saw their activity.)

In art, and in popular culture, genre continues to define the boundaries of social norms (value systems) and it is within and across these sets of constraints that artistic innovation can have social impact beyond elite artworld members' awareness. Ironically, the innovations of the avant-garde that were intended to combat the class and power-based elitism of the aristocracy and bourgeoisie at the turn of the century have led to a new intellectual elitism at the end of the twentieth century. The elitism of the entrenched avant-garde of today is based upon a specialization of knowledge and theory which can be acquired only through the 'luxury' (inequality) of access to higher education, to the material resources necessary for carrying out large scale 'experimental' art and to the institutions such as museums that legitimize art. The impact of these structural relationships on artists is that much art making has once again devolved into a status-seeking professional activity that serves the needs of a wealthy, educated elite rather than creating possibilities of social change.

In contrast to the entrenched elitism of the late twentieth century avant-garde, it may be genre-based art that holds the greatest potential for once again making art a part of peoples' lives in a meaningful way. However, by taking the position that genres are fundamental to art's social function, I am not arguing against all innovation in art. Rather, I am stating that for art to have a social function rather than a private function, innovation must account for the limitations of artistic expression, which are socially and physically inscribed, along with the possibilities that emerge in the artistic imagination. A defense of genre in art could easily be construed as warmed-over academicism, a position that I emphatically do not ad-

vocate. Thus, we need to be acknowledge an innovative space that is dependent neither upon total artistic change (and, therefore radical decontextualization) or upon academic formulae. I think one example of such an innovative space is in the area of expressive genres.

Since I am making strong claims for the importance of genre in contemporary artistic expression, it may be valuable to review some of the major points that I have made about the concept, genre:

1. Genre is related to the notion of 'types' or 'kinds' of communication/ expression which are recognized through the recurrence of situational, formal, strategic, substantive or symbolic elements of communication in a patterned way.

2. Genres are normative: they respond to normative expectations within a culture about how communicative or artistic instances or products *ought* to appear or occur.

3. Genres are communicative codes which depend upon prior learning in order to both understand and create meaning.

4. In complex cultures genres help constitute, perpetuate and sometimes critique (as in the genre of the political cartoon) institutions. They serve institutional needs and therefore exist within an ideological framework.

5. Genres are tied to systems of production, distribution and reception and may emerge in response to underlying cultural oppositions inherent in those systems.

6. Major genres embody a culture's *ethos*. Generic conventions both reflect and influence social life.

7. Genres have the potential to both replicate social norms and to incorporate innovations that lead to social change.

Are there examples of contemporary artists working within genres in innovative ways to reveal social conflicts? One realization that has freed realism to explore social codes from the 'inside' is that realism is not replication of reality in the sense of mimesis. Working representationally involves visual conventions, the selection of subject matter, choices about juxtapositions. For instance, Eric Fischl has made a reputation by painting interior and exterior figurative scenes suffused with sexuality. He takes the convention of the 'nude' in art and combines that attitude with a kind of sexual awareness that might, in other contexts, be associated with pornography. Fischl has blurred two genres—the nude and pornography—in his images, but the boundaries between the two remain intact and provide the source of tension in his work. In the context of current debates about the social construction of gender, Fischl's genre blurring may be seen as referring to social conflicts

as well as psychological processes.

Because the effect of his work is often based upon Fischl's blurring of genres, a response could be that the concept of genre is no longer applicable because its only usefulness is in serving as a basis for ironic juxtaposition. Are genres simply material for postmodern parody or irony, and therefore not inherently valuable? If the concept genre is no longer applicable in the 'postmodern' world, a world that consists of contradictory or ironic examples of communicative instances and forms intended to blur categories of understanding, do we give up much more than systems of classification? Do we give up the possibility of communication itself?

> It is a common modern assumption that genres are things of the past, if indeed they were ever more than illusions. But in fact communication is impossible without the agreed codes of genre. And distinctively modern genres exist, many created or transformed by the electronic media, although most new genres have not yet been named.[6]

Alastair Fowler argues that the hybridization of generic forms has always existed. Is Fowler right? Is the postmodern anxiety about genre blurring merely a problem of finding names for new hybrid forms as the older labels grow inadequate? It must be admitted that naming is more of an important process than it may sound at first, because naming usually involves a process of clear recognition and delineation of the phenomenon.

Another response to artists like Fischl who deliberately blur genres, and to the question raised by Fowler, is that this kind of juxtaposition depends upon the power of the original generic forms in order to be effective. If traditional genres were hollowed of meaning, would the postmodern ironic stance have any force? Additionally, genre blurring has been only one aspect of the genre-lization of art in recent years. Not all generic art in the last ten to twenty years has been ironic in tone. Even more difficult to frame in the context of contemporary theory is art by artists like James Valerio, Claudio Bravo, William Beckman, and others that seems to regenerate the codes of earlier genres 'sincerely' and without irony. In light of these artists' work, post-modernist genre blurring may not be as ubiquitous as it seems.

The more general argument that genre blurring is a pervasive feature of contemporary life comes from media analysis. It is true that certain television genres, for instance, have become more self-referential.[7] But, even though they have changed and will continue to change, newscasts, sportscasts, talk shows, sitcoms, soap operas and the like remain clearly distinguishable. News may have taken on the look of certain 'entertainment' genres, but it is still distinguishable from them. Similarly, the nude and the pornographic image may be blurred in some recent work, but the differences between the two are still clearly recognizable in the work of other artists. Thus, blurred genres depend on the power of traditional generic categories in art for their ironic success.

If the reader accepts the broad notion of genres in art as the differentiation

of patterned communication according to recurrent situational, formal, strategic, substantive or symbolic elements, it becomes clear that the locus of genre—and realism—is in basic psychological and social aspects of human organization. If we take the narrower view, that genre simply refers to systems of classification for analytical purposes rather than being a central ingredient of communication and expression, then the current blurring of genres in late capitalist Western culture may more seriously call into question the concept's usefulness. Though our contemporary genres are blurred in unsettling ways, I take the wider communicative view of genre because I feel it reflects the way that actual generic categories emerge from communicative experience rather than being imposed by critics or theoreticians. From this perspective, the idea of genre regains its usefulness as a conceptual tool and ground for artistic creation.

If it is a useful tool, what does the concept genre tell us about the questions that I asked at the beginning of this section? I asked why artists have turned to traditional genres of realism, given the twentieth century's intense questioning of the value of representation in art. Since genre itself is a social concept, it should not be surprising that the answer to this question is social in nature. Realist genres establish a different relationship between artists and audiences than occurs in avant-garde work. Simply put, the realist artist must take the viewer's conception of 'reality' into account in some way. In several ways genres are anti-elitist, a challenge to the insularity of the late-twentieth-century avant-garde, and serve to question whether the social goals of the avant-garde were achievable through anti-conventional artistic expression. Generic art may represent an attempt on the part of artists to make art part of people's lives in a meaningful way once again.

I considered the charge of academicism—that the artist is responding to 'externally imposed' rather than internally motivated structures—by arguing academicism will only occur if the artist is unaware of social factors that influence his or her selective attention. The social approach inherent in genre can be seen as denying the artist's intention and selective attention, but by contrast may involve an *awareness* of the conventional, physical, and social limits involved in making art that individual artists come to terms with in varied ways. It is these 'limits' inherent in generic expression that focus one's attention in a way that is not possible through self-consciously 'innovative' means and subject matter.

Finally, I asked why art at certain periods would be more genre-lized than at others? The genre-lization of art reflects major changes in the social structures of artworlds and cultures: genres are formed from the material conditions of artmaking and viewing. It would appear that in their representation of the 'real' at the end of the twentieth century artists are increasingly rejecting the positive, celebratory view of urban, technological, and consumerist culture evident in art earlier in the century and exploring the values that pre-modern artistic forms hold for our time. It is beyond the scope of this article to discuss the values that specific genres such as landscape, figuration, still life, and portraiture embody. However, I hope this article has established premises that lead to a generic investigation of *contemporary* realist arts.

Notes

1 Nelson Goodman, *Languages of Art: An Approach to a Theory of Symbols,* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1976, [1968]).

2 I have the following movements in American art in mind for these themes: for urban realities, the Ash Can School and 1930-40s Social Realism (14th Street School, Hopper etc.); for mid-twentieth century technological, industrial realities, Precisionism; for regional identities, Regionalism and some current trends in Multiculturalism; for consumerist reality, Pop art; and for the technological reality of information, Photo-realism.

3 'Genre painting' is a somewhat different concept that refers to the realistic painting of everyday life, but, given that this article is about realism, the ties between the two useages of the term are interesting.

4 Alastair Fowler, "Genre," *International Encyclopedia of Communication,* (Oxford, 1989), 21.

5 Thomas Schatz, *Hollywood Genres: Formulas, Filmmaking, and the Studio System,* (New York: Random House, Inc., 1981).

6 Fowler, 216.

7 S. Olson, "Meta-television: Popular Postmodernism." *Critical Studies in Mass Communication,* 4 (1987), 284-300.

Adorno's Subject and Social:
An Exegetical Study

David Raskin

Art reflects society; that is, the nonidentity of subject and object. In other words, society is embodied in the negative dialectic that exists between subject and object. However, the subject—the self-conscious individual—has a fundamental social existence. The social, under conditions of monopoly capital, moves toward total objectification. Due to this movement, the subject also acquires the social as its antinomy. However (and by the same token), the identity of the social and the subject is a false identity.

This compact statement is manufactured with concepts in Theodor Adorno's *Aesthetic Theory, Negative Dialectics*, letters to Walter Benjamin collected in *Aesthetics and Politics*, and *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, co-authored with Max Horkheimer.[1] The argument in this essay's opening paragraph can be summarized as follows:

1. Art reflects society, which is the dialectic between subject and object.

2. Art is social labor, which is the essential social feature of monopoly capitalist society.

3. The modes of production in monopoly capitalist society are reproduced via the culture industry, which has reified society.

4. Society once reified is an object.

5. Thus art reflects the relationship between the subject and society.

6. However, this relationship—that of subject and object—is also antagonistic toward society.

By evaluating Adorno's writings, these six points will be clarified through the web of Adorno's thought, a thought continually at odds with itself, a thought that constructs meaning through the negation of meaning.

1. **Art reflects society which is the dialectic between subject and object.** Adorno clearly describes his version of the dialectic between subject and object when he writes:

> The polarity of subject and object may well appear to be an undialectical structure in which all dialectics takes place. But the two concepts are resultant categories of reflection, formulas for an irreconcilability; they are not positive, primary states of fact but negative throughout, expressing nothing but nonidentity. Even so, the difference between subject and object cannot simply be negated. They are neither an ultimate duality nor a screen hiding ultimate unity. They constitute one another as much as—by virtue of such constitution—they depart from each other. If the duality of subject and object were laid down as a basic principle, it would—like the identity principle, to which it refuses to conform—be another total monism. Absolute duality would be unity. (ND 174)

In this statement, Adorno establishes subject and object as poles, but he argues for their nonidentity, a condition he describes as "negative throughout." Through this conception, Adorno can argue that art travels between these poles, and by proximity to one pole, reflects its opposite. He writes, "A work of art becomes objective when it is completely artefactual, completely man-made; that is, when all its moments are mediated by a subject." (AT 241-242) In this respect, in order for art to be objective it must always also be subjective.

This requirement for negativity is crucial because it creates a space for art to resist totality. As Adorno writes, "art is defined by its relation to a society governed by the law of objectification: it is only qua things that art works become the antithesis of the reified social order."[2] (AT 240) Here, the negative dialectic is clear: by becoming things in themselves—i.e., objects—art resists that very status. Art is generated in this tension. Adorno further clarifies this objectification as one which demands subjectification: meaning cannot exist as a monad. He writes, "the objectification of art is ultimately an immanent process of presupposing a historical subject. By means of its objectification, the art work goes after a truth that is hidden to the subject." (AT 242)

Adorno here suggests that art reveals social fact by reflecting the dialectic of subject and object. He writes, "Its [art's] social essence calls for a twofold reflection: on the being-for-itself of art, and on its ties to society." (AT 322)

2. **Art is social labor, which is the essential social feature of a monopoly capitalist society.**

If art is tied to society, it is because "it is a product of social labour." (AT 321) This claim that art is a product of social labor does not necessarily make art identical with social labor. However, based on the concepts developed in part one of this essay, the case can be made that art reveals society by responding with a reflective function. In this manner, society needs art for purposes of analysis to spur self-revelation. The identical argument can be made with respect to social labor, and one can thus conclude that art is social labor.

Though it is a product of social labor, this status in turn does not imply that art is subjective, or that art is overly tilted toward sphere of the individual. In fact Adorno writes, "The work of art intrinsically tends towards a division of labour,

with the individual being part of it. As production gives itself over to the matter at hand, it results in a universal that is born out of the utmost individuation." (AT 239) By this statement, Adorno suggests that the individual is constituted in the universal and vice versa (a variation of the parts/whole dialectic). This notion, when applied in turn to social labor is important. It implies that art reflects the necessary and unavoidable participation of the individual in a universalizing social structure, one with its foundation in the production of labor.

This understanding accounts for Adorno's belief that "[s]ocial and class relations leave an imprint on the structure of works of art." (AT 329) These relations are what constitutes a capitalist society, and, in this respect, art is unequivocally a part of this hegemony: "Even without being conscious of society, the labour that goes on in the art work through the medium of the individual is social labour. The intention of the individual subject as such is a residual component needed only to bring about the crystallization of the work of art." (AT 240)

Even if art is only residually tied to the individual, it nonetheless plays the dubious role of "divert[ing] attention from society by hypostatizing the individual" (AT 244) via "genius," which is designed to preserve the capitalistic structure of society.

3. **The modes of production in monopoly capitalist society are reproduced via the culture industry, which has reified society.**

Concerning "genius" Adorno writes:

> If the concept of genius is to be retained, it must be divorced from the crude identification with the creative subject. This equation tends to diminish the status of the work, glorifying instead its author out of a false sense of enthusiasm. The objectivity of art works is a thorn in the side of people living in a commodity society because they falsely expect art to act as a palliative for alienation provided only art is translated back into the person standing behind it. In reality this person is little more than a character mask trumped up by those who try to sell art as an article of consumption. (AT 243-244)

Through Adorno's formulation of genius, art begins to be attached or at least infested with a totalizing structure designed to appease labor. In this sense, "in a world that is totally mediated by social reality nothing is blameless." (AT 323)

Adorno develops his view of the total administration of the subject in society, a society based on monopoly capital which requires individuals as subjects to supply labor for production. In such a society, no conceptions are without complicity, as their purpose is to contribute to the myths of salvation. Adorno writes, "As naturally as the ruled always took the morality imposed upon them more seriously than did the rulers themselves, the deceived masses are today captivated by the myth of success even more than the successful are. Immovably, they insist on the very ideology which enslaves them." (DE 133-4)

This ideology is produced by a structure that Horkheimer and Adorno identify as the "culture industry." As they describe it, the culture industry "im-

presses the same stamp on everything. Films, radio and magazines make up a system which is uniform as a whole and in every part." (DE 120) This uniformity destroys the traditional whole/parts dialectic, which in turn creates a totally false society (whole/parts is necessary to establish truth content). The uniformity in an individual's recreational media—the distractions from the reality of being a subject—serves to provide a universalizing coherence and preserves the status quo. Due to the culture industry, culture masquerades as objective (note the stamp of sameness). Horkheimer and Adorno view this objectivity as a force of enslavement and write:

> In our age the objective social tendency is incarnate in the hidden subjective purposes of company directors, the foremost among whom are in the most powerful sectors of industry—steel, petroleum, electricity, and chemicals. Culture monopolies are weak and dependent in comparison. They cannot afford to neglect their appeasement of the real holders of power if their sphere of activity in mass society (a sphere producing a specific type of commodity which anyhow is still too closely bound up with easygoing liberalism and Jewish intellectuals) is not to undergo a series of purges. (DE 122-3)

Enslavement arises in a society based on a total system of exchange relations. In this respect, the "culture industry as a whole has molded men as a type unfailingly reproduced in every product." (DE 127)[3], implying that in monopoly capitalist society "social labor" subsumes the dialectic of subject and object.

Due to the culture industry, art becomes totally objectified. As Adorno writes, "Attuning art to ephemeral individual responses [i.e. genius] meant allying it with reification. As art became more and more similar to physical subjectivity, it moved more and more away from objectivity, ingratiating itself with the public." (AT 339) If art is totally ingratiated in the public by moving more and more away from objectivity,
then it move toward total subjectivity. In other words, art becomes an object. This statement is a negative dialectic. In this manner art is reified.

If art is reified, then, because of monopoly capitalism where the individual is forced to and desires to sell his or her labor to become a subject, join society, and preserve the status quo, society is reified[4] Horkheimer and Adorno write, "The culture industry perpetually cheats its consumers of what it perpetually promises. The promissory note which, with its plots and staging, it draws on pleasure is endlessly prolonged;the promise, which is actually all the spectacle consists of is illusory: all it actually confirms is that the real point will never be reached, that the diner must be satisfied with the menu." (DE 139)

4. Society once reified is an object.

If art is reified, it is because society is reified. If society is reified, it is an object. As Adorno writes, "art partakes of the universal blindness and reification surrounding it. In Marxist terms, art cannot help but reflect a relationship of living labour as

though it were congealed into an object." (AT 242) Here, Adorno resorts to the Marxist conception, which has been discussed, that under conditions of monopoly capital, society is based on exchange relations; namely, the position of labor.

Adorno approaches the objectification of society from a second angle as well: "Along with the social force of production, the decisive relation of production namely the commodity form, as well as the antagonism between both, affect the work of art. That means works of art are absolute commodities; they are social products which have discarded the illusion of being-for-society, an illusion tenaciously retained by all other commodities." (AT 336) If art reflects society and if under the culture industry, art has become a total commodity, then the condition of society is that of a total commodity: society moves toward a condition of being a total object.

Adorno, further and more explicitly implies the connection between artistic objectification and the objectification of society. He writes, "Enshrined in artistic objectification is a collective We. This We is not radically different from the external We of society." (AT 338) Or, has he implies in a different context, "A fact supporting the objectivistic resuscitation of ontology would indeed be the least compatible with its idea: the fact that to a great extent the subject came to be an ideology, a screen for society's objective functional context and a palliative for the subject's suffering under society. In this sense—and not just today—the not-I has moved drastically ahead of the I." (ND 66-67)

5. **Thus art reflects the relationship between the subject and society.** The not-I (the object) has moved drastically ahead of the I (the subject). If the subject/object dialectic, due to present social conditions, has moved to where society could perhaps be characterized as a monad, a monad of object, then the subject can only be constituted in relation to society, which has become objectified, as so determined by the subject/object dialectic. In this respect, the subject is fundamentally social and vice versa.

This relation, like that of subject/object, is by necessity reflected in works of art. Adorno writes, "Art works are able to appropriate their heteronomous essence, i.e. their entanglement in society, because they are partly social themselves. The other part, autonomy, is social in origin as well: it is an outgrowth of their struggle with society." (AT 337-338) Here, Adorno draws a dialectic between autonomy (or the subject) and society, making two concepts interdependent for their constitution.

Adorno develops further how art reflects the dialectic of subject/society. He writes:

> This duality of immanence and sociality is stamped on every single work of art. It is not some formula that defines abstractly what art in general is but the vital element of art is its many particular shapes. Art is social to the extent to which it is an in itself, and vice versa. In art the dialectic of the social and the immanent operates at the level of the specific complexion of art work: nothing is tolerated that is purely

> internal and not susceptible to externalization; nor is anything tolerated that is purely external and not susceptible of becoming the vehicle of the internal, i.e. truth content. (AT 351-352)

For Adorno, words such as "immanence," "autonomy," "being-in-itself," imply similar ideas. However, these words usually are not used to characterize "individuals" or "subjects." The relation, though, is obvious in the sense of not being a whole.

The subject and social are thus inextricably linked yet nonidentical. As Adorno writes, "The antinomy between the determination of the individual and the social responsibility that contradicts this determination is not due to a misuse of concepts. It is a reality, the moral indication that the universal and the particular are unreconciled." (ND 264)

6. **However, this relationship, that of subject/object is also antagonistic toward society.**

However, this relationship, that of subject/object is also antagonistic toward society, and it must be so. Adorno's dialectical categories are structured to generate the nonidentity of knowledge. As Adorno writes, "dialectical images are as models not social products, but objective constellations in which 'the social' situation represents itself."(AP 115-116) If the model is too perfect, the residue or resistance of nonidentity is lost and the entire purpose of art—to reflect individual suffering as resistance—is negated. The culture industry has established a too perfect identity (and not reflection) of the subject/object dialectic thus reifying it. As Horkheimer and Adorno write, "Today tragedy has melted away into the nothingness of that false identity of society and individual, whose terror still shows for a moment in the empty semblance of the tragic." (DE 154) In this respect then, through the residue of terror, the object is shown not to be wholly or unequivocally supplanted by the social and the subject thus in turn is not wholly defined by the social; while at the same time, they are exactly so constituted. As Adorno characterizes this relationship, "The individual feels free in so far as he has opposed himself to society and can do something—though incomparably less than he believes—against society and other individuals. His freedom is primarily that of a man pursuing his own ends, ends that are not directly and totally exhausted by social ends. In this sense, freedom coincides with the principle of individuation." (ND 261-2)

7. **The Möbius**

By structuring this essay in this manner, I have tried to mimic the essential structure of Adorno's thinking. For what can one claim for Adorno without inserting a necessary contradiction? I have tried to make clear that in Adorno's thinking, sometimes there is a dialectic between subject and society and sometimes there is not. The loop established must also be undone.

In this Möbius strip existence, how can the subject—we—survive? Can we take our collective reification and turn it to subjective use? The task Adorno leaves us with, here and now, is to press on and try.

Notes

1 References to these texts will be two letter abbreviations of the title (e.g. AT for Aesthetic Theory) followed by the pagination (e.g. 242).

2 This statement—reductively, the "whole" argument—contains the key concepts upon which my argument rests. My argument will develop linearly, from assertion 1 to assertion 6. However, Adorno's project is designed to resist just such an understanding (and my project is therefore a perversion). I will assert toward the end of my argument, based on Adorno's writing that "reified social order" is "object." However, I could just as easily go "backwards" and develop this study in reverse. In this respect, I hope to signal the spiraling nature of Adorno's dialectical thought, where thought is an arrangement of "constellations" that generate meaning in the nonidentity of polar opposites and not by analytical construction.

3 Notice how this statement would fit equally well in section 1 of this paper; a connection I would like to make to illustrate the nature of Adorno's constellations.

4 I use reification in the sense that the commodity is the central structuring principle of society, a principle that is replicated ad infinitum. For a discussion of reification see Georg Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness: Studies in Marxist Dialectics*, trans. Rodney Livingstone, Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1971.

Manet to Manet and Back Again: Modern Painting According to Michael Fried[1]

Jody Cutler

I. Fried's Task

The objective of this article is to define and review the critical theory of Michael Fried from his early writings through the 1990s.[2] Fried made his critical debut in the mid-1960s championing the abstract painting of the time, but "finds" the matrix of his theory in *Absorption and Theatricality: Painting in the Age of Diderot*, 1980.[3] In *Absorption and Theatricality*, he establishes a polemic of "the beholder [of the art object]" as the crucial measure of modernist artistic tendencies in an original and scholarly argument.

By then, Fried represented the earliest, latest, and staunchest Greenbergian; in fact, he never strays from Greenberg's vocal demarcation of Édouard Manet as "ground zero"—a position in which Fried himself had invested so much early on.[4] The catharsis represented by *Absorption and Theatricality*, however, appears to have been motivated at least as much by the need to break with his mentor and hero Clement Greenberg as the desire to continue seeking out "better" explanations of modern painting.

The hermeneutic progression Fried accomplishes is not philosophically broad, remaining within the bounds of a predetermined discourse—namely the "pure visual encounter" (as in Greenberg);[5] however, the methodological dialectic of absorption and theatricality that he develops provides an intriguing approach to specific object analysis and the overall views of "two-dimensional" possibilities in art.

By 1969, about six years into his career, Fried had retreated (for the most part) from the contemporary art scene, settling on Manet as the nucleus of his critical musings—the other end of modernism. This shift in arenas enabled him to move beyond the material Greenbergian topos and unravel a "logic" of progressive painting that finds the viewer (noticeably absent in Greenbergian theory) at the fore of the aesthetic constellation. Fried finally acknowledges the space between subject-object, which admits certain "metaphysical" subtleties into an essentially formalist[6] and certainly perceptualist position.

In his recent book, *Manet's Modernism, or the Face of Painting in the 1860s*,[7] Fried spends ample time summarizing and defending his own past.[8] He carries a string of self-recapitulations behind him from work to work, which facilitates but also confuses my task of recognizing critical developments in his theory.

This retrospective strategy, of course, is common to many critics and theoreticians; but signaling past work is different than scrupulously delineating each time all that has gone before. Further, Fried's lawyer-like ability to distract readers with mildly interesting "evidence" that sometimes moves far afield from the more crucial aesthetic thematics at stake, while usually done "correctly," becomes an annoying trait of his writing.[9]

Still, Fried's emphasis on the viewer, or "beholder," as an ever-present constant of painting and therefore the key to it "secrets" is a good argument overall (a Hegelian one, in the mold of Greenberg's pseudo-scientific search for immutables). After all, the precept that painting exists for reaction from spectators is often taken for granted in favor of more distanced explanations for its widely varying forms. Ultimately, Fried locates the modernist impulse on a metaphysical plane between artist, painting, and beholder—reciprocally determined and relatively signified in the play among them. This is the space of absorption and theatricality. His explications are logical and progress in substance, despite the sometimes patronizing redundancies that he asks readers to tolerate along the way.[10]

The course of Fried's progression, roughly, is as follows: He first plies Greenberg's theoretical Manet for the justification of the preeminence of Frank Stella. Next, back to Manet for an iconographic examination, and then to the beginning (in Fried's view)—Denis Diderot, who "proves" the absorption/theatricality thesis. Moving through a post-structural, psycho-semiotic discourse on Thomas Eakins influenced by Jacques Derrida, Fried subsequently discovers a projected physical "transference" of the artist-self into painting/object in the work of Courbet. All roads lead back to Manet, whose "modernism" Fried rediscovers through an amalgam of past observations and considerably matured insights. Placing Manet against a backdrop of close peers, Fried actually comes to downplay Manet's hitherto totalitarian dominance of early modern painting. Manet is a pivotal exception only because, according to Fried, he is the first to present directly to the beholder a painterly performance rather than a fictional reality.

That the early Greenbergianism of Fried and his subsequent alignment with the "new guard" *literatus* Derrida might be somehow analogous is perhaps consequential for the dissemination of Fried's ideas. Much in Fried's theoretical methods can be traced to a genuine overlapping with those of Derrida; yet, the art-political parallel that also arises—"by chance," as Derrida himself might put it[11]—is, for my part, worth noting.

Fried has stayed the course through the torrent of negative criticism wrought by his first major piece on contemporary art,[12] and again by his first published foray into another—the 19th—century, "after which," in his own words, "'Manet's Sources'[13] and I were widely regarded as left for dead."[14] He has since worked hard to establish himself as a dedicated art scholar within the critical fray, on aspects of 19th-century French art and the fundamentals of modernism in western painting.

II. Early Works
(a) Contemporary Art

Fried's earliest art writing focused on the painting of his Princeton classmate, Frank Stella.[15] In his first published piece, a short catalogue essay on Stella (1963), Fried interjects Manet as a central point of reference.[16] Sticking closely to the internal language of Greenberg's "formal flatness," he describes (what he sees as) Stella's own minute planarial progression from flat object to framing edge as the "site" of painterly tensions; thus, Fried differentiates Stella's colorful geometric paintings of the early 1960s from the earlier "black paintings" of 1958-60. This is what it's all about—a self-conscious aesthetic response of Stella to himself, as well as what came just before within the new Greenbergian canon—namely Jules Olitski, and Kenneth Noland.

Shortly thereafter, Fried presents a contemporary painter pantheon of Olitski, Noland (mimicking Greenberg) and Stella (Fried's identity-confirming addition) in *Three Americans*.[17] Here he iterates another Greenbergian precept: the "alienation of the artist from the general preoccupations of the culture in which he is embedded and the prying loose of art itself from the concerns, aims and ideals of that culture";[18] thereby affirming his commitment to formalism as the meaningful discourse of modern painting. His predictable citing of Manet in this essay (at length)[19] nonetheless attempts to shift Manet's focus from "flatness" to an awareness of the painting's edge or bounded field—akin to Stella's "progression."

Without acknowledging his own move away from materialism to an *awareness* of the fictional boundary, Fried nonetheless distances himself from it by privileging the (his) literary position over autonomous art-making in the most classicist manner, *e.g.*, "In discussing the work of painters he admires [the critic] will have occasion to point out what seem to him flaws in putative solutions to particular formal problems; and, more rarely, he may even presume to call the attention of modernist painters to formal issues that, in his opinion, demand to be grappled with."[20] These ideas (among others) make Fried nervous about art criticism by emerging Minimalists on their own works, as well as their disregard for "art of the past"—immediate and distant—as criteria for value or progress in contemporary art.[21]

In the name of Greenberg (literally—he is invoked throughout the text and notes), Fried constructs his infamous attack on Minimalism, "Art and Objecthood" (1967).[22] The consequences for the success of Minimalism have been well established. Fried explains here precisely the real move away from past stylistic paradigms that Minimalism proposed, which also laid bare, ironically, the limits of Greenbergian theory. Not surprisingly, Fried's argument came in the wake of a recent essay by Greenberg in which he revealed guarded skepticism about the "novelty" of the new [Minimalist] art.[23] Fried went even further to deny its status *as* art; in fact, the box-like, monolithic sculptures, or "specific objects," of Donald Judd, Robert Morris, *et al.*,[24] were not art but *just* objects in a "situational" relationship with viewers (although Stella also described his own paintings as "objects"). The necessary, "complicit" spectator signaled an inherent lack in this work. Like the-

ater, it depended on audience, which tainted (among other things) its classical distinction and purity as visual art. Fried somewhat melodramatically described it as "laying in wait" for viewers, dependent on perpetual coming and going—antithetical to the immediate cohesion that Greenbergian theory attempted to concretize (in a reformulation, really, of Renaissance painting aesthetics).[25] Therein, Fried realized, back-handedly, his polemic of the beholder—who is invited in or kept out of a work or art according to the extent of that work's "theatrical" nature.[26]

For Fried, the literal character of Minimalism denied the possibility of quality; in other words, the art order was too short. The "danger" of art slipping into to the prosaic realm was more eminent in sculpture; thus, he upheld the upholding (if you will) of the classical *paragone* by Greenberg. Only sculpture that related openly to *human* form in its part-to-whole (non-monolithic) conception, as well as that which emphasized surface to distinguish its three-dimensionality from non-art was acceptable; apparently, the only sculptors whose works fit this bill were David Smith, and, especially, Anthony Caro.[27]

Obviously, Fried was not the only one to object, on the basis of a perceived "aesthetic void," to Minimalism (a term that still frequently evokes art-world snickers). Particularly bothersome to Fried (and many others) was the lack of art-struggle (mental and physical) that it seemed to embody. Fried, then, had clearly identified "problems" with this art in his essay, as seen in the theoretical light it shed on Minimalism.[28] But overall his tone was sensational and hostile: "Art degenerates as it approaches the condition of theater . . . art must defeat theater";[29] Fried's argument held up art evaluation to *past* standards—wholly irrelevant standards to the artists he criticized. He was laughed off in "avant-garde" discourse and criticized generally for completely ignoring the intent of the artists. Nevertheless, "Art and Objecthood" represented a certain "negative gain" (to pun on Greenberg's own evaluation of Minimalism),[30] for Fried, as well as Minimalism, for he identified the themes—"theatricality" and "pre-existent beholder"—that would sustain his career. Further, the telling last line of the piece, "Presentness is grace," represents a non-Greenbergian (non-material) take on the "immediacy" of good painting.[31] Stumped by the latest "modernism," Fried turns to its roots, which, first of all, meant Manet.

b) "Manet and His Sources . . ."[32]

In his first published art historical essay, "Manet and His Sources," Fried approaches Manet as a somewhat over anxious iconographer, seeking to cast his "criticality" onto a more traditional kind of academic discourse. Fried takes on nothing less than a major "problem" in Manet criticism and scholarship for over a century: the reconciliation of Manet's potentially reactionary appropriations from earlier art with his aspirations as a Baudelairean "painter of modern life" and (post-Greenberg) his proto-formalist painterly accomplishments.

The myriad "citations" that inform such imagery, according to Fried, are all related to Manet's desire to display his artistic "Frenchness"—to take his place firmly within the patrimony of French painting. For example, in *The Old Musician*

(Washington, D.C., National Gallery of Art; a "troupe" scene of vagabond figures), the reference to a specific Velásquez composition and the color/style "characteristically though not specifically Spanish in feeling...achieved only after long studies at the Louvre" created simply a veneer for the real French sources of the Le Nain and especially Watteau;[33] Fried uncovers those buried sources (paintings that he possibly could have seen because they were in France at the time, obscure prints, etc.). Again, Manet's borrowings from Velásquez, Rubens, Raphael and Titian, among others, had been long remarked upon. So had Manet's "Frenchness," a term still commonly used to describe the flat clarity and physiological character types in, particularly, his early work. Although Fried attempted a "breakthrough," he actually just reorganized, in a slightly "fantastic" way, existing interpretations through a complex layering of art-referential iconography; such a methodology, today, as a current scholar puts it, "we like to cast as one of the discipline's *bêtes noires*."[34]

In the primary response to Fried's article, Theodore Reff commended Fried's scholarly energy, but summarized: "Just as he begins with an exaggerated claim for the singularity of his subject, so Fried concludes with exaggerated claims for its importance."[35] Reff inadvertently builds on Fried's critical persona as cast in "Art and Objecthood" in another introductory comment: "...the very independence of [the essay's] concepts from all those previously employed, together with its assertive and somewhat condescending tone, will undoubtedly encourage most readers to accept or reject it out of hand, without examining seriously its observations and arguments."[36] Reff also identifies a substantive problem: "Manet's involvement with past art is for Fried always a direct quotation," continuing:

> If, for example, one of the small boys in *The Old Musician* resembles a figure by Watteau, if the boy standing next to him resembles a figure by Velásquez, and if the group as a whole resembles a group by Louis Le Nain, then this suggests that Manet deliberately exploited Le Nain's motif of two boys in order to present references to Velásquez and Watteau in friendly proximity to one another...because he wanted to acknowledge publicly the connection he, and perhaps no one else, knew to obtain between his work and theirs.[37]

As Reff implies by taking this example, at the point when individual analyses of works gets into areas that *no one else* notices, the readings appear preconceived, or "planted." Reff goes on to posit several likely influences on Manet's imagery that Fried's tightly constructed selection of pictorial sources neglects. In the case of *The Old Musician*, for example, the real gypsy and vagrant life on the outskirts of Paris was a common theme in literature (and only slightly less common in art) at the time. In fact, Fried seems to avoid historical context as much as possible; even explicit pictorial journalism like Manet's *Kearsage and Alabama* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art), which depicts an American Civil War ship battle fought in Cherbourg Harbor and witnessed by the artist, is posited by Fried as a painterly grappling with Géricault's *Raft of the Medusa* (Paris: Louvre)—a prop in

an art history "theater."

The bulk of "Manet's Sources" argues Manet's connection to French rococo painting (which, stylistically, raises eyebrows). Theater itself is intricately related with rococo, as is everything in Manet once Fried's thesis is out—that is, Manet is "theatrical." Fried's early theoretical allegiances are still in place here—art relates specifically to art before within strict cultural paradigms. The mark/symbols in the 19th century, however, are figurative, which opens up for Fried what, it turns out, he is generally good at—literary analysis, or "reading" pictures—the approach that has fueled all of his later work (as shall be reviewed). Yet, as Fried follows the thread of his own iconographic deconstruction, he sometimes glosses over the artist's obvious pictorial priorities. For example, the figure Fried explores least in *The Old Musician* is the crucial top-hatted vagrant self-paraphrased by Manet from his failed salon entry of 1859, *Absinthe Drinker* (Copenhagen: Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek).[38]

Fried projects "meta-goals" for Manet pre-selected by his own clever theses that are based on interpreting the "critical line" of the past. This, in turn, becomes a sensibility that Manet's respective paintings illustrate. Thus, Manet tried to address the respective aesthetic preferences of Thoré, Chesneau, Champfleury, and Astruc with various "hybrid" compositions (*e.g.*, Thoré liked Dutch painting; Manet directly responded with paraphrases from Rembrandt and Vermeer, according to Fried). Reff argues that Fried's theory of a "critical aesthetic" is overdetermined:

> Insofar as [Fried] identifies that [contemporary] criticism is an important factor in defining the intellectual background of Manet's art...this is a valuable contribution...but insofar as...he sees the latter as a kind of illustration of it, Fried's thesis is both unjust and untenable....[39]

The "masking of Watteau sources," as Fried describes Manet's procedure, suggests a compulsive scheming at odds with Manet's noted casual style (for one thing). Fried's identification of Manet's enterprise with "rococoism," however, unfashionable in light of the more popular "modern" Manet, was an original art historical position.[40] More important for his own development, the move into the 18th century opened the way to a deeper consideration of aesthetic theatricality, explored here through the period critical terms of *tableaux*—complete, "theatrical" worlds, and *morceau*—mimetic fragments of real life, which Manet and Courbet, respectively, illustrate according to Fried.[41] Further, Fried's foregrounding of the role of critic-consumer (he doesn't use that term)—one artists did acknowledge at that burgeoning time of art-marketing—redefined the Manet equation.

In his recent Manet book, Fried admits certain "forced and unconvincing" arguments in "Manet's Sources" in a point by point briefing.[42] The main reason, however, "why art historians in the late 1960s found 'Manet's Sources' scarcely intelligible," he seems eager to point out, "had to do with its partial dependence upon an account of the evolution of painting in France from Chardin and Greuze through Millet and Courbet (i.e. from the middle of the 18th century until

the 1860s) that I had not yet written"[43]—that being *Absorption and Theatricality*.

III. 1980: 18th-Century French Painting

By now, the influence of criticism on stylistic progress in painting is a leitmotif of Fried's theory; therefore, Fried turns back to Diderot—the first "modern" art critic—to locate the roots of the phenomenon. Fried's *Absorption and Theatricality* presents a tight argument for the dynamic of painting's play to or denial of the beholder as an aesthetic measure of progression and regression. Essentially, modernity is signaled by the break away from "absorptive" space—unified into its own ontology—into a direct dialogue with the beholder, or audience. Fried shows that Diderot (and virtually all other 18th-century critics) embraced the value of "absorption," through deconstructive analyses of several of Diderot's *salons*.

Basically, the fiction—or separateness from life—of painting was its traditional (classical) appeal and a standard by which it continued to be judged during the early years of art criticism. The faux-worlds of Jean-Baptiste Greuze, who enjoyed a highly successful career, were, for example, favorites of Diderot. What was it, at the core, that made these sentimental works, which highlighted charitable, punitive, or other "instructive," familial actions, so appealing in their day across popular and critical factions?

It was the "merging of [the figures'] responses in a single collective act of heightened attention," Fried concludes, that was attractive for its absorptive state of totality.[44] A Greuze painting represented a moment of its own life (as it were) and did not pander to or depend on viewers, who were like intruders beholding the action. As Diderot himself defends a typical Greuze like *The Pious Son-In-Law* (Leningrad: Hermitage):

> Some say [too] that this attention on the part of all the characters is not natural; that a few of them should have been concerned with the old man and the others left to their own occupations...The moment for which they ask is commonplace, uninteresting; whereas the one chosen by the artist is special.[45]

The "primacy of absorption" (a Friedian term), which peaked c. 1770, was not only stylistic and compositional, but also reflected in the subject matter that began to proliferate, such as reading, sleep, and especially blindness. (Fried makes much of the legend of Belisarius—a blind, neglected Roman war hero—which provided a loaded subject in terms of "absorptive looking" for several important period painters, especially Jacques-Louis David.[46]) Example after example of works by period painters, along with corresponding period criticism, finally imbue the thesis with a sense of obviousness—no small feat. Paintings that "deny" the beholder as much as possible, quite simply, were liked best.

In a contemporaneous study of the same critical and visual material, Norman Bryson advances a theory of *a*temporality in keeping with Fried's absorptive, "ever-presentness": Greuze creates enclosed systems that condense time/space into moments of peak intensity.[47] The viewer is "thrilled" to witness the moral

climaxes depicted in Greuzian scenes, as Bryson explains it. Bryson and Fried can, indeed, be linked through the similar semiotic bases of their respective ongoing explanations of modernist representation.[48] Bryson, however, relates the internal *modus operandi* he identifies within the art back to real life; *e.g.*: the recognizability of Greuze's represented characters and themes largely determined their popularity. Fried insists that the "transcendent" concept of absorption explains everything.

Fried notes the absorptive aesthetic across genres and style. Quality in painting, even at this time, was critically equalized by connoisseurs through technique and not theme (Chardin, Greuze, and David were equally admired). The question of leaving the Academy's hierarchy of genres in place (with history at the top) was an ethical, not aesthetic one (the body in action was favored in classical humanist terms).[49] Absorption involved unity, ontological remove, a sense of fake pictorial autonomy, clear expression of characters, and *moralisé*—classical ideas that recall Albertian *historia*. The Neoclassicism of David monumentalized the notion of absorption, but also tended to yield staged compositional groupings, which, as David himself observed, were becoming overstated, or theatrical.[50] Any such overt anticipation of audience is antidotal to the primacy of absorption (which might be poised as "classic" modern, in opposition to "post"-modern "theatricality").[51] This pushes Manet in a sense back to David, where Fried's story ended, for the time being.

The hero of *Absorption and Theatricality*, however, is Diderot, as Barbara Scott notes in her review of the book, where she also points out Diderot's practice of "inventive criticism"(as he called it)—advice that several artists followed closely.[52] Fried tries to gather ambiguities in Diderot's taste into a unified aesthetic (whatever Diderot likes has to fit), as Scott astutely observes.[53] That Diderotian aesthetic then defines the polemic of the beholder, and then, "modernity." While "many of his speculations are thought-provoking and novel," Scott has trouble with Fried's catch-all construction.[54] Where does the "melodrama" of Greuze fit into Fried's construction—absorption or theatricality?

In a more acerbic review, Peter Conrad notes the "chilling" and pontifical tone of Fried's argument: "Form recoils from the impurity of content and the indignity of having to be beheld."[55] Conrad sees Fried's book as an attempt at a spin on Robert Rosenblum's "romantic sublime" through a metaphysics of the beholder; rather absurdly, in this view, Fried covers a highly individualized reading with an abundance of prophecy-fulfilling examples. His approach is dispelled by Conrad rather bluntly: "It conforms [however] to the dialectical etiquette of structuralism, according to which...pictures admire themselves in a narcissistic heaven of self-reference."[56]

Fried often overburdens good ideas with dimly laughable entanglements (especially from *Absorption and Theatricality* onward), for example, this take on the *Raft of the Medusa* (a painting Fried constantly recalls to exemplify a broad range of points across works):

> ...the strivings of the men on the raft to be beheld by the tiny ship on

> the horizon...may be viewed as motivated not simply by a desire for rescue from the appalling circumstances depicted in the painting but also by the need to escape our gaze, to put an end to being beheld.[57]

Such "wound up" assertions do not help Fried's dialectical proposition, which is sound in its limited scope—it comes with a disclaimer to any social involvement, or overreaching assessment of period painting in its entirety.[58] That leaves a skeletal heuristic frame within which aesthetics are located between the "action" of the painting/object and viewer reception: "The problematic of painting and beholder...is founded on the assumption that a painting *faces* the beholder...that the surface of the painting is in fact its *front*."[59] Whether, in activating this function, the painter presupposes an absorptive or theatrical experience from the viewer is an interesting kind of measure. It helps explain the praise for widely divergent painters within the period and potentially expands the canon. Fried's premise can be applied to the whole history of painting style in an arguably more fundamental way than "early-middle-late" or "two-dimensional awareness." The premise's very facileness enhances its viability.

IV. 1987: 19th-Century American Realism

Through the early 1980s Fried continued working towards his professed mission—a seamless history of "absorption and theatricality" in (western) painting,[60] while interpolating *au courant* methodologies, post-structural and psychoanalytical, into his perceptualist strategies. His interest in these theories leads him to identify a graphically inscriptive style in the work of two late-19th-century American figures in *Realism, Writing, Disfiguration: on Thomas Eakins and Stephen Crane*.[61] Here, Fried juxtaposes two separate essays, on Eakins, artist, and Crane, author, respectively, to reveal a shared "problematic of the *materiality* of writing as that materiality enters into Eakins' paintings and Crane's prose."[62]

Fried is again after a dialectical definition for this aesthetic, in the mold of the "absorption/theatricality" model. This will emerge through a "thematics of writing," the prevalent theoretical discourse since Derrida (in Fried's words).[63] The structure of the book (the visual/literary juxtaposition) emphasizes both its key concept and the tenor of Fried's own development. He maintains a formalist tack, describing morphological patterns, but adds semiological analyses; textual ("named") iconographic signifiers are consequential to the form and content of the object-work. Sub-"text" also leads to the subconscious for Fried (following Derrida).

The book's title is drawn from the first essay, "Realism, Writing, and Disfiguration in Thomas Eakins's *The Gross Clinic*." Fried's interest in Eakins related closely to the question of Realism in the French painters he had been scrutinizing.[64] And, once again, the beginning, consciously or not, is Greenberg, whose 1944 review on the artist bears some relevant insights:

> "Naturalism does not altogether explain the art of Thomas Eakins...Eakins had almost no manner, which explains why his paint-

themselves felt. But he did have a style...His earliest work is the product of French influence in the sixties...a synthesis of Manet's impressionism with Rembrandtian psychologism...."[65]

Greenberg also brings in the contemporary literature of the time (Poe, Melville) to "project" Eakins, albeit relative to the formalist chiaroscuro through which Greenberg defines the period aesthetics. Fried overlays a psychoanalytical interpretation of Eakins' iconography on perceptualist ground in a detailed discussion of the painter's most famous work.

Eakins was well aware that *The Gross Clinic* belonged to a long tradition of medical painting most closely identified with Rembrandt's *The Anatomy Lesson of Dr. Nicolas Tulp* (The Hague: Mauritshuis), as well as the Caravaggesque legacy of realism in general. Despite that fact, and the fact that Eakins's career was well established by then (1875), the bluntness of the foreground scene put off critics. The prevalent critical view was and is that Eakins, who had studied with surgeons, had transcribed too realistically an actual operation. Fried argues, instead, that Eakins tightly composed the scene through unconscious, Freudian motivations—the strangely obscured patient's body position, certain background observers, the doctor's bloody scalpel, etc., together represent a psycho-semiological (rather than art-historical) collage-like construction.

Eakins's high school curriculum (unique to education in Philadelphia at the time) equivocated painting and drawing with writing.[66] The scalpels of the two prominent doctors in the scene are like writing implements and echo the action of the note-taker (left) and Eakins' himself, sketchily inserted into the gallery (mid-right), drawing or writing. (Many of Eakins's other works include depictions of script and writing implements). Eakins's father, held in high esteem by his son, was a supportive but somewhat taciturn writer; the scene includes the surgeon-son of the famous Dr. Gross, the central figure and doctor-in-charge, who looks like certain portraits of Eakins's father. The Freudian family romance played out in *The Gross Clinic* includes the mother (Eakins's mentally unstable mother) of the patient (elided with painter Eakins, who negates this identification with his likeness-alter ego in the gallery); Eakins's castration anxiety is localized in Dr. Gross' iconic knife. "On the one hand, Gross the master healer is deeply reassuring...on the other...his bloody right hand...may be read not only as threatening castration but as having enacted it;" the patient's gender is ambiguous.[67] A positive oedipal experience (good father) and homosexual (submissive, filial, misogynist) wish fantasy are among the forces at work in this painting, a microcosm of Eakins's homogeneous "painting/writing" style overall (according to Fried). Eakins "horizontalizes" (mostly through foreshortening) the traditionally vertical act of painting, which heightens the effect of the physical "disfigurement" represented in much of his production.

Fried posits a "Burkean sublime" (Fried's term; *i.e.*, Romantic terror) at the heart of Eakins' disjunctive realism. Emotional and pictorial violence was too close to the surface in this shadowy work for critical tastes of the time still steeped in the primacy of absorption, despite the encroaching "frontal" tactics of Impres-

sionism. Although *The Gross Clinic* largely adheres to this somewhat reactionary aesthetic value, the response it extracted was not an acceptably distanced, voyeuristic one.

Fried finds a similar "'sublime' scenario of fantasized aggression" in the verbal violence of Crane, as if writing, "like painting for Eakins, were in essential aspects an excruciating enterprise."[68] Titled "Stephen Crane's Upturned Faces," the second essay examines Crane's repeated use of the face image—frequently disfigured—looking up from a prostrate position, which represents an "over involvement in seeing, culminating in effects of horror that by their nature are disruptive of seeing" comparable to that in Eakins' painting; thus, Fried articulates an acute oppositional tension.[69] .

In *Red Badge of Courage*, for example, Fleming (the main character) encounters the body of a dead soldier lying on his back, and becomes transfixed by his stare.[70] A significant example is to be found in Crane's story, "The Monster," where chemicals boiling in a laboratory fire flow "directly down onto [the servant] Johnson's upturned face" until "he had no face. His face simply was burned away."[71] Crane's own war story, "The Upturned Face," focuses on a dead body staring at the sky. Then there is the sleeping vagrant staring up through half-closed lids in "An Experiment in Misery," and the bedazzled epileptic who lies face up in the street in "When Man Falls, A Crowd Gathers." The stare/glance/gaze of the figure-faces is interpreted in predictably but appropriately Lacanian terms;[72] and the mixed signals between life and death that the "upturned face" icon emits is analyzed as "disturbing," analogous, once again, to certain ideas of Bryson.[73]

Fried accepts the widespread description of Crane's atmospheric repetitions and colorful immediacy as "impressionist"; but, would extend the concept (of recorded vision) to a literal interpretation:

> [Crane's] attempt before all to make the reader *see*—at least intermittently led Crane himself to see...by which I mean visualize in his imagination, those things that *before all*, actually lay before Crane's eyes: the written words themselves, the white, lined sheet of paper on which they were inscribed, the mark made by his pen on the surface of the sheet, even perhaps the movement of his hand wielding the pen in the act of inscription.[74]

So Crane's language, for Fried, is attributable more to an "unwitting," metamorphosed production of writing than impressionist stylistics proper (or his related eyewitness work as a news correspondent). Fried points out that the utensils, materials and gestures of writing are invoked frequently throughout Crane's oeuvre, *e.g.*, inky liquids, curly streams of smoke; "chalk-blue" pallors; shoe soles thin as paper (etc.). The look down at the face is the look down at the page; in turn, the horizontal face signifies the "upright" human disfigured, as Crane forces the image/sign to conform to the "shape" of his writing action. Further, the staring and stared at characters become surrogates for the author—reifications of psychological struggles manifested in Crane's writing "bouts." Other scholars have made

cal struggles manifested in Crane's writing "bouts." Other scholars have made similar observations, as Fried acknowledges; however, "a rigorously psychoanalytic—Freudian or Lacanian—reading of Crane's prose would have to take into account *all* the conclusions of this [his own] essay."[75]

As usual, Fried's scholarly energy and prowess in this book was recognized, with reservations: "He races, leaping over tricky terrain with a pace and panache that's an accomplishment in itself," according to Jan Heller Levi, although "we can't help...wondering if part of the excitement was just the wind rustling in our ears."[76] Levi finds certain of Fried's semiotic antics "over-the-top," such as the reading of Crane's play on his initials by frequently (according to Fried) using words that contain not only the letters "s" and "c," but also their respective sounds. (This analytical exercise remains only randomly suggestive.)

Fried never does come up with an pervasive, "neat" dialectic in this work, but revels in a "quasi-dialectical mode of...antithetical categories," as Allan Wallach observes,[77] that provide terms for a "pictographic" theory. In relation to the Eakins essay, it is interesting that Fried steps back from the beholder and returns to the two-dimensional ground as the consequential aesthetic "site." The secondary fascination/repulsion theme, however, extends beyond that plane.

While Fried continues to make no claims for incorporating the wide (sociological) view, he does claim (as always) to define aesthetics in terms of critical reaction. On this ground Wallach faults him for ignoring even general period mores that would have effected the rejection of *The Gross Clinic* for display in the art pavilion at Philadelphia's Centennial exhibition (such as the presence of "ladies") more than the virtually unconscious negative reactions that Fried describes.[78] Wallach also attacks Fried's selective perceptualism; for example, Fried barely examines the implicative single female figure in the work, through which certain simple observations might serve to re-position the more hermetic sources of Fried's rhetoric.

Ultimately, the book's importance for Fried lies in its parlance on viewer preconceptions of artistic representation, which impose connotative terms on styles and genres (in their own time/milieu). His absorptive measure works here (more or less), *i.e., The Gross Clinic* can be said to infer a peak point of absorption—an intense moment in the course of a credible scenario, eternally in action like a movie loop; but it approaches "theatricality" through the sharp foreground action and dramatic lighting. Overall, Fried's eye for formal repetitions and metaphorical forms provides consistent analyses of creative impulses and frustrations latent in Eakins and Crane. Again, he contributes not so much reinterpretations but rather nuanced readings, convincing in their insular logic.

V. 1990: 19th-Century French Realism

Inevitably, as Fried suggested early on, Courbet would figure prominently in his painting history; thus *Courbet's Realism*, 1990.[79] Fried's aim here is reflective of his "characteristic hauteur":[80] to offer a view of Courbet that is "at odds with previous art-historical achievement and moreover would have astounded the foremost

critical intelligence among his contemporaries, Charles Baudelaire."[81] Fried will challenge the earthy tactility and class consciousness that has previously defined Courbet's realism with an "advanced" theory that posits bodily awareness and psychic projection as prime influences on the form of his works.

Fried announces a truce with long-time Marxist rival T. J. Clark, in a rather "theatrical" gesture himself, as Charles Harrison notes in his review of the book.[82] An aside on their critical relationship may serve to further clarify Fried's basic outlook.[83] Steeped in social art history with a specialty in 19th-century French painting, Clark also has considered contemporary painting largely through Greenberg, whose early cultural theory was Marxist (a point that Fried has virtually always ignored).[84] Clark does not question Greenberg's notion of progressive flatness, but simply disagrees that such a "modern" signifier finds its value within a space removed from politicized society rather than from parallel values within it. The absence of content in modern art, replaced by disembodied material, equals a negative impulse or canceling out in Clark's view, whereas Fried sees the same as "essentialism," closely echoing Greenberg: "...since modernism is not to overthrow Old Masters or break with them but rather to equal their achievements, a move towards negation in their works does not follow."[85] New masters, like old ones, are after pictorial unity as defined within a critically framed visual discourse of their time; this, according to Fried, is a more fundamental explanation of modernist painting than either the autonomous art-evolution of Greenberg or the inescapable effects of capitalism on the avant-garde delineated by Clark.

Nonetheless, Clark was a renowned Courbet scholar by 1990, and Fried takes the opportunity in his Courbet study to recognize Clark's contributions. The acknowledgment, however, appears to signify a separate-but-equal segregation of art-related issues rather than any rethinking on topics in which Fried simply has no interest; there is no sense of cross-fertilization in the Courbet story Fried proceeds to tell.[86]

Although it would seem unnecessary for Fried to reintroduce *Absorption and Theatricality* in detail with every new project, an entire chapter is devoted to that work in *Courbet's Realism*, where its terms are repetitively integrated into the main discussion.[87] This format, however, follows a pattern of defensive starts in his work, emphasized this time by such specific points of contention as: "I don't think of my approach in this book...as in any sense 'formalist,' an epithet that has tended mechanically to be affixed to my work ever since the 1960s when I wrote about recent abstract painting and sculpture...."[88]

Then taking up where *Absorption and Theatricality* left off (mid-career David), Fried credits Géricault with recognizing in Neoclassical composition the aesthetic "slide" from absorption into theatricality. Géricault intuits the kind of "depredation" that the latter term comes to imply in Fried's theory and "denies" it in his own work. The painter's use of animal imagery, for example, provided "something like a natural refuge from the theatrical...."[89] (another example of the "entertaining" art rationales that can sometimes detract from following Fried's larger ideas). Traditionally, stylistic dichotomies arising in the first half of the 19th century have been discussed in terms of material "finish"— *equissateurs* versus

finisseurs[90]—apexed in the juxtaposition of Ingres and Delacroix. Fried seeks to establish an evaluative criterion for the developing aesthetics of the period that might override such material factioning.

Continuing towards Courbet, there is an ethical moderation (or "*ratio decorus*") to Géricault's calibrated absorption, which is also reflected in Jean-François Millet's oeuvre. This anti-theatrical subtlety enjoys a revival and last stand in the work of Courbet, who literally projects himself into his paintings, and thereby represents the peak of that tradition, according to Fried's history. Opposing forces are blended in Courbet, rather than balanced, as in the first-generation Diderotian models. Though Courbet works with fragments, he implies continuity in nature by his thematic "spill-over" into the space of the beholder; in turn, the beholder is led into the absorptive space through the painted "window."

This time there is no Diderot: "No contemporary critic appears to have recognized in any sustained way the aspects of Courbet's art that are central to my argument."[91] Rather the philosophy of Maurice Merleau-Ponty—the body as reflector-projector—is invoked by the autonomous art-body politic that, he argues, motivated Courbet.[92] Fried acknowledges the speculative nature of this "operation" on Courbet, and the probably unconscious state of his subject's own involvement in establishing Fried's conclusions, which did not help stave off criticism (discussed below).

Courbet's early self-portraits, several seen cropped on a diagonal thrust towards the foreground, consciously suggest the "near" surface—the outer picture plane. As subject, creator and "first beholder," Courbet has a kind of circular relation with these images—they are extensions of him and reach back out to him. In fact, portraits in general for Courbet "are an attempt to evoke within the painting his intense absorption in his own bodily being."[93] In the familial scene *After Dinner at Ornans* (Lille: Musée des Beaux-Arts) for example, all four figures are really himself, or multiple and non-literal selves. Fried points out the bottom-heavy slant to Courbet's compositions in general, which helps to suggest elision into painter-beholder space.

One of the most extreme of all of Fried's ideas is "Courbet's femininity" (as he titled an essay published shortly before his Courbet book).[94] Because the artist is both subject and object, he experiences the traditionally male gaze in a feminine role. Courbet's use of close-up views and visual metonyms of biological productivity are described and associated with femininity. Flowers are a feminine expression of the artist's heterosexual desires, which, in turn, relate to the painter-beholder's palette and "re-situate sexual difference within the painter-beholder rather than between him and the object of his representations"; in addition, "phallus/paintbrush" symbols are frequently grafted onto female figures.[95] Thus, Fried posits a mini-dialectic of passivity/activity that extends over a cross section of Courbet's oeuvre and reflects a "bi-gendered" tension.

The Wheat Sifters (Nantes: Musée des Beaux-Arts), for example, is usually discussed as part of a loose series of works ennobling peasant activities in Ornans. Fried sees more: the kneeling central women, pushing backward against the picture plane mimics the artist's own painting position; the reddish granules she

sifts signify menstrual production, related to the artist's application of pigment;[96] the posture of the two female figures vaguely suggest the form of the artist's monogram ("G" and "C"; reminiscent of his thoughts on Stephen Crane's alliterative initials, discussed above). This "monogrammatic" reading fuels an equally incredible interpretation of Courbet's seminal work, *The Stonebreakers* (destroyed W.W. II.), in which both the young and the old worker images are projections of the painter and in fact correspond to the painter's left and right hands, their tools symbolizing palette and paintbrush.

The monumental *Burial at Ornans* (Paris: Musée d'Orsay) makes more sense as a compression of space toward the viewer, and better illustrates Fried's conception of Courbet's painting technique of "excavation and filling in," rooted in the artist's experience of the real landscape.[97] The cropping of the open grave at the bottom edge of the canvas represents the painter's "absolute proximity" to the painting before him (which reframes the well-known fact that Courbet painted the huge work in a small studio); in turn, Courbet allows the beholder an empathetic relationship to the artist's physical position, manipulated by his own metaphysical attempt at entering the work from his privileged ("first") beholder viewpoint.

Examining a succession of other Courbet paintings, Fried restates the theme of the painter in the act through morphological schemata, transference and surrogate icons; most turn out to be more or less "allegories of their own production," not so far removed from more traditional conclusions about Courbet's works, but more hermetically positioned. The merging of the painter into the canvas is most explicit in the central grouping of *The Painter's Studio, A Real Allegory* (Paris: Musée d'Orsay), where the artist melds into the landscape that he is pictured painting. Likewise, Fried accepts the leitmotif of narcissism long attached to Courbet, but relates it to form rather than content.

Essentially, Fried questions the totalizing "realist" explanation for Courbet's style, as in his tract on Eakins, by uncovering pictorial patterns in lieu of realistic models in many cases. And he is able to integrate Courbet's late landscapes—so often viewed as ancillary to the great work—into the oeuvre, through this idea of inclusive absorption that Courbet is, unconsciously (as noted), after.

Herding deems Fried's expanded view of Courbet's allegorical *concetti* worthwhile, and the links between early/late work of diverse genres that Fried's method allows intriguing. Problems, however, include a lack of centralized arguments and Fried's failure to deal with the more obvious opposite notion that Courbet "theatrically" sought attention through virtually every act, professionally and personally, that is known of him; which makes the absorptive goal Fried advances appear a tenuous premise.[98]

Further, Fried's theoretical zeal leads him to "force" certain visual examples into his theses; *cf.* Harrison: "In no writing easily called to mind is the connection between 'seeing' and 'seeing as' subject to so consistent a testing of its breaking-point."[99] The novelty of Fried's vision becomes tiresome after endless sightings of "displaced" painting utensils and self-affirming gestures by Courbet (that, again, the artist was wholly unaware of). Fried's thesis on Courbet's gendered messages was signaled with a simple exclamation point by several critics; his psy-

material, as well as the less sensational claims for that study.

Looking back to "Art and Objecthood" for an explanation of *Courbet's Realism*, Harrison has an interesting assessment:

> Apparent excesses of metaphorical reading are only to be expected from a writer so impatient with literalism in the interpretation of art—impatient, that is, with the belief that art is in any mechanical sense caused by such features of the natural or socio-political world it may happen to depict.[100]

But Harrison also gives Fried credit for keeping the "critical experience of art" on equal footing with historically-based explicative formulations of aesthetics.

Fried's clearest judgment to emerge in this book is that Courbet is not a "modernist" painter, which is explored only in the book's conclusion. Courbet's paintings (still) need interpretation, in distinct contrast to the immediate explicitness of modern (Greenbergian) painting, although Fried is careful to assign himself an "alternative theory" whereby material explicitness is not enough—what counts is *acknowledging* a condition that becomes an aesthetic—not just "being there," even self-critically.[101] It is with Manet that this fissure occurs.

VI. 1996: French Painting, c. 1863

From the idea of pictorial "facing" emergent in the Courbet book, Fried returns to Manet with *Manet's Modernism, or the Face of Painting in the 1860's*, 1996.[102] The nexus of his topic, French painting, c. 1863, is a consistent blockbuster—in that sense neither timely nor original. More has arguably been written about the impact of the *Salon des refusés,* indelibly etched into that year, than any other art event of its century. A big part of that history, of course, is Manet, who himself made history partly because of the scandalous *Luncheon on the Grass* (Paris: Musée d'Orsay) exhibited there. What more can Fried tell us—or further define? Well, he wants to replace "flatness" with "facing"—definitively—as the mark of modern painting. The reason for the previous formalist distortion of Manet is that Manet has been looked at backwards from Impressionism, rather than in the context of his exact peers.

Typically Fried's site lies on a relatively hair-splitting schism—this time between the Academy and the "new painting" represented by the alternative salon (not consistently separable in style or theme, as has been well examined). Manet was part of a group whose works jointly define the particular balance of absorption and theatricality that was in place, until Manet tipped the scales forever.

The Batignolles group, spearheaded by Henri Fantin-Latour, a central figure in Fried's "generation of 1863," *was* something of a group, as was the "Society of Three" (Fantin-Latour, Alphonse Legros, Whistler) with which it overlapped. Fantin-Latour's many self-portraits and group studio scenes (see *Homage to Delacroix*, Paris: Musée d'Orsay) are integral to the crux of Fried's predominant theme, with all of the beholding —mirror-imaging, locked-gazing, distancing, introspection and doubling—pictured in and projected on them. Taking off from a

trospection and doubling—pictured in and projected on them. Taking off from a Derrida text that brought Fantin-Latour into sharp focus for Fried,[103] he had summarized his enlightened interest in a 1994 article:

> I am concerned with a singular moment in the history of painting in France...one of a certain 'crossing of borders': conceptually, from premodernist to modernist painting...the works we shall be looking at raise the question of the status of the border, at once literal and imaginary, that separates and binds together the world of the representation and that other world, itself not simply real, that lies 'this side' of a given work's material surface.[104]

That, in a nutshell, is Fried's theoretical scope, with him since the "borders" of Stella.

A reprint of the entire 1969 article, "Manet's Sources," as Chapter 1 of the new book is off-putting, if not a kind of misplaced grand-standing (there was hardly a call for an encore).[105] While aspects of the lengthy, earlier work are still relevant to Fried's continuing arguments, they all come up again later within the new material. If he still felt so strongly about those specific points, he could have simply cited them within his self-review of "Manet's Sources," which forms the entire following chapter. Further, (again) much else from other previous works—including *Absorption and Theatricality,* the Eakins piece, and the directly precedent Courbet book—is amply resurrected here.

Getting past the reprisals, Fried's look anew at Manet's interest in Italian renaissance figures places the painter distinctly in a less modern light than usual (that is, Manet was trying, to a good degree, for classically unified, often allegorical pictures). Always interesting is Fried's selection and interpretation of period critical literature; here, he closely re-examines themes in Thoré and Astruc, Manet's strongest early supporters. Despite the divergent specific tastes of the two critics, they shared certain unifying visions, Thoré's more harmonious, Astruc's more inclined towards novelty.[106] The corresponding visual and documentary analyses on Manet's early works are empirically interesting.

The "big" ideas start with a work by Legros, *The Ex-Voto* (Dijon: Musée des Beaux Arts), a country scene of women in mourning. The painting was a critical success at the Salon of 1861, where commentators noted its connection to Courbet's *Burial.* In Fried's morphological and spectator-oriented evolution, *The Ex-Voto* combines Millet's absorption and Courbet's outward-leaning space, while anticipating Manet's unabashed "facing." The ex-voto icon is faced toward us quite specifically. There is no pictorially inherent reason for its askew perspective in relation to the figures, who, "in reality," would be focused directly upon it. Its bright color further removes it from the preoccupied, other-worldly space of the group, who appear impenetrable. This precarious oppositional balancing was aesthetically appealing at the time, as determined by critical beholders. The analysis of Fantin-Latour's works (as above) convincingly grounds Fried's "turning point" theory. (Fantin-Latour was the only artist to be included in both the traditional and

alternative 1863 salons, and his oeuvre has frequently been given a border-line position in terms of its superficial stylistics; again, Fried simply changes the terms of a widely held view.)

Fried is on target with Whistler's *Woman in White* (Washington, D.C.: National Gallery of Art), whose curious appeal to both conservative and progressive reviewers of the *Salon des réfusés* has long been discussed (mainly) in terms of the work's painterly "finish." Fried's idea of the picture as both "an absorptive, beholder-denying structure (keyed to the woman's state of mind) *and* a facing, beholder-aggressing one (based on the orientation of the animal pelt)"[107] may be dramatic, but it "works" with the visually particularized yet ethereal woman on the bear-rug, confusing space and time inextricably.

In Manet, visual conflicts are everywhere—speed and stillness, cohesion and fracture, planes and brush strokes, social and personal—but not absorption and theatricality, because there is no absorption left in Manet. Manet's visual response to the critical move away from absorption was more extreme than that of his peers; thus, he ushers in *modern* "modern painting." Manet's *Mlle. V. in the Costume of Espada* [fig. 2] epitomizes this "break" for Fried, who calls attention to the following (among many other details): the image directly addresses the viewer and must be processed as a unique, total apparition. The *espanolisme* is essentially wallpaper—a material and conceptual backdrop to a studio modeling session; the "bull ring" does not feign any real space; the scale of the figures is ridiculous, the detailing in the model's costume haphazard. In short, its "clues" do not add up to a potential life-like ("absorbing") situation. It is all "facingness"—confrontational and reflexive. Not that there is no formal precedent for this conception; it is known that Manet almost always used pictorial sources (in this case etchings after Titian and Goya prints) as compositional guides if not virtual stencils, some of them photographic (which has very much to do with all of this, as Fried discusses), despite his simultaneous use of live models. But the *Espada* is about the studio space of the painter—that makes it modern and relates it to the kind of modern painting from whence Fried came. The model performs as the artist performs—"acting" if not "action" painting. The Diderotian aesthetics of absorption died hard— that's what made Manet's work so disarming in its own time; far from the subject matter, and *beyond* individual awkward forms, the "face-off" with the beholder was the thing.

Fried shows that Manet's exploitation of past art to ultimately modern ends was not unique, but shared by his colleagues in the 1860s. "Fresh" discussions include his reconciliation of Baudelairean contemporaneity with Manet's art history through a "thematics of memory," and the relationship between his thesis and the marked shift from landscape back to figure compositions by the progressive painters of the time. In addition, Fried examines individual works by Legros, Whistler, and Fantin-Latour, as well as Manet, with great scholarly care and insight. Still conspicuous, however, is his propensity for relaying an abundance of marginal information, as well as molding examples into the evolutionary, patrimonial schemes he defines (*e.g.*, suggesting David's *Death of Marat* [Brussels: Royal Museum of Fine Arts] as a specific influence for Manet's *Olympia* [Paris: Musée

d'Orsay]). But the diligence, organization, and overriding theme of the work—the theatricality of "*facingness as such*" as a signifier of modernism—form an impressive, uncompromising study.

Fried's Manet *is* somewhere between Clark's and Greenberg's, as he declares in the book's introduction. Capping off decades of critical interchanges, he pays due respects to these two colleagues, while further differentiating his own approach in the play. Fried links Greenberg and Clark in their respective attachment to a material spectrum, although they stand at its two opposite ends—narrow certainty to an esthetic of uncertainty.[108] He rests on a metaphysical middle ground, finally concerned with the gray area between the painting, the subjective painter spectator, and the objective spectator[109]—not that far from the space of Minimalism. Perhaps it's a question of degree.

VII. Conclusion

Fried seeks essentials that may serve to define progressivity in painting across a range of ulterior, politicized circumstances. In the classical tradition, he is partial to categorizing and his theories are set off against metaphysical (or Platonic) models; therefore, his visualizations remain intuitively based at heart, although (for my part) his diligent excavations of "factual" support tend to render his pre-conclusions convincing.

The preconceived "beholder" central to Fried's theory *is* basic but has been underestimated or overlooked (I would agree with Fried) in many approaches to aesthetics. Although Fried uses his absorptive measure to re-impress old molds of modernism, it could be invoked as well to displace traditional notions of stylistic progress (including his own), depending, as it does, on a reflexive dynamic of reception, rather than object properties. This method, perhaps inadvertently, proposes new canonical demarcations in painting (as noted) and could extend beyond western, historical art.

Fried's "critic-puppeteer" conception of the modern artist, however, is anachronistic (virtually no artist could be as premeditated as Fried would have it, accommodating original artistic impulses so closely to ideas articulated by the professional and lay public).[110] While the dialectic of absorption and theatricality gives to the painter a certain autonomy—the benefit of implementing the polemic—Fried wants to remain Hegelian.

As a writer, Fried is difficult. He maintains a perceptibly defensive tone throughout his works, supplying self-explanations of everything in order that he dictate his own terms of judgment as much as possible.[111] His discursive verbiage often gets lost in incidentals, confusing the gist of his themes, which, as I have suggested, are relatively easy to grasp and even to apply—a real plus of essentialist theory. Likewise, the constant repetition of pithy phraseology becomes exceedingly pedantic—we understand. Because Fried's theories depend on "evidence" rather than emotional appeal, I believe that it is necessary to have a strong interest in the specific material he deals with to stick with him through writings—and then, his critical theory is engaging. His rhetoric is highly consistent, and his dedication to investigative, often knowingly unpopular positions speaks well for his career.

Notes

1 Michael Fried (b. 1939) is the Herbert Boone Professor of Humanities at the Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore and serves on the editorial board of *Critical Inquiry*. Notes below cite Fried's works by date, also used to identify books by Fried in review ("rev.") articles cited; refer to the List of Works by Fried Cited, following the notes (*). Additional abbreviation: "Chicago" for "Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press." I thank Denise Tartaglia of Columbia University for suggestive comments on a draft of this paper.

2 In my attempt at defining an underlying theoretical outlook for Fried, I lump together works that may be distinguished between art criticism and art history. Fried seeks to differentiate his work in each area in the introduction to his forthcoming anthology, Fried, 1997 (according to advertisements; I have not seen an advance copy).

3 Fried, 1980.

4 See Clement Greenberg, "Modernist Painting," *Art and Literature* 4 (Spr. 1965); in Charles Harrison and Francis Franscina, eds., *Modern Art and Modernism: A Critical Anthology* (1982; rpt. Harper and Row/Icon Editions, 1987 rpt.), 5 - 10. Fried's early fidelity to Greenberg earned him art world introductions from and endorsement of the older critic.

5 On this summary view, see David Clarke, "The Gaze and the Glance: Competing Understandings of Visuality in the Theory and Practice of Late Modernist Art," *Art History* 15/1 (Mar. 1992) : 80 - 98.

6 Although Fried would disagree; see **V** below (fn. 92).

7 Fried, 1996.

8 *Cf.* Fried, 1996, xxv: "The present book returns to Manet and indeed tries to deliver on certain promises I made in 'Manet's Sources' [Fried, 1969]." He reprints the 1969 article within the 1996 work; see **II. b.** below. In the introduction to Fried 1997, he will thoroughly review his earliest works on contemporary art (see n. 2 above).

9 *Cf.* David Carrier, "Fried 1996," *Art Bulletin* 79/2 (June 1997) : 334 - 337; 335: "Fried's maddeningly frustrating tendency to devote space to tangential questions—summarizing the literature in point-scoring ways [that] are sure to alienate many of his colleagues...."

10 *C.f.,* Charles Harrison, rev., "Fried, 1990," *Art Bulletin* 74/2 (June 1992) : 341 - 344; 343: "Only an uncritical acolyte would deny that [Fried's] work is marked overall by a tendency to obsessiveness"; Klaus Herding, rev., "Fried, 1990," *Burlington Magazine* 133/1063 (Oct. 91) : 722-724; 724: "...the author demands—to a far greater degree than is normally required—a kind of identification with himself [and his subject]."'

11 A general theme in the thought of Derrida; see Jacques Derrida, "Mes Chances/*Mes Chances:* A Rendezvous with some Epicurean Stereophonies," in William Kerrigan and Joseph H. Smith, eds., *Taking Chances: Derrida, Psychoanalysis and Literature* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press/Forum on Psychiatry and the Humanities of the Washington School of Psychiatry, 1984); based on a lecture at the Johns Hopkins University in 1982. Fried lectured on Derrida in 1992, developed in Fried 1994.

12 Fried, 1967 (see **II (a)** below).

13 Fried, 1969 (see **II (b)** below).

14 Fried, 1996, 4. Also quoted in Arthur C. Danto, rev., "Fried, 1996," *New York Times Book Review* Aug. 4, 1996, 30.

15 See Anna Chave, "Minimalism and the Rhetorics of Power," *Arts* 64/5 (Jan. 1990) :

44 - 63; 48 - 49, and fn. 31, 62.

16 Fried, 1963.

17 Fried, 1965; an exhibition catalogue prepared while at Harvard on a fellowship.

18 *Ibid.*, 7; a theme in Greenberg, "Avant-garde and Kitsch," *Partisan Review* 6/5 (Fall 1939), in John O'Brian, ed., *Clement Greenberg: The Collected Essays and Criticism, Volume I* (1955; Chicago, 1988 ed.), 5 - 22.

19 In Fried, 1965, especially 49 - 50, fn. 3.

20 *Ibid.*, 10.

21 *Cf.* Roxie Davis Mack, "Modernist Criticism: Hegemony and Decline," *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 52/3 (Sum. 1994) : 341 - 348; 343: "The will to remake culture *de novo* was one that both Greenberg and Fried distrusted and found ideologically threatening."

22 Fried, 1967. On criticism of the article, see Frances Colpitt, *Minimal Art: The Critical Perspective* (Ann Arbor and London: UMI Research Press, 1990), 67 - 73, 88 - 99.

23 Greenberg, "Recentness of Sculpture," in *American Sculpture of the Sixties* (Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 1966), in Gregory Battcock, ed., *Minimal Art: A Critical Anthology* (New York: Dutton, 1968), 180 - 186.

24 See Donald Judd, "Specific Objects," *Arts Yearbook 8 (1965): Contemporary Sculpture*: 74 - 82.

25 Barbara M. Reise, "Greenberg and the Group: A Retrospective View," *Studio International* 175 (May 1968) : 254 - 257 [part 1] and (June 1968) 314 - 316 [part 2], discusses Greenbergian theory in relation to earlier art historical constructs. Her two-part article is important to my study.

26 Fried (in Fried, 1967) goes so far as to hold theatrical production itself in low esteem because of its fiction of fresh occurrence each time out. Bertold Brecht's improvisational theater is okay, for example, because it does not "hide" behind "theatrical" aspects like time and place differentiations between actors and audience. (Of course, Greenberg also liked Brecht.)

27 In Fried, 1967, see especially 137 - 138 on Caro; see also Fried, 1982. Caro is virtually the only contemporary artist in whom Fried has retained long-term interest; *e.g.*, Fried, 1994.

28 *Cf.* Barbara Rose, quoted in Colpitt, 92: "It is impossible to disagree with Fried's characterization of the new aesthetic as 'literalist' but it is not necessary to accept his conclusion that the new work lacks quality."

29 Fried, 140 - 141. See Reise, 314 - 316 [Part 2].

30 Greenberg, "Recentness of Sculpture," 186.

31 Fried, 1967, 147. See Clarke, 81.

32 Fried, 1969.

33 Fried, 1969, 30.

34 Marc J. Gottlieb, rev., "*Emulation: Making Artists for Revolutionary France* by Thomas Crow, 1995," *Art Bulletin* 78/2 (June 1996) : 362 - 363; 364, in a related discussion; not implicating Fried, but describing Crow's approach as antithetical, and praising T.J. Clark, Fried's virtual nemesis (see **V** below), in the wake of Crow.

35 Theodore Reff, "'Manet's Sources': A Critical Evaluation," *Artforum*, (Sept. 1969) : 40 - 48; 40.

36 *Ibid.*

37 *Ibid.*

38 *Ibid.*, 44.

39 *Ibid.*, 48.

40 That position, however, also places Manet closer to the revivalist *fêtes champêtres* of Impressionism, which Fried distances from Manet's style, also against the grain of prevalent scholarship: "...the appreciation of Manet's revolutionary achievement...took place in reverse order, under the sign of Impressionism...confronting the art historian who wishes to recover the pictorial meaning of Manet's art *before* Impressionism...with an especially difficult task"; Fried, 1996, 6.

41 Fried, 1969, fn. 97, 480. The *tableau/morceau* distinction was a major evaluative criterion of the time, *tableau* signifying a kind of classical unity and *morceau* lacking internal cohesion. Fried further explores this critical dialectic later (especially Fried, 1990, and Fried, 1996). Ultimately, Fried finds a kind of accidental unity in Courbet; see V below.

42 Fried, 1996, Chapter 2, "'Manet's Sources' Reconsidered."

43 *Ibid.*, 4.

44 *Ibid.*, 55. For Fried, this assessment is applicable to almost any early Greuze. He sees a slight shift away from total absorption in the later works, related to Neoclassical stylization.

45 Denis Diderot, Salon of 1763, as quoted in Fried, 1980, 55.

46 See Fried, 1980, 154 - 160.

47 Norman Bryson, *Word and Image: French Painting of the Ancien Régime*, Cambridge U. Press, 1981, 126.

48 See Richard Shiff, "Art History and the 19th Century: Realism and Resistance," *Art Bulletin* 70/1 (Mar. 1988) : 26 - 48; 37.

49 Fried, 1980, 75.

50 Fried summarizes in Fried, 1990, 16 - 17.

51 Fried, 1982, 233 - 234, fn. 17, insinuates that his use of the word "theatricality," anticipates its subsequent linguistic guise as "postmodernism."

52 Barbara Scott, rev., "Fried, 1980," *Apollo* 114 (Aug. 1981) : 135 - 36.

53 In a related discussion, Bryson points out the Diderot allowed himself to change his mind; see *Word and Image*, Chapter 6.

54 Scott, 136.

55 Peter Conrad, rev., "Fried, 1980, " *American Scholar* 51 (1982) : 282 - 288; 284.

56 Conrad, 286.

57 Fried, 1980, 154.

58 *Ibid.*, 4: "Nowhere in the pages that follow is an effort made to connect the art and criticism under discussion with the social, economic, and political reality of the age."

59 *Ibid.*

60 Fried, 1980, 4, explains the "larger evolution...which I hope eventually to chart."

61 Fried, 1987.

62 *Ibid.*, xiii (Fried's emphasis).

63 *Ibid.*

64 *Ibid.*, 12: "...although I mostly refrain from juxtaposing Courbet and Eakins, a comparison between their respective enterprises is tacitly at work throughout this essay." (His Courbet book [Fried, 1990] was, by then, underway.)

65 Greenberg, "Review of Two Exhibitions of Thomas Eakins," *The Nation,* July 1, 1944, in O'Brian, 220 - 222; 222.

66 Fried, 1987, 21; writing and drawing were taught as "different aspects of a single *master* skill of eye and hand working in concert"; Rembrandt Peale's *Graphics*, which promoted calligraphic drawing/writing exercises, was a key textbook at Eakins' school.

67 *Ibid.*, 66 - 69.
68 *Ibid.*, 94, 101.
69 *Ibid.*, 116.
70 The primary source for Crane texts is Stephen Crane, *Prose and Poetry*, ed. J. C. Levinson (New York: Library of America, 1984).
71 Stephen Crane, in Fried, 1987, 96.
72 See Jacques Lacan, *The Four Fundamentals of Psychoanalysis*, trs. Alan Sheridan (London: Hogarth, 1977), Chapter 6.
73 See Bryson's discussion of Antoine-Jean Gros' *Battle of Eylau* (Paris: Louvre) in *Vision in Painting*, (New Haven and London: Yale U. Press, 1983), 143 - 145, where Bryson enunciates the heightened oppositions of life and death (Napolean's virility/frozen soldiers, etc.) in the painting and the disturbing nature of their overlap. (Bryson, like Fried, finds that an elision between unlikely opposites in painting breaks certain traditional "codes" of symbolic imagery.)
74 Fried, 1987, 119 - 120.
75 *Ibid.*, 179, fn. 6 (emphasis Fried's). Likewise, "Fried concedes that the notion of written texts as reifying the process of writing is 'pretty much standard fare' these days [but] he's out to do more...," as in Jan Heller Levi, rev., "Fried, 1987," *Art News* 87/2 (Feb. 1988) : 51.
76 Levi, 51. *Cf.* Catherine Fraixe, rev., "Fried, 1987," *Les Cahiers du Musée National d'art moderne* 23 (Spr. 1988) : 108 - 109; 108: "*L'approach est séduisante et elle l'est peut-être trop.*"
77 Allan Wallach, rev., "Fried, 1987," *Art Journal* 48 (Spr. 1989) : 95 - 98; 95.
78 It *was* hung alone in the medical army barracks, officially still part of the exhibition; other Eakins paintings were accepted for the main display.
79 Fried, 1990. (Fried published several articles on Courbet throughout the 1980's.)
80 Wallach, 95.
81 Fried, 1990, 4.
82 Harrison, 341.
83 See the published exchange between Fried and Clark in *Critical Inquiry* 9/1 (Sept. 1982), as follows: Timothy J. Clark, "Clement Greenberg's Theory of Art," 139 - 156; and Fried, 1982; rpts. in W.T.J. Mitchell, ed., *The Politics of Interpretation* (Chicago, 1983), 203 - 220 and 221 - 238; with response by Clark, "Arguments about Modernism," 239 - 148.
84 See Clark, "Clement Greenberg's Theory of Art."
85 Fried, 1982, 228 - 229.
86 The "gesture" is echoed in the preface of Fried, 1996, where Fried describes Clark as his chief "interlocutor" on Manet; but (again) while Fried points to presumed "dialogues" with Clark (on a joint visit to the 1983 Manet retrospective, for example), he never reflects substantively on those interchanges in relation to his own ideas, as Carrier notes, 335.
87 A point not lost on reviewers; see Herding on Fried's overstated "painter-beholder" phraseology. *Cf.* Pierre Georgel, rev., "Fried, 1990," *Revue d'lart* 95 (Jan. 1992) : 82 - 83, on both that aspect ("*ce qui peut être beaucoup dire*") and the rehash of absorption/theatricality ("*...le même propositions aventurée...*").
88 Fried, 1990, 47, and fn. 57.
89 *Ibid.*, 24.
90 Albert Boime, "The *Salon des Réfusés* and the Evolution of Modern Art," *Art Quarterly* 32 (Win. 1969) : 411 - 427. (Fried always seeks out for special attention dichotomized evaluative distinctions.)

91 Fried, 1990, 48.
92 *Ibid.*, 49; and 307, fn. 7. (Fried already cites Merleau-Ponty in Fried, 1965).
93 *Ibid.*, 64.
94 Fried, 1988; and see Fried, 1990, Chapter 6. His arguments are based on stereotyped concepts of femininity as passive and masochistic; pointed out in Herding.
95 Fried, 1990, 198 - 199.
96 Herding, 724: "This argument is strange, if not grotesque."
97 Fried, 1990, Chapter 4.
98 Echoed in Georgel.
99 Harrison, 343.
100 *Ibid.*
101 Fried, 1990, 285; in this he aligns with Stanley Cavell, film historian, to whom the book is dedicated.
102 Fried, 1996.
103 Derrida, *Mémoires d'aveugle: L'Autoportrait et autres ruines* (Paris), 1990.
104 Fried, 1994 (a), 5.
105 In Carrier, a similar take on the reprint is reflected. In Danto (as in n. 4 above), on the other hand, the "defiant" reprinting is subtly defended.
106 Fried, 1996, 162 - 63.
107 *Ibid.*, 223.
108 *Ibid.*, 15 - 16.
109 See Clarke, 19.
110 Richard Wrigley, rev., "Ways of Seeing at the Salon [Fried, 1980]," *Art History* 5/3 (Sept. 1982) :358 - 361; 360, argues a similar view.
111 To be continued in the introduction to Fried, 1997; see fns. 2 and 8 above.

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