ART
CRITICISM

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Contents

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Bernard Berenson and the Science of Anti-Modernism

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For several generations, enemies of modern art could conveniently criticize it by arguing that it lacked "tactile values." Avant-garde painting and especially non-figurative painting could be dismissed for its lack of literal "significance," the ability to make an "impression" on the viewer. It could not do so, evidently, because the forms of the work itself did not correspond to the forms of the human perceiving apparatus. Since the effect of art upon perceivers is based on self-identification, any form of painting lacking this would necessarily be rather irrelevant.

Bernard Berenson (1865-1959) authored the idea of "tactile values" and art historians and educators still use "tactile values," "plastic values" and the like to discuss in particular works of the Renaissance which held as one of its express purposes the representation of relief and volume. More interesting for our purposes is when it is used in a normative way. John Pope-Hennessy called Berenson's theory "the single instance of a successful attempt to evolve by inductive methods an absolute aesthetic standard applicable to Western classical art."[1] More recently, Kenneth Clark said that it was "the first, and remains the only de-mystified aesthetic to command respect. Compared to it, the plastic sequences of Roger Fry and the significant form of Clive Bell are pure mysticism—not to say incantation."[2]

While Berenson connected some progressive elements to his theory, remarkably recognizing Cézanne in his 1896 monograph, he went on to become a notorious enemy of modern art. After a halfhearted defense of Matisse in 1908, he became the most vocal and persistent defender of classic art and its values for the rest of his long life. The problem of psychological aesthetics and anti-modernism were coterminous for Berenson. For those whose sympathies still lie with Bernard Berenson it is useful to revisit the circumstances under which the theory was formulated, and to suggest ways in which the theory coheres and stands up to scrutiny.

"Tactile values" is a form of empathy theory. In the English-speaking world, it has not been fully appreciated the extent to which psychological aesthetics based upon "empathy" (*Einfühlung*) were developed in late nine-

teenth-century Germany. The recent volume published by the Getty Museum, *Empathy, Form, and Space: Problems in German Aesthetics: 1873-1893*, has given many the first chance to read many of the foundational writings in English, and the revised judgment is indeed striking.[3] Suffice it to say that Robert Vischer's work of 1873, *Über optische Formgefühle: Ein Beitrag zur Aesthetik* contained the fundamentals of a Berenson-style aesthetics.[4] By the 1880s, Heinrich Wölfflin, Herman Siebeck, Karl Groos, Johannes Volkelt and, finally, Theodor Lipps—who gave the theory a properly psychological grounding— had all published works on the empathic response to form.

The works of those who were known to work in this vein in English, Bernard Berenson and Vernon Lee especially, therefore appear remarkably late. Berenson and Lee published their first works in 1896 and 1897, respectively, and other works much later. With the hegemony of empathy-based theory in mind, and the overall dependence of American psychology upon German-speaking psychology in the late nineteenth-century, the origin of Berenson's theory is of special interest.

The most interesting thing about Berenson is that he accorded novelty to his theories, even until the end of his very long life. In spite of facility in numerous languages and being a voracious reader, he could still hold that he had gotten his ideas all on his own. The problem of influence is real enough but it may be protracted in Berenson's case with a simpler explanation; Berenson was a student of William James from 1884-7, at Harvard. During this time, James was writing *The Principles of Psychology*, published in 1890, and the course material Berenson absorbed in this time can be assumed to be closely related to it.[5] Perhaps this direct source of psychological ideas could explain Berenson's coyness in giving credit.

Like the empathy theorists, Berenson agreed that, if one perceives the swelling of a column (although unlike Lipps, he never used the example), this is no intrinsic aspect of the object itself. Rather, one must take their raw image and supplement it with kinesthetic experiences learned in the past when bearing weights. In the end, the column appears to swell because one is presently both in the oculomotor and bodily muscles "swelling" at the same time. In Berenson's terms, one must "giv[e] tactile values to retinal impressions."

The only work we are certain that Berenson read was the popular book by the artist Adolf von Hildebrand published in 1893: *Das Problem der Form in der bildenden Kunst*.[6] Hildebrand wrote this book in collaboration with the philosopher Conrad Fiedler and its non-psychological pretensions could have led Berenson to conclude that he was breaking new ground. But the fact remains that even Vischer and others had already made physiological hypotheses and empathy theory had scientific pretensions from the very be-

ginning. One possible influence could have been Vernon Lee, a friend of Berenson, who in fact was charged by Berenson with plagiarism of his ideas the year after Berenson's first work appeared.[7] According to Berenson, he only knew of Lipps through hearsay,[8] and only read Volkelt when he was an old man.[9] Thus, we remain with the idea of Berenson put forward by E. H. Gombrich: "with his gift for the pregnant phrase, [Berenson] summed up almost the whole of [Hildebrand's] somewhat turgid book."[10]

If we do not accept Berenson's historical priority but his claim of isolation, we can counter that he was decisively influenced in his endeavor by William James. Berenson indeed sought to sum up Hildebrand, but he also sought to put him on scientific footing, and one might claim that he did so via the writings of James, his former teacher at Harvard. Thus, parallel to the Vischer-Lipps tradition of *Einfühlung*, I argue for a contemporary but perhaps provincial 'Jamesian' tradition of Berenson's "tactile values." In the following, I shall try to substantiate this claim and relate its importance to Berenson's own anti-modernism, thereby illuminating one small chapter in the history of psychological aesthetics.

Berenson's Theory

Berenson's theory was put forward in his series of books on Italian art commissioned by G. H. Putnam, and published through the 1890s. These were ultimately brought together and published as *The Italian Painters of the Renaissance* in 1930.[11] In the context of four books, Berenson expressed a three part theory of art, which was complete in his second and third books, and restated at the end of the fourth, in a concluding essay.

The unifying psychological concept with which Berenson built his theory was "ideated sensations." Regardless of what psychology texts Berenson had before him in formulating his theory, I think it is clear that the idea of ideated sensations stayed in his head as a foundation from Harvard days. James wrote in *The Principles of Psychology* of the vividness of our impression when we see someone who "Barely escapes local injury, or when we see another injured." He had to concede *"That peripheral sensory process are ordinarily involved in imagination seems improbable; that they may sometimes be aroused from the cortex downwards cannot, however, be dogmatically denied."*[12] And in discussing hallucinations he took a phenomenalistic interpretation that would prove vital to Berenson: *"An hallucination is a strictly sensational form of consciousness, as good and true a sensation as if there were a real object there."*[13] In typical empiricist form, James believed that this was possible because of the associationist nature of nervous pathways. *"When the normal paths of association between a centre and other centres are thrown out of gear,"* James explained, *"any activity which may exist in the first centre tends to increase in intensity until finally the point*

may be reached at which the last inward resistance is overcome, and the full sensation process explodes."[14]

Thus we are not at all surprised to find that, for Berenson, a work of art provides ideated sensations by offering surrogate psychological experiences. As Berenson summed it up, "in order to be life enhancing an object must appeal to the whole of one's being, to one's senses, nerves, muscles, viscera, and to one's feeling for direction, for support and weight, for balance, for stresses and counter-stresses, and for the minimum of space required for one's indispensable bodily autonomy."[15] This passage, written in 1907, indicates retrospectively how Berenson departed from the concept of ideated sensations and sought individual psychological experiences—touch, movement, extensity— with which to go about explaining art. These correspond to "Tactile Values," "Space Composition," and "Movement" in his articulated theory. At this point, it is necessary to describe these individual ideational faculties as they appear in Berenson's theory. Only then may we estimate the further importance of James for Berenson.

The first book was devoted to Venetian art, *The Venetian Painters of the Renaissance* (1894). This first book actually contains no theoretical exposition. Berenson later wrote in the postscript to the last book that at the time he had no inkling of his psychological system and, therefore, never had the opportunity to critically treat the problem of *color* which would have complemented his other concepts.[16] However, it is difficult to see—even granting the undeniable importance of color to Venetian painting—how a resonance theory could handle it. It is perhaps for this reason that in the half century of scholarly activity after the writing of this book Berenson never returned to it.

Tactile Values, Movement

The second book was devoted to Florentine art, *The Florentine Painters of the Renaissance* (1896). Here, the concepts of "tactile values" and "movement" were introduced, the former the concept with which Berenson is most identified. In treating the Florentine school and artists like Giotto and Masaccio, it occurred to Berenson that one function of psychological experience that this school excelled at capturing and which, by extension, was important for all art, was the ideated sensations of touch, or tactile values.

Berenson wrote that the painter's business "is to rouse the tactile sense, for I must have the illusion of varying muscular sensations inside my palm and fingers corresponding to the various projections of this figure, before I shall take it for granted as real, and let it affect me lastingly."[17] Berenson found that when he indeed viewed the works of Giotto or Masaccio, he felt his tactile sense stimulated.

As the book progressed, however, Berenson found a different ideated sensation of touch stimulated, "movement." The Pollaiuoli brothers,

Verrocchio, and Botticelli all stimulated muscular feelings of pressure and strain. Berenson gives the example of a depiction of two men wrestling: "unless my retinal impressions are immediately translated into images of strain and pressure in my muscles, of resistance to my weight, of touch all over my body, it means nothing to me in terms of vivid experience...[t]he artist extracts the significance of movements, just as, in rendering tactile values, the artist extracts the corporeal significance of objects."[18] Just as in the case of tactile values, the ideated sensation of movement is life enhancing because it gives to us a vital experience with no psychic effort. Also, in the same way that Berenson was led by actual works of art and tailored the theory to fit the phenomenon, so too the necessity to deal with these other Florentine artists seems to have put Berenson to expanding his theory.

Space-Composition

The next year, the third book devoted to Roman, Umbrian, and Sienese art, *The Central Italian Painters of the Renaissance* (1897) was published. While it begins with what seems to be a new distinction, by discussing the Sienese proclitivy to "decoration" (which was contrasted to Florentine "description"), it sought to explain a final concept, space-composition. It was called for in dealing with the unique quality of the works of artists such as Perugino and Raphael.

In speaking of space-composition, Berenson wished to capture those experiences which are *not* of the self. Those tactile, muscular and locomotor sensations already expounded were suitable for dealing with figurative arts. When Berenson faced some Central Italian art, however, he saw a genius for landscape and he looked for a psychological faculty to reflect this aspect of their art. He found this in space perception and what he called the "vaso-motor" system. In the rendering of space, it was suggested that the artist must appeal to our own elementarily experienced sensations of space. According to this theory, if the ideated sensations of space-perception could be compounded in a work, then, through the concentrate of their effect, they might relate a material significance superior to the actual present or recalled sensations.[19]

In sum, it can be seen that Berenson conceived of the connoisseur of art as a psychological being, and the task of art was to provide surrogate sensations of tactile values, movement and space-composition. Berenson conveniently found all of these qualities in the most important schools of Italian Renaissance painting.

Berenson's Psychological Rationalizations

It was noted that James' understanding of the fundamental identity between illusions and ordinary sensations was crucial to Berenson. Nineteenth century empathic theories share the notion of specific nerve energies, inherited

from early physiological theory. The basic underlying idea is that a properly stimulated nerve pathway will always give rise to the same sensation. Therefore, surrogate experiences (as for instance works of art) can give rise to a perception of the real thing. While I shall try to untangle Berenson's specific debts to James presently, it is important that James never doubted this fact.

Another thing that all empathic theories share is an orientation to empiristic psychological explanation. Berenson followed empiricists in his early reliance on Bishop Berkeley for his theory of visual perception, and it is through a discussion of this philosopher that we may make our best entry into Berenson's theorizing. Berkeley argued that since all light had to pass through a small hole into "the fund of the eye," there was no way that an idea like distance, for example, could be seen directly.[20] Thus, one had to build up an understanding of distance by the tactile ideas of tangible figure and solidity. In other words, it was touch that was responsible for our ideas of distance.

Although Berenson attempted to explain tactile values, movement and space-composition with simple seeing, it is useful to point out that Berkeley had accounted for the passions with his theory. "The passions," he wrote, "are themselves invisible: they are nevertheless let in by the eye along with colors and alterations of countenance, which are the immediate object of vision, and which signify them for no other reason than barely because they have been observed to accompany them: without which experience, we should no more have taken blushing for a sign of shame for gladness."[21] We think of Berenson's as a theory of "expression," and although he relied on an account of the perception of mere distance, Berkeley's account of the perception of the passions was at least available to Berenson as a model.

After Berenson left Harvard it can also be assumed that he would have owned the *Principles* and found nothing particularly novel in it. In the light of James' long critique of Berkeley in the same book, it is therefore with surprise that we find evidence of Berenson's early reliance upon Berkeley. I will discuss this below, but for now wish to focus on James' reception of Berkeley. In his *Principles*, James marvels at how Berkeley's theory "has been adopted and enthusiastically hugged in all its vagueness by nearly the whole line of British psychologists who have succeeded him."[22] Against Berkeley and his school, James produced within his chapter, "Perception of Space," a long critique of Berkeley and ultimately argued that the school had forgotten, "as a rule, to state under what sensible form the primitive spatial experiences are found which later become associated with so many other sensible signs."[23] Of course, James meant sight.[24]

After publishing his first book on the Venetian school of painting (that is, after 1894), these problems assumed importance for Berenson. While on a bicycling trip with his brother-in-law, the philosopher Bertrand Russell, Berenson had the opportunity to discuss these problems more deeply. Russell

writes (and this is how we know of Berenson's reliance on Berkeley) that "I... felt [Berenson] was under a misapprehension following Berkeley's mistaken theory of vision (that we see everything in two dimensions and ourselves supply a third). I put B.B. on to William James's *Psychology* to dissuade him from this view, and he subsequently modified his theory and clarified it greatly."[25]

It is difficult to resolve the logical inconsistency of Russell referring Berenson to Berenson's teacher, James, but it is evident that Berenson did have difficulty accepting James, while at the same time recognizing the inadequacy of Berkeley. He wrote to his future wife, Mary Costelloe, that after ruminating on the problem, "Even if our primary sensations of space be three-dimensional (which I would not deny) the third dimension in precise form must largely be the result of tactile and locomotor sensations."[26]
This rather noncommittal solution shows up in *The Florentine Painters of the Renaissance*. Berenson begins by saying that "modern psychology has ascertained that sight alone gives us no accurate sense of the third dimension." Saying "*modern* psychology" is an implicit invocation of James, however, the doctrine is Berkleyan. Thus ultimately Berenson's loyalties to Berkeley win out. Berkeley's contention that "distance, of itself, cannot be seen" is none too far from Berenson's "sight alone gives us no accurate sense of the third dimension" and, in fact, are indistinguishable psychologically. Thus, when Berkeley writes of signification of "ideas of sight, [which] forthwith conclude what tangible ideas are...likely to follow" is really no different from Berenson's "giving tactile values to retinal impressions."

It is an interesting fact that tactile values theory not only marked the emergence of Berenson's theory, it also served as its continued foundation. Much later in life, Berenson called tactile values "a basis upon which, as critics, we may erect our standards of value."[27] This is so interesting because we already saw that tactile values was the most difficult concept to assimilate to a contemporary legitimately psychological theory. James voiced his lack of complete agreement with Berenson in his review of *The Florentine Painters of the Renaissance* when he wrote that, "Mr. Berenson himself has to add 'spiritual significance' to his other terms of 'life-enhancing value.' But until we can define just what the superior 'significances' are, in the better of two good pictures—and surely we hardly ever can—the explanation of all merit by significance remains somewhat unsatisfying."[28] It will become evident that as Berenson's theory became increasingly Jamesian, it became also less important in its author's eyes. The initial fumblings with tactile values and Florentine art, however awkward, remained most important to Berenson.

When we come to treat of Berenson's movement theory, it is evident that Berenson departed more clearly from James. James had taken it for granted that joint surfaces are sensitive and that movement is perceived in the joints.[29]

It was left to Berenson to consider this another kind of knowledge, as important as touch, which could at the same time be suggested by works of art. This he did in those works with a pronounced linear quality.

By the next book, it is certain that Berenson read James even more closely. James had written that, "mental states occasion also changes in the callibre of blood-vessels, or alteration in the heart-beats, or processes more subtle still, in glands and viscera."[30] And these effects of respiration and circulation especially as they affect the brain are discerned through each and every sensation's varying quality of *voluminousness*. "Voluminousness," according to James, is "*the original sensations of space*."[31] Therefore, Berenson made the interpolation that in landscape, instead of feeling *self*-identified with a portrait (as per tactile values or movement), we may *be* identified with actual atmosphere or space alone. Incidentally, it should be pointed out that Berenson's friend, George Santayana, a fellow student of James, wrote the year before in his book, *The Sense of Beauty*, "how much the pleasure of breathing has to do with our highest and most transcendental ideals...the actual recurrence of a sensation in the throat and lungs that gives those impressions an immediate power, prior to all reflection upon their significance."[32]

Once again, Berenson has isolated yet another psychological source of spatial knowledge and elevated it to the foundation of a very art. We have evidence that James, himself, recognized his own theories finally in *The Central Italian Painters of the Renaissance* for he wrote to Berenson that it was "the most utterly charming book about pictures...*so true psychologically*."[33] If James might have scrupled with the earlier interpretations of space perception through touch, he could not do so now; Berenson the psychological aesthetician had become a Jamesian.

If Berenson ultimately accepted James, he did so only gradually and grudgingly. After his initial fumblings with the ultimate justification of tactile values he was able to turn to James with much more authority; thus, the theory of space composition and movement are clearly indebted to James. The irony is that while James ultimately remained empiristic in his explanation of distance perception, still believing that it was a matter of custom, Berenson had so much difficulty understanding it! If Berenson had qualified how James actually held to a revised form of empiricism, as he himself did, his aesthetic theories would have been much more coherent. Of course, coherence and truth are two different things, but I have only been concerned with the former.

Cultural Conservatism

Critics often misunderstand main-stream science, which is not unusual. But it brings us to the point of Berenson's anti-modernism. Before moving on to this topic let us review briefly again Berenson the progressive. We know first of all that as a student Berenson moved in artistically liberal circles. He made up an

influential group along with George Santayana and Charles Loeser. All were in some sense outsiders (Berenson and Loeser were Jewish, Santayana was Spanish), and this probably influenced their openness to new things.

It is well known that one of the earliest collections of post-Impressionists (Cézanne) was assembled by Loeser, at his residence in Florence. Berenson, in fact, probably provided the earliest American endorsement of post-Impressionism when he wrote in 1897 in his book, *The Central Italian Painters of the Renaissance*, of "the exquisite modeling of Cézanne, who gives the sky its tactile values as perfectly as Michelangelo has given them to the human figure."[34]

We know that Berenson's ideas were avidly taken up in avant-garde circles. In these years under Berenson's tutelage and friendship Roger Fry was developing his own views of modernism. Furthermore, Berenson had contact with the Steins in Paris, also expatriate Jews. There the "fourth-dimension" of cubism was explicitly considered to be invoked through touch.[35] It is in this context that we must read Berenson's 1908 defense of Matisse in a letter to *The Nation*, written during a trip to the United States.[36] Still, Berenson could only offer his half-hearted approval. He vouched firsthand of the superior draftsmanship of Matisse, but could not nominate him as a "complete" artist.

At this point it is useful to pause and acknowledge the remarkable multivalence of Berenson's theories. Here one can draw attention to his statement that, "Cézanne gives tactile value to the sky." If one imagined giving significant form to the sky, it would appear that one was well on their way to accepting the principles of the over-all composition of the picture plane characteristic of the most radical modernism. For after all what is a "tactile sky," but a compositional element that does not suffer from being incorporeal?

Mary Calo in her book, *Bernard Berenson and the Twentieth Century*, has detailed the ways in which Berenson had reformed criticism and taken it to its logical limit, which suppressed content, only to realize that he had neglected it.[37] She explains his full-blown antipathy to modern art by speculating on his return from connoisseurship during his notorious association with the dealer Joseph Duveen, and his need for continued relevance to a reading public. Modern art became his celebrity cause and he recrafted his aesthetic principles to suit himself. Although he had enunciated principles that were formal and accessible to all, modern art did not leave anything to him. The isolation and specialization of Italian painting promised Berenson some reward for his knowledge; From then on, the tactile specificity of perception became a boon to his anti-modernism, indeed, its correlate.

Berenson's attacks on modern art began slowly but steadily. We have already mentioned the half-hearted defense of Matisse's draftsmanship. Just a year before, in the conclusion to the *Northern Italian Painters of the*

Renaissance, he had written of the "Decline of Art," but this referred to the post-Renaissance and expressed opinions widespread in contemporary art historical writing. Calo sees an essay on Leonardo da Vinci as a watershed in which all the pieces of his later views are present.[38] Leonardo's obscurity and ambiguity, his unwillingness to address the viewer unequivocally, were stand-ins for exactly what modern artists were doing.[39]

Berenson wrote sensitively of medieval art, publishing a group of essays in 1930 under the title *Studies in Medieval Painting*. But again while medieval painting lacked tactile values it was still *Italian* and promised a dependence on Berenson's connoisseurial methods. The preface betrays one of the aims of one of the more interesting essays, on metropolitan and provincial art, which "vaguely foreshadows inquiries which I hope to pursue later in a book on the decline and recovery of form in the arts of visual representation."[40]

The only evidence of this project is *The Arch of Constantine*, provocatively subtitled *Or, the Decline of Form* (1954).[40] However, this work did not offer any substantial invocation of psychology to justify its thesis of the fall of art in the late Roman Empire. This defense came briefly, in *Seeing and Knowing*, written in 1948 and published in 1953. Berenson began the book by affirming the old empiricist distinction between seeing and knowing. He sits in the main piazza in Siena and sees "flowers from a herbaceous border, so multi-colored was what I actually saw, and I saw nothing else" but then realizes that "the mass, the crazy-quilt I was looking at, did not consist of flowers or patch-work. . .I knew that this floral canopy not only must be, but was actually, composed of human beings."[41]

The purpose of his excursus was to affirm that just as vision requires memory, so too art requires the proper cues to evoke the same feelings of solidity. Representation, he writes, is a compromise with chaos whether visual, verbal, or musical. The compromise is effected with conventions, and the visual arts cannot give up on figural conventions no matter how outdated they may seem.

But the most important late defense of Berenson's theories came in *Aesthetics and History in the Visual Arts* written in 1941 but not published until 1948. There Berenson takes up each of the features of his theory, and seeks to affirm them. When he arrives at tactile values, he repeats his convictions about the necessity of rendering solid objects. Only once does he search for aid, when he cites a passage written by Henri Bergson (1859-1941), in his *Les deux Sources de la Morale et de la Religion*:

> A body is essentially what it is to the touch. It has distinct shapes
> and dimensions that are independent of us. It occupies a given
> space and cannot change it without taking the time to occupy one

by one the intermediate positions. The visual image that we have
of it we judge to be mere appearance whose different aspects must
always be changed by reference to the tactile image. This image is
the reality to which the other draws our attention.[43]

This is a rather willful citation. Bergson is first of all not a psychologist but a
philosopher. And he is Berenson's contemporary, who is himself writing quite
late in his career with little care for scientific rigor. Evidently, Berenson has lost
much of the scientistic pretensions he himself previously had.

But meanwhile much had happened in psychology. The most impor-
tant thing was the destruction of empiricist theories based on past experience.
New schools like gestalt psychology used nonsense figures to help isolate the
contribution of autonomous factors in perceiving without the help of the intel-
lect. One of the most important discussions was published by Kurt Gottschaldt
in 1926.[44] He displayed simple forms to subjects and then embedded them
within a larger geometric design. According to the most literal interpretations
of empiricist theory, in spite of the embededdness the mere presence of the
retinal image ought to have triggered past associations.
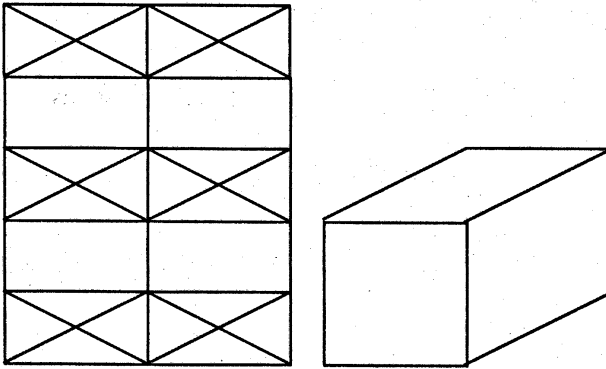
The demonstration may seem trite to us today. Any form of perceptual
constructivism we might defend today would be much more nuanced. How-
ever, this was the form of empiricism common when Berenson was writing, and
that which he never attempted to bolster in any meaningful way. Instead, he
remained content to produce his long-ago conceived ideas, flashed occasion-

ally as the scientific proof of the errors of modernism.

The reason for this is not far to seek. Tactile values required the human form in order to register properly, thus they were selective as to their range of manifestation. This is the same selectivity we saw with the status of Italian painting. When Berenson beheld a Renaissance work by an obscure master it was easy simply to proclaim the abilities of the artist to capture tactile values. But that artist, unlike Picasso or Matisse, was a potentially hypothetical individual, the full knowledge of whom existed only in Berenson's mind.

In conclusion, Bernard Berenson at first glance appears to be an important contributor to psychological aesthetics. From his earliest endeavors, however, he always displayed a coyness about his sources, both William James and the German *Einfühlung* theorists. He also resorted periodically to a willful reliance on his own intuitions or else outmoded theory, like Bishop Berkeley's nearly two century old account of visual perception. All of these factors make it less surprising that when the shape of contemporary art was changing away from the model that Berenson could accept, he fell back on his "scientific" brand of anti-modernism.

Notes

1   John Pope-Hennessy, "The Literature of Art." *Burlington Magazine* 69 (1936): 287.
2   Kenneth Clark, "The Work of Bernard Berenson," *Moments of Vision* (London: J. Murray, 1981), 124.
3   See Harry Mallgrave and Eleftherior Ikonomon (eds.), *Empathy, Form, and Space: Problems in German Aesthetics, 1873-1893* (Santa Monica: The Getty Museum, 1994). See also Michael Podro, *The Manifold of Perception: Theories of Art from Kant to Hildebrand* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1972).
4   Robert Vischer, *Über optische Formgefühle: Ein Beitrag zur Aesthetik* (Leipzig: Hermann Credner, 1873) reprinted in *Drei Schriften zum asthetischen Formproblem* (Halle: Max Niemeyer, 1927), 1-44.
5   George Santayana, *Persons and Places: Fragments of Autobiography* (Cambridge: M.I.T. Press, 1986), 389, says of 1888: "James read to us from the manuscript, chapter by chapter, his new *Principles of Psychology*."
6   Adolf von Hildebrand, *Das Problem der Form in der bildenden Kunst* (Baden-Baden, 1894) trans., *The Problem of Form in Painting and Sculpture* (New York: G. E. Stechert & Co., 1907). Ernest Samuels has also suggested that Edmund Gurney's *The Power of Sound* was influential on Berenson (*Bernard Berenson: The Making of a Connoisseur* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press, 1979).
7   The article in question is Vernon Lee and C. Anstrutter-Thomson, "Beauty and

Ugliness," *Contemporary Review* (1897). The incident is described in Ernest Samuels, *Bernard Berenson: The Making of a Connoisseur*, in the chapter "A Duel with Vernon Lee." Later, Lee relied heavily on the Lippsian version of empathy theory (*The Beautiful, An Introduction to Psychological Aesthetics* [Cambridge: 1913]).

8   A friend of the Berenson's, Obrist, mentioned Lipps to them, but his theory was only available in lectures then. Cf., Samuels, *Bernard Berenson*, 232.

9   *Rumor and Reflection*, 23 January 1942 (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1952), 73-4. The book which Berenson read at this late date was Volkelt's *Ästhetik des Tragischen* (Munich: C. H. Beck, 1897). Berenson writes "I might have avoided Volkelt out of fear that he would rob me of my job, making me feel there was nothing left to say."

10 E. H. Gombrich, *Art and Illusion: A Psychology of Pictorial Representation* (New York: Pantheon, 1960), 16.

11 Berenson, *The Venetian Painters of the Renaissance* (New York: G. H. Putnam, 1894), *The Florentine Painters of the Renaissance* (New York: G. H. Putnam, 1896), *The Central Italian Painters of the Renaissance* (New York: G. H. Putnam, 1897), *North Italian Painters of the Renaissance* (New York: G. H. Putnam, 1907) all compiled as *Italian Painters of the Renaissance* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1930).

12 James, *The Principles of Psychology*, 2 vols., (New York, Henry Holt and Co., 1890), 72. James' italics.

13 Ibid., *The Principles of Psychology*, 115. James' italics

14 James, *The Principles of Psychology*, 127. James' italics.

15 Berenson, *Italian Painters*, 4-5.

16 Berenson writes, "The book on the Venetian painters, where colour is discussed, was written many years ago, before I had reached even my present groping conceptions of the meaning and value of things:" Ibid., 199.

17 Ibid., 2.

18 Ibid., 59.

19 Ibid., 120.

20 George Berkeley, "An Essay toward a New Theory of Vision" (1709), Essays, Principles, Dialogues (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1929), 13.

21 Ibid., 65.

22 James, vol. 2, 212.

23 Ibid., 270.

24 See Nicholas Pastore, *A Selective History of Theories of Visual Perception* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1971) for an account of James' position in nineteenth century visual science.

25 Sylvia Sprigge, *Berenson: A Biography* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1960), 140.

26 Bernard Berenson to Mary Costelloe, 31 July 1895, in *The Bernard Berenson Treasury*, ed. Hanna Kiel (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1962), 83-4. This, of course, later corresponds to Berenson's "tactile values" and "movement" theories.

27 Berenson, *Aesthetics and History*, (London: Constable, 1950), 62.

28 William James, "Scientific Literature," *Science* (1896): 318.

29 James, vol. 2, p. 191, 193.

30 Ibid., vol. 1, 5.

31 Ibid., vol. 2, 135. James' italics.

32 George Santayana, *The Sense of Beauty* (New York, Charles Scribner's Sons, 1896), 56. One can also see here the basis of James' theory of emotion, the so-called James-Lange theory, according to which bodily changes cause different emotions.

33 William James to Bernard Berenson, 15 June 1898, in Ernest Samuels, *Bernard Berenson*, 295. Italics mine.

34 Bernard Berenson, *The Central Italian Painters of the Renaissance* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1897), 101.

35 Linda D. Henderson, *The Fourth Dimension and Non-Euclidean Geometry* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983).

36 Bernard Berenson, "Matisse," *The Nation*, 12 November 1908, Similarly, Frank Jewett Mather wrote in *Modern Painting* that "Fundamentally [Matisse] seems to me a fine draughtsman gone wrong," 358.

37 Mary Calo, *Bernard Berenson and the Twentieth Century* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1994).

38 Berenson, "Leonardo da Vinci," *The Study and Criticism of Italian Art*, 3rd series, (London: George Bell and Sons, 1916).

39 One under-appreciated example of this is found in Geoffrey Scott's influential book, *The Architecture of Humanism* of 1914, written under the influence of Berenson. Scott helped renovate Berenson's villa, I Tatti, in Florence. He wrote his work to combat modernist alternatives to Renaissance architecture based on functionalist, and other justifications, which he called 'fallacies.' Instead, the Renaissance architect knew how to evoke pleasure through the simple classical means he employed. The conservatism of Scott's position is clear; the contemporary should not regard the ornamentation of the classical orders as superfluous, but admit that they are there for a reason. Geoffrey Scott, *The Architecture of Humanism* (1914) introduction by David Watkin, (London, 1985). Alina Payne ("Rudolf Wittkower and Architectural Principles in the Age of Modernism," *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 53 (1994): 322-342) mentions Berenson but does not make the important link to Scott in the genesis of his empathic aesthetics.

40 Bernard Berenson, *Studies in Medieval Painting* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1930 reprinted Da Capo, 1975), x.

41 Bernard Berenson, *The Arch of Constantine; or, the Decline of Form* (New York: 1954). See Calo, *Bernard Berenson and the Twentieth Century,* for this ill-fated project.

42 Bernard Berenson, *Seeing and Thinking* (London: Chapman & Hall, 1953), 2.

43 Henri Bergson, *Les deux Sources de la Morale et de la Religion* (Paris: Alcan, 1932), 139.

44 Kurt Gottschaldt, "Über den Einfluss der Erfahrung auf die Wahrehmung von Figuren," *Psychologische Forschungen* (1926): 1-87, trans., "Gestalt factors and repetition," in W. Ellis, ed. *A Source Book of Gestalt Psychology* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner, 1938), 109-122.

Kaprow's Strategy

Dennis Raverty

Pollock's fatal car crash in 1956 precipitated a crisis that had been brewing for quite some time within the ranks of the avant-garde. Many sensed that with Pollock's death, an era had come to an end. In fact, the inability of Pollock to continue painting after 1952 was not only a symptom of his alcoholism but reflected a larger crisis of contemporary art, an impasse beyond which the artist could not move.

By that time, three major changes had occurred which altered the relationship of artists to their social context. First, as modernism became more accepted and appreciated, the avant-garde lost what many saw as its *raison d'être:* artists were no longer in an antagonistic relationship to society. At the same time, it had become obvious that the most powerful players in the contemporary art world were the critics, not the curators or dealers and certainly not the artists themselves. Finally, the reason for the ascendancy of criticism was that it had developed and articulated a compelling art historical explanation for contemporary art.

While most artists continued to exploit the clichés of Abstract Expressionist gesture while maintaining their pose as rebels, Allen Kaprow decided to face the changed situation in contemporary art and developed a strategy for moving beyond the *impasse* through the theory and practice of a new genre, the Happening. In doing so, he addressed each of the aspects of the changed situation of the avant-garde: he developed an art historical explanation to justify his art, thereby giving it a certain legitimacy and challenging the dominant formalist paradigm on its own terms; seeing the power of critics in the contemporary art world, Kaprow became a critic in his own right, publishing widely on his own work as well as that of others, despite the conflict of interest this sometimes implied; and he proposed a new role for the artist in society—the artist as teacher.

Although Kaprow continues to develop his theories to the present, it is during the decade between 1956 and 1966 that they reveal most clearly the underlying strategy with which he is grappling. During that time, the changing conditions in the art world and his own career are paralleled by changes in his ideas about art, and consequently, it is to this period of his writings that

this essay will be chiefly addressed.

Before turning to Kaprow's strategy as revealed in these early writings, however, it will be necessary to expand upon the situation that he was trying to move beyond in terms of the established role of the artist, the dominant critical matrix of the late 1950s and early 1960s, and the art historical grounds which legitimized this critical position.

Since the advent of Romanticism during the late eighteenth century, artists had been in a more or less antagonistic role in their relationship to the society in which they lived. The rise of the bourgeois class, while freeing artists to explore their own interests, at the same time alienated them from the patronage they had enjoyed under the *ancien regime* and created a financial precariousness which threatened their very existence.

As late as the mid-1940s, when the Abstract Expressionists began to do their mature work, this was the case. According to Elaine DeKooning, "Nobody expected to make money from his work, and mainly, nobody did."[1] Rothko mentions the impetus which this alienation and poverty afforded the artists in an article published in *Possibilities* from 1947:

> The unfriendliness of society to his activity is difficult for the artist to accept. Yet this very hostility can act as a lever for true liberation.[2]

The antagonistic role the artists had vis-a-vis society served the function of freeing them to explore their own directions, as well as binding them to one another in community.

All this had begun to change drastically by the mid-1950s, when the Abstract Expressionists were feted both here and abroad. A decade later, the transformation of the American avant-garde was complete, as Kaprow points out in an article from 1964:

> According to myth, modern artists are archetypal victims who are, as Artaud says, "suicided by society." In the present sequel, they are entirely responsible for their own life and death. There are no clear villains anymore. Society nowadays—at least a rapidly growing part of it—pursues artists instead of exiling them.[3]

Although it seems it would be a blessing for artists to finally be integrated into society, the separateness which they suffered (or enjoyed) had become central to the identity of artists and even to the critical theory which catapulted them to success.

The critical theory which would come to dominate the field and was to be such a powerful influence in American art during the 1950s and 1960s held

separateness and purity to be cardinal virtues. The originator of the theory and the most influential and powerful critic of the period was Clement Greenberg, whose ideas and those of his followers came to be called "formalism."

The virtues of separateness, at least aesthetic separateness, was the touchstone of authentic art, according to Greenberg. The avant-garde aims to create art entirely on its own terms, that is, in terms of its intrinsic qualities.[4] The history of modern art, Greenberg claimed, has been the progressive reduction of painting and sculpture to their essentials, and this tendency he traced back as far as Courbet.[5]

Setting aside for the moment the validity of such a reading of the development of art, it is significant that art history has been called in as a witness to the superiority of abstract art.

> I find that I have offered no other justification for the present superiority of abstract art than its historical justification. So what I have written has turned out to be an historical apology for abstract art. To argue from any other basis would require more space than is at my disposal and would involve an entrance into the politics of taste.[6]

By using an argument derived from history, Greenberg was able to give his theory a certain sense of authority that seemed to be independent of mere taste and subjective preference. It was this historicism that made his theory so compelling and led to formalism's domination of the critical field by the late 1950s. Greenberg's historical model also validated the ascendancy of American contemporary art by emphasizing its links to European modernism of the earlier part of the century.[7]

Although it legitimized avant-garde art, the reductivist imperative implied in Greenberg's paradigm created substantial problems for younger artists who did not want to conform to the dictates of formalist criticism. The burning question for these artists was, "Where do we go after Pollock?"

Kaprow provided a direct answer for this question in his first important essay, "The Legacy of Jackson Pollock," published in *Art News* two years after Pollock's death.[8] According to Kaprow, Pollock did not reduce painting to its essence, as the formalists would have it, but rather Pollock extended painting beyond the confines of the canvas to enter into the viewer's space.

> Pollock ignored the confines of the rectangular field in favor of a continuum going in all directions simultaneously, beyond the literal dimensions of any work...The four sides of the painting are thus an abrupt leaving off of activity, which our imaginations continue outward indefinitely.[9]

Kaprow feels that the large scale of Pollock's painting is related to an attempt to envelope the viewer in an abstract environment, because standing in front of the painting, one cannot see the edges and becomes immersed in Pollock's field of gesture. The viewer's role thereby changes from that of a passive observer to that of an active participant surrounded by the art.

This expansion of the space of the painting into the viewer's space Kaprow tells us, is a reversal of the Renaissance and Baroque tendency to extend the viewer's space into the imaginary space of the picture or ceiling through trompe l'oeil techniques. He sees this as an evolutionary, historical development. It is possible to see in this connection how Pollock is the terminal result of a gradual trend that moved from the deep space of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries to the building out from the canvas in Cubist collages.[10] This tendency is first seen as a trend toward flattening the represented depth from the deep spaces of the Renaissance and Baroque to the relatively planer compositions of David, and then the shallower and shallower space of Manet and Cézanne to the planarity of Cubism. It is at the point of the introduction of collage that the picture begins to advance from the picture plane outward toward the viewer, a tendency, Kaprow asserts, brought to its culmination in the all-over drip paintings of Pollock. The legacy of Pollock, then, is part of a large historical trend: a developing concept of space that extends all the way back to the Renaissance in Kaprow's historical scheme.

It is little wonder Kaprow would be able to formulate his theory of art in terms of historical development because of his background and training in art history. After receiving his B.A. in studio arts from New York University he attended graduate school at Columbia, where he studied art history with Meyer Shapiro. It was in his master's thesis, *Piet Mondrian, A Study in Seeing*, that Kaprow first articulated this historical model.[11]

In this unpublished work, Kaprow places Mondrian in a key position in this historical trend toward the moving of space beyond the parameters of the picture plane. The author rejects formalist or decorative readings of Mondrian despite that artist's importance in the history of modern design and the widespread influence of *de stijl* on designers. Kaprow refers, rather, to the "pervasive incompleteness" of the elements in Mondrian's mature paintings, meaning the open ended rectangles which seem to continue beyond the boundaries of the picture frame.[12] These unfinished rectilinear forms—which are a natural development from the *passage* of Cézanne and the unclosed, interlocking forms of Analytic Cubism—call on the viewer to complete them. But the only way closure can be achieved, Kaprow maintains, is through an imaginary extension of the unclosed forms into the viewer's own space. Kaprow concludes, "Mondrian is only 'alive' in the very process of seeing it."[13]

Later during the same year Kaprow finished his thesis, Harold Rosenberg published his important article on "action painting."[14] Rosenberg's

famous metaphor of the canvas being an arena in which the artist acts, served as the point of departure for Kaprow's later essay on the legacy of Pollock. Rosenberg, however, is vehemently anti-historical in his interpretation of Abstract Expressionism. According to him, the contemporary American artist is unconcerned with history, in contrast with his European counterpart. "The French artist thinks of himself as a battleground of history, here one hears only of private Dark Nights."[15] In the face of the artist's immediate existential position, the burning question becomes whether or not to act. At this juncture, history becomes a moot point, as Rosenberg states, "The Great Works of the Past and the Good Life of the Future become equally nil."[16]

Perhaps it was this lack of a historical justification that led to Rosenberg's interpretation being largely eclipsed by the later 1950s in favor of Greenberg' historically determined formalism. Kaprow, however, saw an opportunity for historicizing Rosenberg's theory by placing it as a developmental moment in the larger historical trends he outlined in his master's thesis. Rosenberg's "arena in which to act" was the next logical step from Mondrian's extension into the viewer's space. Using Pollock (via Rosenberg) as a fixed point, Kaprow was able to make a prediction for the future direction of art: painting per se had ended with Pollock, and Kaprow's environments, Happenings and related trends are destined to become the "alchemies of the 1960s."[17]

It may strike the reader as strange, given the importance of art history to Kaprow's developing theory, that he seems to disparage history in essays from roughly the same period as his Pollock essay. For example, only a year after publication of his essay in *Art News*, Kaprow is speaking of the history of art as something mainly to react against:

> The only general use the past has for me is to point out what no longer has to be done (as someone unremembered once said). The past cannot and does not want to be embalmed. I think that it can only be kept alive in artists who appear to be spitting in its face.[18]

Yet on closer inspection, the defiant avant-garde stance of such statements belie a tacit acceptance of the historical role of the avant-garde, a tradition spanning back a least a century. The need to move beyond the past implies the importance of an understanding the past. Kaprow, even at his most radical and anarchic, is an art historian despite himself.

A more or less fully articulated critical response to formalism, in historical terms (that is—on its own terms), was published by Kaprow in 1963 under the provocative title, "Impurity."[19] A polemical alternate to Greenberg's call for a historically determined purity, Kaprow shows how Mondrian, Stout, Pollock and Newman—artists claimed by the formalists—are ultimately not purists, turning the tables on formalists by using their own exemplars as wit-

nesses to his alternate model. In doing so, Kaprow was building on the ideas he first explored in his master's thesis some twenty years previously.

Finally, in 1966, with the publication of his book, *Assemblage, Environments and Happenings*, Kaprow synthesizes many of his ideas from the previous decade, including his historical apologia.[20] That same year, he did a critical survey of contemporary trends, "Experimental Art," summarizing Hard Edge, Op Art, Color-field painting, Pop art and a number of different directions from his own anti-formalist perspective.[21] Again, he finds it expedient to discuss contemporary art in terms of its avant-garde lineage, tracing current ideas back to earlier twentieth century masters, but with a distinctly "impure" bias. He contrasts what he calls "developmental artists," those working self-consciously to extend historical trends (a thinly veiled reference to the minimalists) with "experimental artists" (the *real* avant-garde) who blur the demarcations between the various mediums and between art and life itself.[22]

Mention of this last essay brings me to the second point of Kaprow's strategy: his assumption of the role of art critic in addition to that of being an artist and theoretician. Kaprow realized that the critics were powerful players in the art world and rather than wait for them to interpret his work, he assumed the role of critic himself, actively supporting work sympathetic to his own, perhaps ultimately hoping to create a critical milieu more in line with his own ideas and therefore more receptive to his work. In "Experimental Art," mentioned above for example, the historical apologia is embedded in a critical review of contemporary art and is in some senses covert (that is, it is not an art historical essay to the same degree as "Impurity").

The use of a critical mode to promote his own ideas while talking about the work of others was strategically much better than, say, publishing manifestos, partly because critics were seen as relatively disinterested parties and therefore were supposedly not motivated by self promotion. Also, by assuming the role of critic and stating his theories "covertly," they were less likely themselves to be the subject of criticism than if they were published as manifestos (critics don't generally criticize criticism).

Kaprow published prolifically during the early years of the 1960s, writing critical reviews for the major art magazines while also doing criticism intermittently in smaller, alternative papers.[23] Although ostensibly reviews of works or exhibitions, Kaprow's critical writing usually contained underpinnings of the overall artistic theory (and its historical scheme) within which his criticism operated. For example in, "Segal's Vital Mummies," Kaprow states that "Abstract Expressionism 'had' to come to something like 'New Realism,'" hinting that the principles of historical dialectics themselves dictated such a switch, rather than a mere shift in taste.[24] Further, Segal's space is environmental, conforming to Kaprow's view of the most current state of the development of space, and his work is highly "impure," mixing materials and breaking down

barriers between art and life. It is also significant that Segal was Kaprow's student at Rutgers, a fact that is tactfully not mentioned in the short biographical sketch that preceded the article. In "The World View of Alfred Jensen," Kaprow acknowledges the work of this artist as relating formally to "hard edge" painting, the most advanced painting of the time for the followers of Greenberg, but Kaprow finds a deeper, mystical meaning in Jensen's painting which transcends form, thereby subtly undermining the dominant critical paradigm of formalism.[25]

In "Happenings in the New York Scene," Kaprow's summary of the "scene" includes his own work, tastefully downplayed, but still present.[26] Moreover, his own theory of the Happening is here crystallized. The Happening as explicated in this article both implies an historical model and addresses the changed role of the artist, but the point here is that it is done under the guise of art criticism.

The Happening, according to Kaprow, advances the historical conquest by the artwork of the viewer's space by entering the audience's temporal dimension because it takes place in time. Happenings stem from the advanced painting of the previous decade, Kaprow tells us, and are therefore more related to the history of painting than to the theater per se.[27] Because the actions of the performers are usually everyday experiences, such as squeezing oranges, and the "actors" play themselves rather than a role, there is a breakdown of the barriers between audience and performers, the real and the artificial, the planned and the spontaneous, resulting in the gradual elimination of spectators, so that everyone becomes a participant.

> Our advanced art approaches a fragile but marvelous life, one that
> maintains itself by a mere thread, melting the surroundings, the
> artist, the work, and everyone who comes to it into an elusive,
> changeable configuration.[28]

The resulting interactions, which take place around a "script" of activity directed by the artist, is the Happening according to Kaprow.[29]

This brief summary of Kaprow's theory brings me to the third part of his strategy: because of the changed nature of the artist's relationship to society, the artist's role should shift from misunderstood tragic genius to that of teacher and facilitator of aesthetic experience.

He begins the development of these aspects of his critical theory early in his career. In "Rub-a-Dub, Rub-a-Dub" of 1957, Kaprow grapples with the new situation of the artist and suggests that this is in part a result of the widespread stratification of modern life, where art becomes of interest only to specialists in a narrow field.[30] He also observes that with the general acceptance of modern art, "there was nothing to revolt against, modern art had won

its battle."[31] The question for the avant-garde, is would seem, is what to do now?

He goes on to describe his own situation as an educator and the dilemma of how to teach art. He concludes that rather than continuing to teach along traditional lines or merely consolidating the lessons of the early modern masters, the artist,

> Might [do] well to continue treating the subject as a historian who talks not so much about art per se, but rather a process of change in which certain data called "art" figure prominently.[32]

The artist should bring to bear the lessons of previous art, especially recent art, not so much as something to emulate, but as something to react to.

By the time "Happenings in the New York Scene," was written in 1962, Kaprow had experienced some success and he describes the pros and cons of the altered situation for artists in New York. He asserts that neither the patron nor the artist understands their changed role in this new alliance.[33]

> To us, who are already answering the increasing telephone calls from entrepreneurs, this is more than disturbing. We are, at this writing, still free to do what we wish, and are watching ourselves as we become caught up in an irreversible process.[34]

That this process, this new-found success, is ultimately good for the artist and therefore for art is questionable.

In "Should the Artist become a Man of the World?" of 1964, Kaprow discusses the dynamics of the artist's new role in society. The "irreversible process" alluded to in the previous article is here explicated in detail. It entails being invited to speak at colleges, appearing on TV and radio, participating in panel discussions, judging international exhibitions and being tenured faculty.[35] Ultimately, with the assumption of power in society, the artist will have different moral responsibilities to what he calls "the people out there," meaning the broad spectrum of the public.[36]

This new, wider public will have to become informed about contemporary art if society is to bridge the gap between what has become a specialized field and this new audience. "Essentially, the task is an educational one," as Kaprow asserts.[37] The responsibility, as viewed by Kaprow, is primarily the artist's.

> Their job is to place at the disposal of a receptive audience those new thoughts, new words, new stances even, that will enable their work to better understood.[38]

The artist thus becomes interpreter of his own work for his new public. Kaprow acknowledges that this was once the task of the critic, but should presently be assumed by the artist himself, who now represents not only "authority-as-creator," but has become "creator-as-authority."[39] In answer to the question whether or not the artist should become a "man of the world," the answer seems to be a cautious "yes," qualified by a realization on the part of the artist of the moral responsibilities this new role entails.

The educative task of the artist has broadened in Kaprow's thought from the days of "Rub-a-Dub..." when he was primarily thinking in terms of art students, to the wider public envisioned in "Should the Artist..." Nonetheless, the artist is still explaining or interpreting his own work (and the work of his colleagues) in the latter essay.

By 1966, with the publication of "Manifesto," the receiver of Kaprow's educative endeavors is no longer being "explained to" about artwork itself, but about a sort of aesthetic approach to everyday experience. In this sensitized mind set, the chipped paint on the wall of an old building takes on the qualities of a canvas by Clyfford Still, the inside of a dishwasher becomes Duchamp's *Bottle Rack.*[40] Non-art situations become transformed into aesthetic experiences.

> Moreover, as the "found object" implies the found word, noise or
> action, it also demands the found environment. Not only does art
> become life, but life refuses to be itself.[41]

Training people to view ordinary experience in this heightened fashion requires no specialized techniques or skills but rather "a philosophical stance before elusive alternatives of not-quite-art and not-quite-life."[42] The result of the deliberate blurring of the ordinary and the extraordinary "forces the attention upon the aims of its ambiguities, to 'reveal' experience."[43] The end product of the artist's task, then, seems to be "revelation," a concept that echoes all the way back to his early treatment of Pollock.

> Pollock, as I see him, left us at a point where we must become
> preoccupied with and even dazzled by the space and objects of our
> everyday life, either our bodies, clothes, room, or if need be, the
> vastness of Forty-second Street.[44]

Kaprow brings these theoretical positions to their full development in his series, "The Education of the Un-artist," from the 1970s, where the "education" is entirely addressed to an audience of non-artists and the objects of aesthetic "training" or "sensitization" are exclusively drawn from non-art sources.[45]

But this brings us beyond the scope of this essay on the uses of art theory by Kaprow during his formative years. Between 1956 and 1966, Kaprow developed and articulated a strategy for dealing with the changed situation for avant-garde artists after Pollock's death. The theory developed rationally, paralleling the development of Kaprow's art from assemblage, through environments to Happenings. At the same time, Kaprow assumed the role of critic and interpreter of his own work, utilizing an historical model which gave it weight and credibility, especially necessary in an critical milieu dominated by formalist aesthetics. Finally, faced with the paradoxical problem of the artist's acceptance into contemporary society, Kaprow favored the artist abandoning his old role of misunderstood genius, to become an educator, broadly conceived of as a facilitator of aesthetic experiences.

Notes

1   Quoted in John Gruen, *The Party's Over Now: Reminiscences of the Fifties* (New York, 1967), 174.
2   Mark Rothko, "The Romantics Were Prompted," reprinted in Clifford Ross, *Abstract Expressionism: Creators and Critics* (New York, 1990), 168.
3   Allen Kaprow, "Should the Artist Become a Man of the World?" *Art News* 63 (October 1964): 35.
4   It was partly Greenberg's positioning of art as part of a broader, social pattern which made it so convincing, while at the same time, paradoxically, he wanted art to be an entity set apart, separate from broader social concerns.
5   See Clement Greenberg, "Towards a Newer Laocoon," 1940, reprinted in *Pollock and After: The Critical Debate* (New York, 1985), 35-46.
6   Ibid., 45.
7   However, Greenberg's model of progressive reductionism had drawbacks that can be clearly seen from our vantage point at the end of the century. It is apparent that he was compelled to dismiss whole movements in art to maintain the linear continuity of his paradigm. Surrealism, for example, was dismissed as a retrogressive contamination of the visual arts by literary devices, and this he maintained despite the importance of Surrealism as a point of departure for Abstract Expressionism. His model also failed to explain important tendencies in early twentieth century American art, such as the Ashcan School, Regionalism and Social Realism, which did not share his agenda of abstract reductionism. Despite these shortcomings, Greenberg's model of historical determinism found widespread acceptance within the art world and he and his formalist followers among the critics became major power brokers within that world.
8   Allen Kaprow, "The Legacy of Jackson Pollock," *ArtNews* (October 1958): 28-29, 55-57.
9   Ibid., 5.
10 Ibid., 6.
11 Allen Kaprow, *Piet Mondrian, A Study in Seeing*, unpublished M.A. thesis,

Columbia University, 1952.

12 Ibid., 15.

13 Ibid., 39.

14 Rosenberg, Harold, "The American Action Painters," *Art News*, 51 (December 1952): 22-23, 48-50.

15 Ibid., 23.

16 Ibid., 48.

17 Kaprow, *Piet Mondrian.*

18 Allen Kaprow, "The Demiurge," *Anthologist* 30 (Spring 1959): 16.

19 Allen Kaprow, "Impurity," *ArtNews* 61 (January 1963): 30-33.

20 Allen Kaprow, *Assemblage, Environments and Happenings*, (New York, 1966).

21 Allen Kaprow, "Experimental Art," *Art News* 65 (March 1966): 60-63, 77-82.

22 Ibid., 62.

23 For example, *The Anthologist* or *The Village Voice.* For a good bibliography of Kaprow's writings, see John Grey's *Action Art: A Bibliography of Artist's Performance from Futurism to Fluxus and Beyond* (New York, 1993). Grey's book gives some idea of the sheer amount of writing Kaprow did at the time, which is all the more impressive when it is realized that Grey deals only with reviews or articles concerned with performance. Other critical reviews, e.g. about painting exhibitions, would not be cited here.

24 Allen Kaprow, "Segal's Vital Mummies," *Art News* 65 (February 1964): 30-33, 65.

25 Allen Kaprow, "The World View of Alfred Jensen," *Art News* 62 (December 1963): 29-31.

26 Allen Kaprow, "Happenings on the New York Scene," *Art News* 60 (May 1961): 36-39.

27 Ibid., 16.

28 Ibid., 18.

29 He acknowledges that other happenings operate on a slightly different basis.

30 Allen Kaprow, "Rub-a-Dub, Rub-a-Dub," *The Anthologist* 29 (no date): 16.

31 Ibid., 16.

32 Ibid., 18.

33 Kaprow "Happenings," 32.

34 Ibid., 33.

35 Kaprow, "Should the Artist Become a Man of the World?" reprinted under the title, "The Artist as Man of the World," in *Essays on the Blurring of Art and Life* (Berkeley, 1993), 52.

36 Ibid., 54.

37 Ibid., 55.

38 Kaprow, "Manifesto," in *Essays on the Blurring of Art and Life*, 81.

39 Ibid., 81.

40 Ibid., 81.

41 Ibid., 82.

44 Kaprow, *Piet Mondrian, A Study in Seeing*, 8.

45 Kaprow, "The Education of the Unartist," *Art News* 69 (February 1971): 28-31, 66-68.

Humoring The Holocaust
An Italian Film Folly

Donald Kuspit

The film "Life is Beautiful" is structured by a number of oppositions child and adult, Italian and German, good German and bad Germans or Nazis, unrepressed, spontaneous Italian child and repressed, well-disciplined German children, private paradise and public hell, home and concentration camp, intimate love and impersonal hatred, humaneness and inhumanity, woman and man, father and son, life and death, and, above all, at least for the purposes of this paper, Jew and non-Jew. But some of the differences become blurred. For example, the male hero is a childlike adult, the male child is an adultlike child, that is, the child who discovers the fatal truth—the ugly reality—that his father is eager to deny, supposedly for his own good, by insisting that life in the concentration camp is an amusing game, not the horror it seems. There is a benign German doctor, initially seen on holiday in the Italian hotel where the hero is a waiter, who re-appears as the authoritarian concentration camp doctor, as obsessed with riddles as ever, so much so that he rescues the hero from grueling work in the concentration camp factory and makes him a waiter in the German dining room, not out of compassion but because the hero is expert at proposing and solving riddles. The woman who becomes the hero's wife has a stolid one-dimensionality frequently associated with male stoicism. It no doubt helped her endure the concentration camp, and survive until the end of the war. Her one spontaneous moment is her dramatic rebellion against upper class and Christian society to marry a lowly Jewish outsider, who made her feel alive as she never did before, and with whom she identifies to the extent that she voluntarily joins him in the concentration camp—a very heroic sacrifice indeed. In contrast her husband, who has a lyrical, giddy, if clever or cunning—indeed, manipulative—quality conventionally associated with femininity, perishes just as liberation is at hand, although he succeeds in saving his son, who is the film's narrator.

But "Life is Beautiful" is not a study in complexity of character; it is about the power of fantasy to defy and change reality, apparently successfully. Humor—the father's conviction that life is fun, however unfunny it may be (this is his lesson and legacy to his son)—is the instrument and motor of the father's fantasy and as such the means of the wish fulfillment. The wish is to survive the concentration camp, as the extreme representative and capsulation

of reality—a place where Jews (among many others) were worked to death when not immediately exterminated. The Nazis in fact called it "Extermination through Labor." This involved "the death by starvation and overwork of literally hundreds of thousands of slave workers."[1] As Albert Speer said, he "didn't see or think of them as human beings, as individuals," but simply as means to an end.[2] The unnamed concentration camp in the film is apparently also a site of what has been called "assembly-line genocide" by gassing, primarily of Jews, but also of 200,000 Gypsies. Moreover, we know, by Heinrich Himmler's own testimony, that "*two thirds* of the victims were women and children," which makes the Nazi mass murder—their ruthless ethnic cleansing—all the more "unique...in the world's history of cruelty and violence."[3]

Now the film is primarily the story of the survival of a child and secondarily the story of the survival of a woman, his mother. It thus contradicts reality—the reality represented by the mirage-like vision of the pit of bodies the hero stumbles upon. An impossible situation, a remote possibility wins out—becomes actuality—with the help--virtually constant help—of humor. The odds are completely against survival, but humor—embodied in the very body of the hero, which seems to have the absurd flexibility of a clown's body and the miraculous litheness of a skilled acrobat's body—tilts them in favor of it. It is this big lie that I want to concentrate on, along with the fraudulent, rather simplistic and stereotyped, and overidealized image of the Jew the film presents. No doubt you will say Hollywood is allowed such liberties—it's just entertainment, after all, another tear-jerker and cliff-hanger in one—but the question is whether the illusions they foster are emotionally useful or betray the self. We know they betray the social truth, which is always stranger than fiction, but the question is also whether they betray the larger human truth of the self. If humor performs the life-saving service the film attributes to it, it helps the self realize itself, but if humor does not do all it is supposed to do then the film dangerously misleads the self.

The psychoanalyst Gilbert Rose has argued that at its best art establishes an "aesthetic alliance" with the spectator that is "analogous to the therapeutic alliance."[4] Both "facilitate emotional responsiveness," that is, "the freedom...to experience a full range of feelings...within the security of a stable structure." This permits one to recover one's full humanity, lost in the everydayness of instrumental conformity and conventionality. But the structure must not only be stable, it must be convincing—the work of art like the analyst must seem to be authentic, that is, a true self or its representative and symbol. If the analyst or work of art seems false in any way, it loses authority and therapeutic potential, as well as expressive value. One only reluctantly forms an alliance with it, which is the same as saying one never really does. This paper is about why I do not find "Life is Beautiful" convincing as art— which doesn't mean it isn't entertaining (entertainment doesn't make us do

psychic work the way art does, as Hanna Segal says)—and why I cannot form an aesthetic alliance with it. In the end, I will argue, this has less to do with the fact that it presents a false image of the Jew and reality, than with the fact that it offers humor as an aesthetic antidote to all the poisons of life, indeed, to death itself. The Italian clown-father suggests that all one has to do is to see life in a humorous way—to see tragedy as comedy—and one will survive its traumas. The heroism of humor is the really the big lie of the film—the dangerous grand illusion, indeed, insane delusion that it fosters.

The film splits Jewishness into two characters. On the one hand, there is the hero, a kind of Jewish clown, as I have suggested, full of proverbial Jewish smartness, which helps him survive, at least until the last moment, and above all helps his son and secondarily his wife survive, literally and spiritually. For his humor keeps their spirits alive in a spiritless, degrading situation, and he cleverly finds a way to hide and feed his son. He is also a Jewish cliché in that he is reduced to running a bookstore, indicating that he is one of the people of the book. This remarkable character contradicts all the claims that the Jews went passively—without resistance—to their death. This person, who never seems to succumb to depression however depressing the circumstances, does not go gently into the night, but ingeniously outsmarts it as long as he can. The other significant Jew in the film is the hero's uncle Elezeo (Elijah), and he does go all too gently and apparently unknowingly to his death. To the last moment, he lets himself be deceived by the Germans' intentions—he does not see through them, as his nephew does. The uncle generously hires his nephew as a waiter despite his apparent incompetence and clumsiness, lives in what can only be described as private cultural luxury—how he can do that on a waiter's salary is beyond me—and, undressed and about to go into the gas chamber, bends down to help up a Nazi woman officer who has tripped in front of him, thus remaining a gentleman to the end. This imperturbable, kind, profoundly humane person, smiling and tolerant, accepting without being resigned, maintaining his dignity even in the most macabre circumstances, never rebelling against life even with humor, as his nephew does, is an unwitting caricature of the assimilated Jew. Cultured but socially blind and compliant, even docile—he is certainly not as aware and wary of his environment as his ironic nephew—he has no idea of what fate has in store for him, even when it is at hand. In contrast to his nephew, he is a dupe of society—a believer in the proper forms, as the lesson in waiting he gives his sloppy nephew indicates, which gives him a kind of belief in himself. He is all surface—sincere surface, but still surface, however deep the cultural aura of his private life. He does not seem to understand what it is to suffer because he is well-adjusted to his world—so at home in it, to the extent that he seems to fit into it seamlessly. In contrast, his nephew knows how hard and random life is—how big a role contingency plays in it—which is why he needs the defense

of humor to deal with it. Both figures are idealized clichés of Jewish identity: the clever Jew, outsmarting the evil gentiles—and even taking one as his wife and convincing her that Jewishness is more vitalizing than Christianity, more on the side of life, while Christianity is on the side of living death—and the passive, sophisticated Jew, who makes the best of his menial situation, to the extent that he has a higher private spiritual life, whatever his public and material circumstances. Both figures are Christian fantasies of the Jew that have only a tangential, incidental—dare one say accidental?—relationship to the realities of Jewish character, if there is such a thing.

In humor, Freud wrote, "the ego refuses to be distressed by the provocations of reality, to let itself be compelled to suffer. It insists that it cannot be affected by the traumas of the external world; it shows, in fact, that such traumas are no more than merely occasions for it to gain pleasure." In other words, humor creates the illusion that one is immune to the traumas of the external world. The hero of the film gains pleasure from the traumas he endures, that is, he finds beauty in ugliness, as the title of the film tells us—even the traumas of the concentration camp seem to delight him in some peculiar way, as though it was some unique place he was privileged to experience. He does not simply make the best of his hard lot in the concentration camp, but subliminally seems to delight in it, not only for his son's sake, but because it is fascinating and bizarre—unlike anything he has known before.

But he goes too far: he has the illusion that humor can defend him from suffering and death, much the way some pre-industrial people seemed to think that rubbing themselves with some liquid and chanting while doing so protected them from bullets. This illusion is perpetuated—worked out, as it were—in his effort to convince his son that the concentration camp is a game in which one scores points for performing certain activities well, with the winner getting a tank. Lo and behold, the wish comes true, in the form of the American tank of liberation, with a kindly American soldier—utterly unlike the brutal German soldiers—in its turret. The big brave happy clean shaven utterly unrealistic soldier seems unaware of the fact that he is in a concentration camp, and he does not bother to ask the boy how he happened to be alive. There is a double payoff of fantasy, for the boy finds his mother, making for a happy ending. The father's faith in the power of humor to right all wrongs has done its miraculous job.

The hero's humor, which is initially a way of ridiculing "false Grandeur" (the 18th century philosopher Frances Hutchinson's definition of it)—I am thinking of the various "attacks" on the socially important fiancé of the woman who eventually became the hero's wife—and thus shown to have a certain adaptive function, becomes something more through the game the hero plays with his son. It is no longer an ironic way of adapting to reality, but an unironic, compulsively maintained way of falsifying it away. The hero's humor

comes to support a completely unrealistic attitude. The ultimate point of the picture is to convince us that even the most horrendous reality can be made to seem unreal, which permits one to endure and survive in it—literally not be destroyed by it. One only has to keep the faith of humor, which is an all-protective shield. This is the dangerous big lie of the film.

The real monstrosity of this insane lie is that it reduces the holocaust to triviality, and suggests that the smartest kind of Jew is a sacred fool. Indeed, the film implies that to be a sacred fool, Jew or not, is the best way to live, especially when living is living death. No doubt it is time to come out from behind the passivity of a silent response to—silent witnessing of—the Holocaust, and to responsively witness it in an artistic as well as humanly convincing way—a way that does not aestheticize the Holocaust's barbarism but rather affords imaginative insight into it—insight that imaginatively identifies with its victims, conveying their sense of abandonment, hopelessness, and helplessness as well as wish to survive. Adorno was wrong when he said it was barbaric to write poetry—in effect to make art—after Auschwitz. On the contrary, silence is barbaric, in that it rapidly turns into indifference, that is, mimics the silence of death which it claims to witness. The speechlessness of the ineffable has an affinity with the silence of death. In antiquity sarcophagi were often covered with images of life at its most vibrant—scenes of Dionysian revelry, ironically signalling the return to nature which death is but also indicating that nature is much more than death. The question today is whether the hope and strength implicit in humor, when brought to bear on the Holocaust, as "Life Is Beautiful" does, makes emotional and aesthetic sense, or whether it betrays the Holocaust, by reminding us that there is life beyond the grave without understanding just exactly what a grave is, especially a grave that other people have dug for one.

In my opinion the representation of humor in "Life Is Beautiful" is inauthentic, for it is a false reponse to the life-threatening provocations of the external world it seeks to surmount. The provocations and traumas of Freud's remark about humor are everyday compared to those of the Holocaust, which is why humor is as incompatible with the Holocaust—an inappropriate response to the Holocaust—as the Holocaust is discontinuous with everyday life. Humor and the Holocaust are as incongruous as the suffering of the Holocaust and everyday suffering. There is no doubt some appropriate artistic defense against the Holocaust—some response between silence and humor—but it is not clear what it is, especially since overwhelming trauma allows no response. Or rather the concentration camp compatriots of the hero show the response: the abject helplessness of psychic deadness, which among other things involves the narrowing of the range of emotional responsiveness, and finally the disappearance of all emotion. The problem is how to artistically defend against psychic deadness, abject helplessness, emotional absence, by

conveying them without producing an abject, dead, emotionless art. But such an art might be more convincing than one that insanely keeps laughing all the way to the grave. That the comic hero does so confirms that he has become a very disturbed child, which he may have been all along.

Notes

1 Gita Sereny, *Albert Speer His Battle with Truth* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1995), p. 334.
2 Ibid., p. 338.
3 Ibid., p. 344.
4 Gilbert J. Rose, *Necessary Illusion Art as Witness* (Madison, CT: International Universities Press, 1996), p. 80.

Journalistic Criticism
Popular Entertainment or Populist Critique?

Keith Miller

> *Ernest* But what is the difference between literature and journal-
> ism?
> *Gilbert* Oh! Journalism is unreadable and literature is not read.
> That is all.
>
> —Oscar Wilde[1]

Despite its questionable reputation among academic and artworld
specialists, it would be difficult to overestimate the power of journalistic art
criticism in daily and weekly papers of national importance.[2] With an audience
far broader than any of the more specialized journals and art magazines, these
publications offer the possibility of an access point for an ever more detached
and indifferent public to an artworld which alternately disdains and desper-
ately desires that public. Embodied in the criticism of John Canaday and Michael
Kimmelman, both chief art critics of the *New York Times* and separated by
several generations, are two poles of journalistic criticism, which demonstrate
both the potential power and the flaws of this field. On one side stands the
possibility of being the questioner of the new, the angry critic railing against
excess. On the other is the eminent insider, enthusiastically celebrating much
of the work produced. In both cases the broader public ends up losing where
they could be benefiting greatly.

While academics write explanations of, and justifications for, works
of art, the broader public sees an opaque group of art works which they can
easily turn away from. For the unengaged viewer of art, in many cases the
result has been work which was difficult to digest, supported by "critical writ-
ing [that] has all too often become bad writing."[3] The journalistic critic should
instead question and shed light on the work as much as the reader, be they art
specialist or outsider, in a way which is at once intelligent and accessible, as
their job demands. The critic must interrogate the work in order to show its
deeper layers of meaning. In this light, "Criticism must strive to be as resonant
as the art it interprets, but without being abstruse or condescending."[4]

While trying to balance the editorial requirements, the to and fro of

the art world, the level of education (or knowledge of the art world) of the reader and their own views, the journalistic critic is in the same position as many other reporters of current events. These journalists and newspapers have been transformed from ostensibly serious conveyors of the news of the day to a more entertaining, less challenging version of the same events, often called "infotainment." Just as international affairs of state take a back seat to political trysts, the art world has been turned into a celebration of personality as much as the work of art, and in some cases more so. Although this is potentially a great loss to the works of art, it could be used in the hands of the art journalist as a way to bring the reader into the work in order to discuss the substance of the work, instead of a cover for the lack of substance within the criticism.

The influx of fashion, and of the fashionable in general, is not itself a cause for a lack of critical investigation. The same sense of fashionable criticism, criticism which focuses more on the fashion of art than the substance, which can be criticized today, has been present since the beginning of critical journalism.

The criticism of John Ruskin, made over 150 years ago, can still be made today. "[Journalistic critics'] writings are not the guide, but the expression of public opinion. A writer for a newspaper naturally and necessarily endeavors to meet, as nearly as he can, the feelings of the majority of his readers; his bread depends on his doing so."[5] The attempt to stay abreast of the public opinion, as opposed to leading or lending insight into those opinions, inevitably produces mediocre writing at best. At the same time Ruskin's comments must be taken as criticism of the potential flaws of journalistic criticism and not its inherent nature. If the critical work is to have any substance it must meet the work on equal footing.

> *Ernest*   But what of criticism outside creation? I have a foolish habit of reading periodicals, and it seems to me that most modern criticism is perfectly valueless.
> *Gilbert*   So is most modern creative work also. Mediocrity weighing mediocrity in the balance, and incompetence applauding its brother—that is the spectacle which the artistic activity of England affords us from time to time. As a rule, the critics—I speak, of course, of the higher class, of those in fact who write for the sixpenny papers—are far more cultured than the people whose work they are called upon to review. This is, indeed, only what one would expect, for criticism demands infinitely more cultivation than creation does.[6]

While the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were not without their share of bland coverage of the art of their time, one need only look to first

Denis Diderot's and later Charles Baudelaire's salon coverage to find a journalistic criticism which penetrates as it enlightens, enlivening both the work and the reader and potential viewer of the work. Writing for the *Correspondance litteraire*, Diderot eventually wrote critiques of nine Salons between 1759 and 1781. In those essays, written largely for a foreign audience without first-hand access to the work, Diderot developed a style based on close description and analysis of the works he saw as important, using clear and opinionated prose. Diderot attempts to create an experience similar, or parallel to, the experience of the work, thus giving the reader an access to the work he or she might otherwise not have, even if they were to see the Salon in person. His directness and enthusiasm in the Salon of 1763 gives a clear example of both the insight and accessibility of his writing:

> There are several small paintings by Chardin...Nearly all represent fruit and the accessories of a meal. They are nature itself; the objects seem to come forward from the canvas and have a look of reality which deceives the eye...When I look at other artist's paintings I feel I need to make myself a new pair of eyes; to see Chardin's I only need to keep those which nature gave me and use them well...For the porcelain vase is truly porcelain; those olives are really separated from the eye by the water in which they float...And I ought to tell you that this artist possesses excellent common sense and discusses his art marvelously well...To hell with Apelles' famous Curtain and with Zeuxis Grapes! It is not difficult to fool an impatient artist, and animals make bad critics of painting...But Chardin can deceive you and me whenever he wishes.[7]

In his narrative, Diderot takes the reader from the first experience of the work, seeing it from a distance within the larger room, and brings us closer and closer to the work, penetrating ever more the materiality of the painting until he finally reaches the artist himself. While his arrival at the artist may seem beside point, it is more so exactly the point. By beginning with the larger element, the room, and then moving inward until he arrives at Chardin himself, he reveals for the reader that this phenomenon called art is in fact human and altogether important and consequential.

At the beginning of Modernism it was Baudelaire who stated what the task of the modern critic would be. He wrote that the critic should "write from an exclusive point of view, but a point of view that opens up the widest horizons...I sincerely believe that the best criticism is that which is both amusing and poetic not cold, mathematical criticism..."[8] It is an idea that applies to the journalistic critic more than the academic or specialized critic. With the criticism of Baudelaire, the work of the critic was given a new level of self

awareness and with it a broader freedom, and an equally broader responsibility. In his Salon of 1846, he speaks not only of the work but more so of general ideas of criticism and painting. In his writing the sense that he is a poet as well as a critic is never distant. While his comment that "the best account of a picture may well be a sonnet or an elegy"[9] may be an exaggeration, it is his ability to penetrate the visual through the poetic and analytic, simultaneously, that have given to his writings the transcendence they have.

As a result of the critical consciousness brought about by the writings of Baudelaire, the critic was no longer seen as the parasite many of the Salon artists of Diderot's time thought the critic to be. Through Baudelaire's writings on Delacroix, Proudhon's and Champfleury's writing on Courbet, Zola's writing on Manet, among many other examples, artists saw themselves explained and defended by the critics to a potentially hostile, misunderstanding public. Often this was done in a way that not only spoke of the work critically, but also elevated the work and the whole enterprise of criticism. At the end of the nineteenth century no one would make clear the possibilities of criticism better than Oscar Wilde.

For Wilde, the critic need not be a servant of the art discussed. Instead, "to the critic the work of art is simply a suggestion for a new work of his own."[10] His conception of the critic not as a simple translator of works of art but also as the creator of works of art (he titled his essay of 1890 "The Critic as Artist"), transforms the critical possibility and establishes a new relationship between the artist and the critic.

> [Criticism] treats the work of art simply as a starting point for a
> new creation. It does not confine itself...to discovering the real
> intention of the artist and accepting that as final. And in this it is
> right, for the meaning of any beautiful created thing is, at least, as
> much in the soul of him who looks at it, as it is in his soul who
> wrought it.[11]

While his work "The Critic as Artist" is more a treatise on criticism than the play it purports to be, his humorous, elegant prose style demonstrates exactly what strength criticism can have as an autonomous and creative art. At the same time, he demands just that of the critic.

Since the inception of modernism, 'new art' has very often been received with hostility, disgust or indifference. In light of this ambivalence the journalistic critic has often been the one to translate the new language to an ever more distant public. "In the best of circumstances, the critic serves as a kind of aesthetic mentor, introducing an audience to challenging, little-known, or obscure works or offering insights that might make work more accessible, engaging, profound, or relevant."[12] The newspaper critic is the potential first

link between difficult to read art and a potentially interested viewer. It is the writer's opinion that can arouse interest or disdain and which creates a level of interest outside the insulated art world. The newspaper critic is for many the first point of contact with art works which might otherwise go completely unnoticed by all but an initiated few.

In speaking of journalistic criticism, *The New York Times* is a logical place to focus for at least two reasons. The first is due to its being situated in the city which gave birth to the first prominent and original artistic movement in the United States. The second is its being one of the most important daily newspapers in the country, with a significant art department.

From its beginnings to the present, the relationship of the public to the currents of modern and contemporary art has evolved and with it the relationship of the journalistic critics to the work and to the public they write for. To attempt to understand the nature of that evolution, it will be helpful to look at two periods in the history of the *Times*. I begin with the moment when the New York school was sufficiently established for New York to be recognized as the center of the international avant-garde in the United States as well as Europe (its competition for the leadership of the avant-garde). Then I compare that with the present situation.

In the beginning of the gallery season of 1959, John Canaday began work as the chief critic for the *Times*. Throughout his journalistic criticism one senses the tone of a man somewhat disgusted with the excesses of his day, and who seemed to go in direct opposition to all that was new and in artistic vogue at the time. He was particularly critical of the New York School, by then triumphant, and with its champions on both sides of the Atlantic as well as in the institutions of power and the academy.

Canaday's stay with the *Times* was decisively marked by his first column in September 1959, in which he harshly criticized abstract expressionism and its supporters—the critics, collectors, curators and educators who failed to see through what he considered to be the hoax of that school of painting. While claiming to appreciate certain painters of the New York School, he generally regarded them as competent at best and charlatans more often than not. "(W)e have managed to create the impression that all abstract art per se must be given the breaks on the probability that there is more there than meets the eye," he wrote, "while all other art per se must be regarded with suspicion on the probability that it isn't as good as it looks."[13] He goes on to explain that the cause of this blindness on the part of the viewers and critics comes from a sort of historical baggage left over from the critical errors of the nineteenth century.

> We suffer, actually, from a kind of mass guilt complex. Because
> Delacroix was spurned by the Academy until he was old and sick,

because Courbet had to build his own exhibition hall in 1855 to get a showing for pictures that are now in the Louvre, because Manet was laughed at, because Cézanne worked in obscurity, because Van Gogh sold only one picture during his lifetime, because Gauguin died in poverty and alone, because nineteenth-century critics and teachers and art officials seemed determined to annihilate every painter of genius—because of all this we have tried to atone to a current generation of pretenders to martyrdom. Somewhere at the basis of their thinking, and the thinking of several generations of college students who have taken the art appreciation course, is the premise that wild unintelligibility alone places a contemporary artist in line with great men who were misunderstood by their contemporaries.[14]

He concludes his first column with a resounding condemnation of the contemporary scene:

In the meanwhile, critics and educators have been hoist with their own petard, sold down the river. We have been had. In the most wonderful and terrible time of history, the abstract expressionists have responded with the narrowest and most lopsided art on record. Never before have painters found so little in so much.[15]

Despite his general dismissal of all things abstract expressionist, he does occasionally offer surprising insights, such as his prediction in 1960 that Philip Guston "will turn toward a more generally communicative way of painting…His problem is the problem of abstract expressionism in general—what next, if this is the ultimate?"[16] This having been written over a decade before Guston turned to a figurative and symbolic mode of painting, rejected by critics and his peers.

Canaday continued his rejection of what he called third-rate charlatans throughout his tenure with the *Times*, using the harshest and most colorful language in his attacks upon them. In 1965 he wrote of Robert Motherwell, for example, that he,

has the school's basic superficiality, working from the premise, but not admitting, that painting today can be nothing better than a demonstration of the laying on of paint. But he has none of the flair and dash that makes, for instance, de Koonings laying-on an acceptable end in itself and even, in its limited way, expressive…(Motherwell's paintings are) some of the most flatulent acreage in the history of large-scale painting.[17]

While at times he made substantive complaints on his part, often he

offered a wholesale attack on a whole school of painting of which he had no appreciation. This rejection could eventually prove to be his historic merit, as the defenders of the lately rediscovered masters such as Bouguereau and Rockwell discovered.

Within a year and a half he was attacked in a letter sent to the *Times* and signed by 50 of the country's leading figures including William Barrett, John Cage, Stuart Davis, Adolph Gottlieb, Hans Hoffman, Kenneth Koch, Willem DeKooning, Robert Motherwell, Barnett Newman, Fairfield Porter, Robert Rosenblum, Irving Sandler, David Smith and Meyer Shapiro, among others. After listing a number of places where he had insulted the artists, curators, collectors and critics in favor of abstract expressionism (some cited above), they explained that,

> Mr. Canaday is entitled, of course, to the freedom of his opinions regarding works of art. We submit however, that his terminology of insults is scarcely adequate to describe emerging art works and tendencies, and we scorn this waging of a polemical campaign under the guise of topical reporting.
>
> If Mr. Canaday has a political or social or esthetic "position" or philosophy, let him state what it is and openly promote his aims. Every style and every movement in art history contains examples of work by imitative or uninterested artists. To keep referring to these in order to impugn the whole, instead of attempting to deal seriously with the work of the movement, is the activity not of a critic but of an agitator.[18]

The letter seems to be of central interest to the whole of the topic of journalistic art criticism. It is apparent that Canaday saw it as crucial to his place as a critic, naming his first book "Embattled Critic" and featuring the letter and over 30 responses to it in the epilogue of that book and referring to it in the second collection of his criticism (as well as mentioning that of the 600 letters that came in 550 supported him, "not all of these, however, for the right reasons."[19])

On the other hand, the letter is also of interest because it is not by ignorant people but some of the most established and "advanced" New York artists, academics and critics of the day. The need to respond to the criticism makes apparent that to these people something important took place by the publication of the writing. If, conversely, they had seen it as unimportant and boorish (as well they could have) there would have been no need to respond to it at all. But the fact is that despite the critical mass surrounding the New York School by 1960, *The New York Times* never ceased to be centrally important to artists and the art world in general, as it still is to this day. The reasons for this are apparent. As noted, the *Times* represents the first contact with a largely

uninitiated audience to the work of avant garde artists. Their representation in the *Times* is of utmost importance to their reputation and visibility.

Stepping back a bit, I want to point out the unique place the *New York Times* holds within the current situation, which goes back at least to the Canaday period. Although it is not my purpose to focus on economics, it is important to take into account that New York has been, at least since mid century, the center of global capital, and the *Times* is in many ways the voice of the power which capital represents. Its headlines influence the headlines of the rest of the country's papers and are cited around the world as definitive source material. The stamp of approval from the *Times* represents an almost transcendent legitimacy. It is this reality to which these artists and critics were responding. In relationship to the art world this is significant when we realize that a single review from the *New York Times* can sell out a gallery show, and, for example in the theater, a negative review can close down a show after only one night.

In this sense, John Canaday has an interesting place in the history of the New York School and contemporary art. Modernist art has always had an adversarial relationship to the public, especially in the case of Dada and Surrealism. That attitude was essential to its avant garde character. Without it, the artist falls into the category which Greenberg refers to in his essay on "Avant-Garde and Kitsch." Tacitly accepting his own adversarial role, Canaday goes so far as to say that "critics should not know artists and artists should not know critics."[20] What is surprising is the reaction of the avant-garde. It reacted with indignation, rather than mockery as might be expected, which seems contrary to the basic nature of the avant-garde and demonstrates the beginning of a shift in the avant-garde's concept of itself. With the "triumph of the New York school" the avant-garde idea of itself as outsider and misunderstood genius shifted to one of a sense of entitlement and deservedly rewarded master. Canaday stands on the precipice of that change. He is in many senses a holdout from the former time, hearkening back to the nineteenth century academic critics. Although apparently unaware of it, his counterparts do not seem to be the champions of the early modernists, but instead those same "critics and teachers and art officials...determined to annihilate every painter of genius." Conversely, the next generation of *Times* critics clearly reflects the opposite school of thought.

> *Ernest* ...what are the qualities that should characterize the true critic?
> *Gilbert* What would you say they were?
> *Ernest* Well, I should say the critic should above all be fair.
> *Gilbert* Ah! Not fair. A critic cannot be fair in the ordinary sense of the word...The man who sees both sides of the question sees nothing at all. Art is passion...

> *Ernest* The true critic will be rational, at any rate, will he not?
> *Gilbert* Rational? There are two ways of disliking art, Ernest. One
> is to dislike it. The other to like it rationally.[21]

Since Canaday's retirement there have been a number of other critics working at the *Times*. In the present chief critic of the *Times* we see a full realization of the difference discussed above.

While Canaday's first collection of his critical activity, *Embattled Critic* (1962), was almost exclusively concerned with his adversarial relationship to the art world, the current chief critic of the *Times*, Michael Kimmelman, published his first book on a similar topic but with an entirely different theme. Kimmelman's 1998 book, entitled *Portraits Talking with Artists at the Met, the Modern, the Louvre and Elsewhere*, is a pleasant chat and stroll with a number of artists he admires. The talks are friendly, pleasant conversations with these ostensible masters, They are almost all cheerful and flattering of the artist.

Kimmelman's criticism is conversational in an informal way, rarely reaching the levels of vitriol so often seen in Canaday's writing. Where Canaday seemed to dislike much of what he saw, one wonders if Kimmelman strongly dislikes anything he sees. In his recent *Sunday Times* magazine article on Matthew Barney he was almost shockingly uncritical of the man he called "the most crucial artist of his generation." The resulting portrait was only slightly more flattering than Baudelaire's portrait of Delacroix, with revealing differences. In Kimmelman's case, it is apparent that he was happy to make the sacrifice of walking through the cold desert in order to be around so great an artist. Discussing Barney's work and ideas of Matthew, a friendly Kimmelman assures us there are many ideas in the work, but there is no need to get to them right now.

> Those ideas are nearly impossible to explain simply, and the tendency when talking about Barney is to get lost in the minutiae of his art. The work can seem ingeniously complicated or nonsensical, depending on one's inclination. Suffice it to say that it is a mix of autobiography, history and private symbolism and it has involved him doing various death-defying acts and wearing elaborate makeup and prostheses.[22]

He describes the man behind the art as "of medium height, with light blue eyes and a clean, open all-American face, Barney has an easy charm. He laughs readily; he is honest, smart, intense just underneath the surface, charismatic in a soft spoken way and not the least ironic. His looks are changeable."[23]

This kind of flattery in print is usually reserved for the dead or the nearly so. When Baudelaire wrote about Delacroix, the Romantic painter was in fact deceased. Moreover, Baudelaire used his eulogy to give insight into the

artist, the work and the ideas behind it.

> But doubtless, Sir, you will be asking what is this strange, myste-
> rious quality which Delacroix…has interpreted better than anyone
> else. It is the invisible, the impalpable, the dream, the nerves the
> soul; and this he has done—allow me please to emphasize this
> point—with no other means than colour and contour.[23]

The differences and similarities between Kimmelman's essay on Barney and Baudelaire's essay on Delacroix suggest some important elements and requirements for the journalistic critic. Kimmelman's narrative content and use of engaging and clear prose brings the reader 'in' and generates immediate empathy for and interest in Barney. Kimmelman makes us care about what happened to him and why he did it. In that way we begin to care more about Barney than his art. In a similar vein, Diderot mentions that Chardin was an artist who "possesses excellent common sense and discusses his art marvel-ously well;" Baudelaire refers to Delacroix as possessing "a sureness, a mar-velous ease of manner, combined with a politeness which, like a prism, admit-ted every nuance"[24] For the uninitiated, these personal anecdotes generate a human interest in the otherwise intimidating work of art. It is precisely the humanness of both the critic and the artist which creates an opening for the casual reader. Once we feel a connection to the subject we become more open to the difficult world the work represents. It is this next step, in which the critic takes us from the artist's personality to an in-depth analysis of the work, that Kimmelman leaves out.

The lack of this kind of critical investigation in Kimmelman's criticism reflects a hollow cheerleading, doing little more than create a cult of personal-ity around an artist whose work is perhaps "crucial" and at the same time difficult to understand (at least for some). Kimmelman's willingness to reduce what analysis of the work he makes to simple and empty remarks reflects a larger trend among journalistic art critics to set aside any serious introspective and intellectual attitude toward art. Kimmelman's is little more than a well writ-ten piece of flattery, while giving no substance to the claim of Barney's impor-tance.

The populism implied by this cult of personality, in the hands of Baudelaire or Kimmelman, seems to be one of the manifold possibilities for the journalistic critic. In the attempt to reach to a larger audience, it would seem this populist approach could be decisive to bring about a larger discussion of the work. Despite Wilde's admonition that "a critic should be taught to criticize a work of art without any reference to the personality of the author,"[25] this seems to be one of the most readily available tools for a critic addressing a broad public.

In an article on Norman Rockwell, Kimmelman takes a different tack. The article is friendly and folksy, like Rockwell's work, but again refrains from any of the critical methods one would bring to bear on another artist. It seems that instead of appraising the artwork critically there is a fear of falling into the trap of being retrograde. While major critics around the country extol the virtues of Rockwell, there is a sense that there is something really hip about this newfound enthusiasm. In this light it seems Kimmelman is afraid that a serious analysis might leave him on the side of the passé, that is those who once thought of Rockwell as old fashioned and out of step with the latest advances. An impartial and passionate investigation of the work of Rockwell could easily cause Kimmelman to come to a less than flattering conclusion about the work and, perhaps more crucially, of the critical situation that produced the artist's 'renaissance.' While it is altogether possible that he sincerely agrees with the current trend, he chooses to avoid serious investigation. Instead he notes that Rockwell "is a good artist, on his own terms, every artist being good on some terms or other...Rockwell's terms involved squeaky-clean pleasure, which, more than anything else made sophisticated art critics and art historians cringe."[26] Here he aligns himself with both the current wave of criticism, a sort of neo-populism, and with Canaday's point of being distanced from the "sophisticated" critics and historians which Canaday criticized.

Kimmelman has taken the safest road by standing somewhat distant from and above the current neo-populists and outsiders to the art world, while simultaneously joining their ranks. He is at once a sophisticate and a lay viewer, both an insider and an outsider. The inherent paradox in this position is made apparent not only by its impossibility, but by the emptiness of the writing that results from it.

The wish to be "in the know" produces bland approval of all things 'in.' The critical distance required by the critic is thus set aside for fashion. The classic critical decision, "This is trash!", made famous throughout early modernism, is absent, leaving the lay viewer in the precarious position of being intimidated or bored by work which may be good, mediocre or just plain bad – a decision which they are unsure of making.

While many artists have thrown aside the image of the misunderstood modernist genius for a post-Warhol type of celebrity, the critics have also taken their place within the ranks of artworld personalities and stars. Clearly the role of the critic as antagonist and adversary, railing conservatively against "the new," is hardly interesting or beneficial to either public or art. But neither is the role of critic as cheerleader of any genuine use. On one side of these cheerleaders can be found what Michael Kimmelman refers to as "far too many critics who are held hostage by fashion–whether it's political fashion, intellectual fashion, esthetic fashion, or a combination of all three."[22] On the other side is what Robert Hughes refers to as "a different kind of philistinism,

a philistinism of total acceptance."[27]

The current mode of criticism, taken in light of the overwhelming quantity and variety of work being made, is to separate the good from the bad not through the derisive commentaries so favored by Canaday but rather by signaling quality through the selection of work considered by the critic. Except in the case of the already recognized, where the work may or may not receive a stamp of approval, the implication is that what is discussed is of some quality while the rest is questionable at best.

Based on the current artistic situation– abundant, varied and expansive–the need to discern seems more critical than ever. While the criticism of John Canaday, viewed from the distance of several decades, seems stale, dated and nearsighted, it is nonetheless refreshing to read such anger directed against a group of works which regarded itself automatically radical, formally as well as intellectually, but which was often unable to look at itself critically. At the same time, while Canaday scrutinized the whole of what he saw, applauding figurative work at a time when it was unpopular and ridiculing currently fashionable work, his criticism of the work is often shallow and without insight. His general critique of the euphoria and self-satisfaction of the moment seems well founded and in many ways historically vindicated, but his analyses of individual works end up offering little for the viewer beyond the sense of distaste he obviously had for the work as a whole. If there is a historical transcendence in his criticism, it comes only from the fact that he stood against the tide, seemingly alone.

Conversely, while Kimmelman occasionally offers intelligent commentary on the work he looks at, there is a lack of true insight or original thinking in relation to it. He seems to have an intimate relationship to the artworld he covers, but we, the readers, do not benefit from it.

These problems bring up the general question of the function of journalistic criticism. In view of the potentially broad public for this criticism, one would think that the critic could take an understanding of the work as well as the individual and the world which produced it (as well as the viewer of the work and the reader of the criticism), thus creating intellectual and emotional excitement in the reader searching for topical documentation of contemporary events.

While it is always easy, and often all too fashionable, to use the lights of the past to demonstrate the shadows of the present, the current batch of nationally prominent journalistic critics stand to learn from their predecessors. This is not because the criticism of Baudelaire, Diderot and Wilde would be appropriate in the contemporary art world, but precisely because it would not be. Instead, today's critics must reinvent their field and make it applicable to today's needs.

It was Diderot who first brought the reader to the experience of view-

ing the art, thus making it accessible to those who could not actually see the work; Baudelaire brought poetry to that critical effort, to make the endeavor autonomous. The predicament of the current journalistic critics to bring that poetry and immediacy to a public that is continually inundated with images, and which sees little use for art or criticism.

> *Ernest* ...Well, I think I have put all my questions to you. And now I must admit...
> *Gilbert* Ah! Don't say that you agree with me. When people agree with me I always feel that I must be wrong.
> *Ernest* In that case I certainly won't tell you whether I agree with you or not. But I will put another question. You have explained to me that criticism is a creative art. What future has it?
> *Gilbert* It is to criticism that future belongs.[28]

Over a hundred years ago Oscar Wilde, seeing this chasm between art producer and public, wrote that "there was never a time when criticism was more needed than now."[29] It would seem that situation has gotten more urgent precisely because it is the critic who "will always be showing us the work of art in some new relation to our age. He will always be reminding us that great works of art are living things."[30] The journalistic critic's task seems in many respects to be nearly impossible, as Michael Brenson wrote, "but I also know that the impossibility of journalistic criticism is proof of its necessity."[31]

Notes

1   Oscar Wilde, *The Artist as Critic*, Richard Ellman, ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 349.
2   "Its enormous influence is taken for granted, particularly among artists, curators, and dealers in New York, yet general discussions about it rarely take place, and within the academic world only the most generous scholars treat it with respect. It may be the most accessible and the most remote, the most wooed and the most spurned field of criticism." From, Michael Brenson, "Resisting the Dangerous Journey: The Crisis of Journalistic Criticism," in *The Crisis of Criticism* ed. Maurice Berger (New York: The New Press, 1998), 104.
3   Maurice Berger, "Introduction: The Crisis of Criticism," in *The Crisis of Criticism* ed. Maurice Berger (New York: The New Press, 1998), 101. Also, "Many theorists reject coherence as a matter of principle. Homi Bhaba, for example, argues that incoherence of certain theoretical texts can allow them to better represent the complexity of such difficult and involved concepts as power, identity, and paradox." Ibid., 9.
4   Ibid., 10.
5   John Ruskin, from the introduction to *Modern Painters*, 1844, quoted in

Neoclassicism and Romanticism, Sources and Documents vol. 2, ed. L. Eitner (Englewood, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1970), 164.

6   Wilde, 358.
7   Denis Diderot, "Salon of 1763," in Eitner, 58.
8   Ibid., 155.
9   Ibid., 58, 155.
10   Wilde, 369.
11   Ibid., 367.
12   Berger, 8.
13   John Canaday, *Embattled Critic* (New York: Noonday Press, 1962), 32.
14   Ibid., 33.
15   Ibid., 33.
16   Ibid., 140.
17   John Canaday, *Culture Gulch* (New York: Farrar, Strauss, and Giroux, 1969), 83.
18   Canaday, *Embattled Critic*, 219-233.
19   Ibid., 219.
20   Canaday, *Embattled Critic*, 5.
21   Wilde, 392.
22   Michael Kimmelman, "The Importance of Matthew Barney," *New York Times Magazine* (October 10, 1999): 64.
23   Ibid., 66.
24   Charles Baudelaire, "The Life and Work of Eugene Delacroix," in *The Painter of Modern Life and Other Essays* (London: Phaidon, 1995), 44.
25   Ibid., 57.
26   Wilde, 42.
27   Michael Kimmelman, "Renaissance for a 'Lightweight.'" *New York Times* Arts and Leisure (November 7, 1999): 1.
28   Steven Henry Madoff, "The Critics: Clarity and Distance that Does Not Exclude Love," *ArtNews* (September 1992): 87.
29   Nicholas Jenkins, "The Critics: Clarity and Distance that Does Not Exclude Love," *ArtNews* (September 1992): 86.
30   Wilde, 401-402.
31   Ibid., 403.
32   Ibid., 374.
33   Brenson, 109.

Uncanny Koons

Peter Jones

Much of the exegesis of the controversial work of Jeff Koons sees it as, variously, a re-working of Duchampian and Pop Art strategies, an embodiment of Baudrillardian ideas, or as some equivocal comment on the often disavowed commodity status of art.[1] While not denying the value of such interpretations, they are framed by and reflect the prevailing concerns of American art discourses of the 1980s namely, (post)modernism and art's problematic relation (criticism or complicity?) to the consumer society, the mass media and a booming art market.[2]

A fresh look at Koons's work and its uneasy critical reception is long overdue. Here I want to examine it from a different perspective—a Freudian one: *the uncanny* in its psychic, aesthetic and social registers. It is germane to read Koons's unsettling art through the uncanny, since Freud considered his work on the subject to be a contribution to what aesthetics has neglected, namely that which arouses feelings of "repulsion and distress."[3] Even a brief inspection suggests that Koons's work is uncanny in its use of repressed material, such as kitsch and the re-casting of the familiar, as in the *Banality* (1988) series.

The conjunction of Koons's work, contemporary critical concerns and the uncanny will permit an exploration of some of its overlooked aspects and enable us to offer a possible explanation for its "genuine strangeness to a cultivated art world."[4] For, as Briony Fer notes, uncanniness is often "a question of spectatorship"[5] and contingency rather than literalness. However, first I will sketch out Sigmund Freud's ruminations on the uncanny, which I shall return to in more detail.

The Uncanny

In his 1919 essay *Das Unheimliche* (*The Uncanny*), Freud designates the uncanny as a type of fear or anxiety resulting from the return of the once familiar made strange through repression. He writes,

> this uncanny is in reality nothing new or alien, but something which is familiar and old-established in the mind and which has become alienated from it only through the process of repression.[1]

The uncanny is, Freud continues, "something which ought to have remained hidden but has come to light."[2] Freud lists the phenomena which can evoke feelings of uncanniness in the spectator in particular contexts. As Solomon Prawer has observed "it confronts us in history [...] Each age, each nation, incarnates the uncanny in a different way."[3] However, despite its historical character, according to Freud, there are recurrent and pervasive triggers of the uncanny, namely, the double, confusion between the animate and inanimate, the female body and unsurmounted infantile complexes such as narcissism and castration-anxiety.[4]

Freud reaches his conclusions through an etymological and lexical investigation of the adjective *heimlich*, literally meaning the homely, the familiar and intimate, *and* paradoxically that which is concealed and secret, and its antonym *unheimlich*: the unhomely, the eerie and estranged. Semantically, the words oscillate, contaminating each other, simultaneously signifying ambivalent meanings. The uncanny is thus marked by semantic and conceptual uncertainty. Indeed, "intellectual uncertainty,"[5] in regard to the status of perceived objects is a key factor in the activation of uncanny feelings.

Jacques Derrida has implied that the uncanny is like deconstruction's unsettling "undecidables" such as the "pharmakon" or "hymen" which have "a double contradictory, undecidable value."[6] Sarat Maharaj has argued that Koons's work is something like a radical 'undecidable' in the way it shuttles between and troubles the oppositional categories of kitsch and fine art.[7] This I want to suggest is one of its many uncanny effects. For many, Koons's work has an uncertain status and indeterminant relation to kitsch and its despised markers: the ornamental, the polychromatic, the childlike, the domestic and the feminine.[8] His art simultaneously repudiates and flaunts kitsch—the repressed yet ever present *other* of modern aesthetics.

This indeterminacy, disruption of borders and return of the repressed certainly evoked anxiety in critics across the political spectrum. For the conservative Hilton Kramer:

> All of the distinctions that once separated the achievements of high art from the commercial vulgarities of popular culture are effectively eliminated, and minds so besotted with the easy emotions and numbing sensations of the latter are assured of encountering no obstacles in coming to terms with the debased objects that are now offered *as* art.[9]

While on the other side of the barricades, Hal Foster was troubled by Koons's ambivalence to the economy of the commodity-sign. Asking, is the work:

> a stance of semiotic resistance, a pose of revolutionary decadence

(i.e. a conformist so blatant as to be subversive) or a gesture of cynicism that is more camp than critique?[10]

In contrast, David Joselit saw Koons's work as having an unsettling quality vis-a-vis the everyday. His re-casting of consumer products as in the vacuum cleaners of *The New* series (1980-87) was seen to radically alter their normative function and signification. For Joselit, this created "an art of embarrassment or resistance, which causes didactic ruptures in the seamless and ubiquitous surface of the quotidian, the intensely familiar."[11] However, might not this disruption of the everyday also arise from the uncanny, the unhomely in the home?

The Uncanny Commodity

Koons's appropriation of domestic objects represents a return of the repressed, not only of art's disavowed commodity status but also of what is seen as uncanny in household commodities; the feminine and the confusion between the animate and inanimate. *The New* series harbor such others, due to the tendency to gender domestic objects as feminine. Koons recalls:

> My vacuum cleaner pieces were always looked at in more of a feminine vein; people would always think of photos of the house-wife vacuuming the home of the fifties.[12]

Uncanny feelings stemming from intellectual uncertainty over the animate/inanimate are suggested by the anthropomorphic nature of *The New* series. As Koons notes, "The reason I was using the vacuum cleaners was also because of the anthropomorphic quality, like breathing machines."[13]

This confusion between the living and the dead is compounded by Karl Marx's idea that commodities retain traces of what is repressed by mass-production, the producer. Furthermore, citing Marx's notion of commodity fetishism, Foster argues that the commodity assumes the form of an uncanny other. He writes,

> Marx argues that producers and products under capitalism trade semblances: social relations take on "the fantastic form of a relation between things," and commodities assume the agency of producers. In effect, the commodity becomes our uncanny double.[14]

Foster goes further and draws on Walter Benjamin's and the Surrealist notion of the 'outmoded,' the obsolete, spooky commodity. He argues that such objects are especially uncanny as they harbour the aura of the effaced producer *and* an unsettling archaic residue of past modes of production and their social formations (capitalism's others) made strange through historical repres-

sion—modernization.[15] The uncanny redolent in the outmoded is evoked by Koons's use of handcrafted objects, resurrection of past styles as in the Rococoesque *French Coach Couple* (1986) and defunct, Plexiglass-encased models of *The New* series. Obsolescence (death) and its disavowal are also the consequences of positing such objects as art. Koons recalls, "I mean, they're dealing with the immortal [...] I went around and brought up all the vacuum cleaners before they stopped making a certain model."[16]

The Double

Freud notes that the double "in every shape and in every degree,"[17] is a potent source of the uncanny, be it the duplication of the self, a recurrence or the motif of repetition, doubling the double. Freud links this to a "compulsion to repeat,"[18] an irresistible impulse in psychic life which overrides the pleasure principle, the seeking of gratification and avoidance of pain. He writes, "whatever reminds us of this inner "compulsion to repeat" is perceived as uncanny."[19] Here the uncanny converges with *Thanatos*, the death-drive, an instinct to return to a primordial, tensionless inorganic state. As Freud pithily put it in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920): "*the aim of all life is death*."[20] All this is suggested by the multiples of entropic domestic appliances of *The New* series, installations which Koons has reiterated over a number of years.

Koons's *Equilibrium Tank* (1985), a series of glass tanks containing basketballs suspended in liquid, are usually read as a comment on the precariousness of social mobility in American society.[21] Yet they are also capable of stirring uncanny feelings in the viewer. On one level as obvious symbols of castration, the uncanny maternal body and infantile fantasy of an intra-uterine existence, the return to the womb: "the former *Heim* (home) of all human beings."[22] Koon himself sees them as "very womb-like."[23] However, their duplication and entropic state are also suggestive of the compulsion to repeat and "Nirvana,"[24] the aim of the death-drive. Koons has said of the works: "This is more a pre-birth situation...an ultimate state of being."[25]

Koons' manipulation of doubles—signs or simulacra as in the reproduction of advertisements for alcohol in *Aqui Bacardi* (1986) or copies of photographic images of constructed, fantasy toy landscapes in *Shelter* (1997), is also suggestive of the compulsion to repeat and the uncanny double, due to the unleashing of simulacra—repressed, referentless copies. As Foster notes:

> The simulacrum is suppressed in Western philosophy because it is
> a copy without an original and as such is based on difference and
> repetition—not the principle of identity and resemblance by which
> the Platonic order of representation (of Ideas, of Truth) is set.[26]

Moreover, simulacra not only trouble the old hierarchical binary order of repre-

sentation—original over copy, causing uncertainty as to the status of images—but also usurp the referent, becoming more 'real' than the real. Freud notes that the uncanny is evoked "when a symbol takes over the full functions of the thing is symbolises..."[27] There are parallels here with Jean Baudrillard's condition of simulation, the sign-saturated world characterised by:

> the collapse of reality into hyperrealism, the meticulous reduplication of the real, preferably through another reproductive medium such as advertising or photography.[28]

Indeed, one could say that in hyper-reality, the *real* is uncanny.

The Double and Narcissism

Freud also links the double to an archaic, egocentric, primary narcissism, an "unbounded self-love...which dominates the mind of the child."[29] Essentially, it is the projection of the self onto an idealized double to shore up a fragile, nascent ego. It also promotes animistic feelings of omnipotence, self-sufficiency and immortality. According to Freud, a trace of this primordial, fusional narcissism remains in us all. Doubles are uncanny here as they evoke in adulthood the repressed (un)comforting state of primary narcissism and an alien, double 'self.'

Doubles and narcissism are fundamental to art and the artist. Indeed, the urge to replicate the self was seen in antiquity as the origin of art. Sarah Kofman notes that,

> doubles are what constitute the true beginning of the artist and his identity, for the fact that he has to double himself, repeat himself, implies a non presence to oneself, an originary dissatisfaction, death immanent in life, and the absence of any simple and full origin.[30]

A supplementary narcissistic doubling of the self is evident in Koons's numerous self-portraits, such as the haughty marble bust *Self-Portrait* (1991) where an ego-ideal can be seen to emerge from an undifferentiated mass, and in the porno-narcissistic displays of the scabrous *Made in Heaven* series (1990) featuring Koons and, then wife, Illona Staller.

Koons's blatantly narcissistic work can be seen as symptomatic of (and an ironic comment on?) the narcissism many see as prevalent in American society. The psychoanalyst Otto Kernberg observes that "contemporary Western society, with its focus on consumerism and self-gratification, resonates with the narcissistic personality."[31] However, one can go further, arguing that Koons and his often facile art are complicit in the fostering of contem-

porary narcissism and its illusionary ideals such as instant gratification and fame. Of his *Made in Heaven* series, Koons has stated:

> They only promote narcissism. They give the essence of narcissism to the public, of what it feels like, what it is supposed to feel like, to be a star.[32]

Another good example is the self-advertisements placed by Koons in American art journals (1988-89) featuring his stately self. Brian Wallis notes that, "The reification of the self as high-priced commodity is the ultimate enactment of narcissism under capitalism."[33] Furthermore, the artist is seen as hero, an object of narcissistic identification, an ego-ideal, and art, a palladium, a sanctuary and eternal.

Donald Kuspit has argued that society's adoration and reification of art and the artist has resulted in 'glamour,' a heightened, compensatory and insidious form of narcissism: "a socially approved manifestation of the deluded grandiose feeling of narcissistic completeness."[34] Koons *pace* Warhol is perhaps the epitome of 'glamour.' Moreover, Koons doubles not only himself, but also the viewer. For example, the gilded Rococo-like mirror *Wishing Well* (its title having obvious connotations of narcissism) from 1988, presents the viewer with an ornately-framed double in the guardian angel of art. Such art is 'glamorous,' in Kuspit's sense as "it exists to make us feel good about ourselves."[35] However, in Koons's stainless steel *Rabbit* (1986) and more recent *Moon* (1997), convex shiny surfaces return a grotesquely distorted reflection, an uncanny double of the viewer. This leads us to the other much less appealing aspect of the double, as a signifier of death.

The Double and Death

The double as Hélène Cixous notes is "a *changing* sign, it passes from the affirmation of survival to the announcement of death."[36] The Austrian psychoanalyst Otto Rank whose work on the double Freud drew on, summarized the implications:

> The double who personifies narcissistic self-love, becomes an unequivocal rival in sexual love; or else, originally created as a wish-defence against a dreaded eternal destruction he reappears in superstition as the messenger of death.[37]

Once deemed a protection against death in earlier times then, Freud notes that for self-conscious modern man, the double is now "the uncanny harbinger of death."[38] Rosalind Krauss has analyzed the double's capacity to destroy the illusory integrity and immorality of the original/subject and to evoke the deathly

compulsion to repeat. She writes:

> the double is the simulacrum, the second, the representative of the original. It comes after the first, and in this following, it can only exist as a figure, or image. But in being seen in conjunction with the original, the double destroys the singularity of the first. Through duplication, it opens the original to the effect of difference, of deferral, of one-thing-after-another, or within another: of multiples burgeoning within the same.[39]

Indeed, one experiences the uncanny most intensely in relation to death and the dead, for as Freud notes "our unconscious has as little use now as it ever had for the idea of its own mortality."[40] Death and its bedfellow, the uncanny, are suggested by Koons's wry *memento mori, Snorkel Vest* and *Lifeboat* from 1985, deathly and funerary-like bronze castings of lifesavers. Like the treacherous double, they are not saviors, but harbingers of destruction. They are also emblematic of the death-drive and the attainment of an inorganic state. Koons remarked:

> That life-raft or the inflatable vest, for instance, would carry anybody who trusted them to the bottom of the Ocean. […]So the underlying theme, really, was that death is the ultimate state of being.[41]

Freud also lists wax-work figures and dolls as being most propitious to the uncanny due to our uncertainty as to their status, animate or inanimate.[42] They are markers of a zone of indeterminacy between the living and the dead simultaneously evoking both but being neither. Koons is aware of such indeterminacy, stating that his work is about "the negotiation between the animate and inanimate."[43] Dolls are also the confluence and condenser of various modalities of the uncanny: the commodity, the double, childhood and the ego-ideal. Mike Kelley, a contemporary of Koons who has explored such themes in his art, notes that: "All commodities are…[idealized] images, but the doll pictures the person as a commodity more than most."[44] Furthermore, from Christianity's prohibition on graven images to the Modernist repudiation of naturalistic figurative sculpture, life-like figures have constituted a repressed uncanny other of art and aesthetics. Kelley observes:

> Naturalistically-colored dolls, mannequins, automata and wax portrait figures are not included in the generally accepted version of Western art history, and polychrome religious statuary is in the very lowest strata. Until recently, drawing from the fine art world,

it would be difficult to come up with a significant list of poly-
chrome figurative sculpture from the last hundred years. [50]
Color is also associated with the others of Western philosophy and art: confu-
sion, the decorative, the feminine and the childlike. As David Batchelor notes:
"In aesthetics and art theory colour is very often ascribed either a minor, a
subordinate, or a threatening role." [51]

We can see such avatars of the uncanny in Koons's colorful life-like
sculpture: the life-like porcelain figures of the *Banality* series (1988) as in
Naked featuring mawkish yet sexualized children with phallic flowers, the gaudy
Saint John the Baptist, the quasi-Baroque *Michael Jackson and Bubbles* and
in the large-scale figures of *Dirty Jeff on Top* from the *Made in Heaven* series
(1991), along with various uncanny *others* of the psyche, aesthetics and soci-
ety: the primal scene, kitsch, popular culture and infantile sexuality. Indeed, in
this post-Enlightenment, hyper-rationalized world, childhood and children are
considered most uncanny.[52] The uncanny iconography of childhood is a promi-
nent theme in Koons's work, from early works using toys, *Inflatable Flower
and Bunny* (1979), to the more recent *Celebration* (1992-1998) series of garish
paintings and sculpture featuring "plastic flowers, Play-Doh, party hats, birth-
day cake, bracelets, balloon dogs, Lincoln Logs, Easter eggs, toys, popcorn."[53]

As Freud noted, that which revives childhood and concomitant re-
pressed yet unsurmounted infantile fears or fantasies such as the castration
complex are often a potent source of the uncanny. The castration complex is
central to Freud's discussion of the uncanny and is used to muster the diverse
phenomena that trigger it. Indeed, dread of castration appears as almost para-
digmatic of the anxiety caused by the uncanny. Freud notes that the female
body and in particular phallic-like severed limbs and decapitated heads can
evoke castration anxiety. He writes:

> Dismembered limbs, a severed head, a hand cut off at the wrist...all
> these have something peculiarly uncanny about them...As we al-
> ready know, this kind of uncanniness springs from its proximity to
> the castration complex. [54]

The uncanny female body, dismembered limbs and severed heads feature promi-
nently in Koons's art. His *Fait d'hiver* (1988) shows a female figure with a
severed torso, dismembered arm and hand cut off at the wrist. *Women in Tub*
(1988) features a figure with a truncated head. It is also blinded, and is thus
particularly uncanny, as blindness according to Freud is "a substitute for the
dread of being castrated."[45]

To conclude, criticism of Koons's work has for the most part been
incumbent upon the prevailing concerns of the 1980s. Bringing the uncanny
to bear on Koons permits a badly needed reframing and fresh reading. It

perhaps also enables us to explain its striking ability to unsettle the critics, for we have seen that many phenomena that can evoke the uncanny such as indeterminacy, kitsch,[46] and the double are present in his work. Furthermore, recourse to the uncanny can possibly help us elucidate and grasp the indeterminate relation of Koons to art's others, aesthetics and the critics. I want to suggest that it is usefully seen as being analogous to the intractable effects of the uncanny on the relations between the subject and the other as described by Julia Kristeva:

> a crumbling of conscious defences, resulting from the conflicts the
> self experiences with an other—the "strange"—with whom it main-
> tains a conflictual bond, at the same time "a need for identification
> and a fear of it."[47]

This contradictory, subliminal need perhaps also accounts for the uncanny ability of Koons's art to be at once, both repellent and enticing.

Notes

1   For a survey see Brian Wallis, "We Don't Need Another Hero: Aspects of the
      Critical Reception of the Work of Jeff Koons," in *Jeff Koons* (San Francisco: San
      Francisco Museum of Modern Art, 1992), 27-33.
2   See the important 1986 group shows *Endgame: Reference and Simulation in*
      Recent Painting and Sculpture held at Boston's Institute of Contemporary Art
      and *Damaged Goods: Desire in the Economy of the Object* at the New Museum
      of Contemporary Art, New York. Also see the 1989 exhibition *A Forest of*
      Signs: Art in the Crisis of Representation, Museum of Contemporary Art, Los
      Angeles.
3   Sigmund Freud, "The Uncanny," in *The Standard Edition of the Complete*
      Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud. Volume XVII (1917-1919), trans. James
      Strachey (London: The Hogarth Press), 219.
4   Thomas Crow, *Modern Art in the Common Culture* (New Haven: Yale Univer-
      sity Press, 1996), 98.
5   Briony Fer, "Fault-Lines: Surrealism and the Death-Drive", *The Oxford Art*
      Journal, v18 no.1 (1995): 158.
6   Freud, "The Uncanny," 241.
7   Ibid., 241.
8   Solomon S. Prawer, *Caligari's Children: The Film as Tale of Terror* (New York:
      Da Capo Press, 1980), 126 and 132.
9   Freud, "The Uncanny," 235.
10   Ibid., 221.
11   Jacques Derrida, *Dissemination*, trans. Barbara Johnson (London: The Athlone
      Press, 1981), 220-221.
12   See Sarat Maharaj, "Pop Art's Pharmacies: Kitsch, Consumerist Objects and
      Signs, The 'Unmentionable'," *Art History* (September 1992): 334-349.

13 On the linkage of kitsch, the feminine and their repression see Kathryn Hixson, "Feminine Wiles: Modern Art's Fear of the Female," *New Art Examiner* (March 1997): 21-24 and 56. Also see Andreas Huyssen, "Mass Culture as Women: Modernism's Other," in Tania Modleski, ed. *Studies in Entertainment: Critical Approaches to Mass Culture* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986), 188-207.

14 Hilton Kramer, "Academy of Kitsch," in Andreas Papadakis, *Art and Design*, vol. 5 no. 7/8 (1989), 77.

15 Hal Foster, "The Future of an Illusion, or The Contemporary Artist as Cargo Cultist," in *Endgame: Reference and Simulation in Recent Painting and Sculpture* (Boston: Institute of Contemporary Art/MIT Press, 1986), 99.

16 David Joselit, "Investigating the Ordinary," *Art in America* (May 1988): 154.

17 Jeff Koons, "The Idea of a Moral Imperative in Contemporary Art," *Art Criticism*, vol. 7 no.1 (1991): 30.

18 Ibid., 29-30.

19 Hal Foster, *Compulsive Beauty* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1995), 129.

20 Ibid., 126-127. Commodity fetishism can be seen as a modern form of animism, see Christoph Asendorf, *Batteries of Life: On the History of Things and their Perception in Modernity*, trans. Don Reneau (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 193-194. This further compounds the commodity's uncanniness as Freud links the uncanny to archaic animistic beliefs (Freud "The Uncanny," 240-241).

21 Anthony Haden-Guest, "Interview: Jeff Koons," in *Jeff Koons*, ed. Angeilka Muthesius (Cologne: Benedikt Taschen, 1992), 16-17.

22 Freud, "The Uncanny," 234.

23 Ibid., 238.

24 Ibid., 238.

25 Sigmund Freud, "Beyond the Pleasure Principle," in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud. Volume XVIII (1920-1922)*, trans. James Strachey (London: The Hogarth Press, 1986), 38.

26 See David Joselit, "Modern Leisure," in *Endgame: Reference and Simulation in Recent Painting and Sculpture* (Boston: Institute of Contemporary Art/MIT Press, 1986), 84. Also see Koons's comments in "The Idea of a Moral Imperative in Contemporary Art," *Art Criticism*, vol. 7 no.1 (1990): 29-33.

27 Freud, "The Uncanny," 245.

28 Koons, 31.

29 Freud, "Beyond the Pleasure Principle," 56.

30 Koons, 30.

31 Hal Foster, "Uncanny Images," *Art in America* (November 1983): 203.

32 Freud, "The Uncanny," 244.

33 Jean Baudrillard, *Symbolic Exchange and Death*, trans. Iain H. Grant (London: Sage, 1993), 71. There are further analogies. Freud also states that "an uncanny effect is often and easily produced when the distinction between imagination and reality is effaced" (Freud, "The Uncanny," 244). Similarly, in hyper-reality, as Baudrillard notes, "the real and imaginary are intermixed in one" (Baudrillard,

Symbolic Exchange and Death, 75).

34 Freud, "The Uncanny," 235.

35 Sarah Kofman, *The Childhood of Art: An Interpretation of Freud's Aesthetics*, trans. Winifred Woodhull (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), 118.

36 Pietro Bria, Sergio De Risio and Alberto Siracusano, "Narcissistic Personalities: A Discussion with Otto Kernberg," *Journal of European Psychoanalysis*, no.1 (Spring-Summer 1995): 25. Perhaps the most well-known exponent of this view is Christopher Lasch. He has argued that the break-up of the traditional family, the growth of consumerism, bureaucracy and proliferation of mass media images since the 1970s has endangered a new narcissistic pathology, personality-type and culture. See his *The Culture of Narcissism: American Life in the Age of Diminishing Expectations* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1979).

37 Andrew Renton, "Jeff Koons," *Flash Art* (Summer 1990): 114.

38 Brian Wallis, "We Don't Need Another Hero," 28.

39 Donald Kuspit, "The Problem of Art in the Age of Glamour," *Art Criticism*, vol. 6 no.1 (1989): 34.

40 Ibid., 33. On Warhol (the arguments also apply equally to Koons) as the embodiment of contemporary narcissism see Donald Kuspit, *The Cult of the Avant-Garde Artist* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993).

41 Hélène Cixous, "Fictions and Its Phantoms: A Reading of Freud's *Das Unheimliche* (The "Uncanny")", *New Literary History*, vol. 7 no.3 (Spring 1976): 539.

42 Cited in Jefferson T. Kline, "Doubling the Double," in *Fearful Symmetry: Doubles and Doubling in Literature and Film*, J. Eugene Crook, ed. (Tallahassee: University Presses of Florida, 1981), 73.

43 Freud, "The Uncanny," 235.

44 Rosalind Krauss, *The Originality of the Modernist Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths*, (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1994), 109.

45 Freud, "The Uncanny," 242.

46 Haden-Guest, 19.

47 Freud, "The Uncanny," 226-227.

48 Koons, 30.

49 Thomas Kellein, *Mike Kelley*, (Basel: Edition Cantz, 1992), 86.

50 Mike Kelley, *The Uncanny* (Arnhem: Gemeentenmuseum, 1993), 10.

51 David Batchelor, "Chromaphobia," *Art and Design*, vol. 12 no.7/8 (1997): 31.

52 On the Enlightenment and the uncanniess of children see Stefan Germer, "Pleasurable Fear: Gericault and Uncanny Trends at the Opening of the Nineteenth Century," *Art History*, vol. 22 no.2 (June 1999): 159-183.

53 Keith Seward, "Frankenstein in Paradise," *Parkett*, no. 50/51 (1997): 71.

54 Freud, "The Uncanny," 244.

55 Ibid., 231.

56 The abhorrence of kitsch and its uncanniness for some may also have be due to its political associations in the 1980s. Citing Koons' work among others, Sidney Blumental argues that kitsch reclaimed from camp returned as neo-kitsch and became the 'official' aesthetic of the Reagan era. See "Reaganism and the Neo-Kitsch Aesthetic," in *The Reagan Legacy* Sidney Blumental and Thomas B.

Edsall, eds. (New York: Pantheon Books, 1988), 251-294.

57 Julia Kristeva, *Strangers to Ourselves*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), 188.

Schizoid Administrativism

Mark Van Proyen

The information economy was a Ponzi scheme spiraling out of control. The investment bankers got rich slaving away, so they called their tax accountants, who got so rich filing government forms that they called their investment bankers back for advice about where to invest their surging wealth. The investment bankers were also miserable, so they called their therapists, who billed them by the hour to listen like a good friend and assure them that they weren't crazy. They worked so hard that they neglected their families, so many of which ended up in divorce. They called their divorce lawyers. The lawyers worked even harder than the investment bankers and suffered physical maladies that the doctors charged them ridiculous fees to attempt to cure. The doctors, worried about being sued by the lawyers, called their insurance brokers for malpractice coverage. The engineers built computer systems that helped all of them speed up this cycle so that they could call and bill at a faster pace. The engineers that didn't build computers worked in the military industry at the request of the politicians, who were worried that Iranians might invade Florida. The politicians kept changing the laws so the lawyers could be kept busy, and they kept changing the tax code so that the accountants could be kept busy, and they kept borrowing money to keep the investment bankers busy. This was the Third Law of Information Economics at work, and it was the way of the future.
—Po Bronson[1]

Thus, there is not only the reality of the model, there is also no reality other than that of the model. Consequently, developers produce cities that are models for cities, architects produce buildings that are models for buildings, and artists produce works of art that are models of the idea of art.

—Peter Halley[2]

To stand upon the west balcony of Mario Botta's San Francisco Museum of Modern Art is to see the future. Below stretches Third Street, running north to

south like an urban Nile. On the opposite bank of this liminal river, one sees a stark causeway running westward between the Visual and Performing Arts buildings of the Yerba Buena Center for the Arts, the latter bearing a stunning similarity to the Middle Kingdom temple at Luxor. At the far end of the causeway, past an urban park which is an anemic study in surveillable, over-manicured artificiality, we see the newest building in the area, the Sony Metreon entertainment complex, a grandly scaled arcade of hyper-administered spectacle that is the most recent addition to San Francisco's new downtown cultural nexus, which just happens to be geographically convenient to the subterranean cavern of the Moscone Convention Center located one short block away. This complex-of-complexes has been aptly dubbed "the necropolis" by street-smart hipsters, perhaps as a way of referring to its futuristic resemblance to a Pharonic burial site, and perhaps also because it ushers in (as do so many other architectural projects which are its international kin)—a new historical moment in which there are no more streets to be smart in. Cars and trucks may continue to career about on roadways, but these bear no resemblance to the streets of yore—those being the Montmartres and Bunker Hills which were once inhabited by undulating crowds of modern boulevardiers reflecting upon the dialogical meanings that once seemed to inhere in unsupervised social encounter. At the necropolis, the modern crowd has been displaced by the post-modern congregation desperately pretending to be a public, with the paradoxical index of this pretense being its willingness to sell the very idea of public interest for the barmacide illusions of momentary congregational benefit. When T.W. Adorno took note of the fact that "people cling to what mocks them in confirming their own essence, 'making' common cause with the world against themselves" via "their own conversion into appendages of machinery"[3] he was not merely touching on the grim anti-democratic and anti-subjectivist seductions of Hollywood's corporate dream machine, he was also elucidating the earliest manifestations of an all-pervasive marketing model which would soon come to permeate all facets of public culture, most especially that of the museum, where the idea of "display" was even then becoming as much of a cost-benefit calculation of "show business" as any over-hyped action-adventure saga.

More than anything else, the ascendance of marketing—that is, the incremental making over of reality in the image of the marketer by way of convincing people that they should want things which they never knew that they wanted—is now the most telling index of the way we live. Since the 1950s, we have seen the slow but steady ascendance of an interdisciplinary field called "motivational research," defined as "a type of research that seeks to learn what motivates people in making choices. It employs techniques designed to reach the unconscious or subconscious mind because preferences generally are determined by factors of which the individual is not conscious."[4]

The contemporary import of this ascendancy lies in how its increasing sophistication and availability has saturated everyday life in a social arrangement where corporate culture continues to consolidate, replicate, extend and amplify its invisible hegemony by synthesizing the worst of capitalism (omen-present commodification stemming from ever-more arduous standards of "accountability" to mythical bottom-lines) with the worst of socialism (endless, Kafkaesque bureaucracy and the gatekeeper's culture of extortion and protracted deferral spawned by it). Thus, it becomes clear that the end of the Cold War calls for a new descriptive term for this nightmare moment of feverish consolidation, which now extends not only to all points of the known globe, but into cyberspace as well—the "final frontier" for the marketer's estimable alchemy of inventing persuasive illusions of value from the thin air of precisely managed fantasy. We can only shudder when we contemplate the implications of a leading advertising executive's claim that "the stuff with which we work is the fabric of men's minds."[5]

Rather than joining Frederic Jameson in wistfully pretending that we are in the throes of something called "late capitalism," I would like to advance the term "techno-bureaucratic capitalism" as a more accurate tag for marking the current moment of capitalism's final assimilation of any actionable connection between personal volition and the legitimate hope for the creation of a better world.[6] No doubt, such hopes were in their own way naive in that they assumed that the imperatives of universal justice and practical liberation could somehow be synthesized into a grand cultural vision, but at least it was a vision in the ego-ideal sense of the word, and as was the case of the Vassarian synthesis of Platonic idealism and Aristotelian mimesis which came to dramatic fruition during the Renaissance, it brought the best out of many artists and writers. Now, in the place of that older vision are the new fetishes of "positionality" within the network and the institution, fetishes whose core cynicism corrodes idealism and finally abolishes the old dichotomy of progressive and reactionary. In its place, we have a resurgent acquiescence to the age-old cynicism which sees the world first and foremost as a drama of insiders and outsiders. Thus, where heroes once lived, opportunists have since supervened to the disastrous detriment of any aspiration to build a better world, or even any hope to gain a stable moment of intrasubjective coherence.

Amid this subtly nightmarish moment of historical transformation, we can also take note of the change in the presiding ethos which frames and inhabits that complex system of symbolic exchange which we call "art." Much has been written about the continued inoperability of the old humanistic ethos after the global tragedy of the second World War, the "governing fiction" of humanism having been decried as being "not humanistic enough" by some, and vigorously dismissed as irrelevant, hypocritical and ridiculously nostalgic by others. Some, following Adorno, linked its collapse to a necessary and

permanent moratorium on the writing of poetry, while others saw in it an opportunity to sketch, circulate and enforce new meta-narratives which were redolent of their own previously *outre* idealism which privileged spontaneity at the expense of an overburdened will-to-mastery. One function of this unleashing of a "return" of a "repressed" transcendental idealism was that, for a brief historical moment, art in its modernist and avant-gardist guises became a form of religion rather than a mere prompting to it, offering spontaneously concretized moments of metaphysical revelation stemming from paradoxical symbols for the instantaneous transcendence of symbolism. Such productions were viewed as offering salutary moments of a psychical "starting anew" even as they could also be viewed as gestures which erased or blanked out the old, confirming the notion of art history as being the dramatic chronicle of an Oedipal dream where relevant hope always reigns superior to irrelevant remembrance. This was the stuff of necessary invigoration and wish-fulfillment, even as it tended toward a kind of narrow historical blindness which proved to be its undoing.

Since the middle 1960s, the symbolic perpetuation of phenomenological and existential notions of "essence" have been linked to the aforementioned collapsed humanism, although fairness dictates that we remind ourselves that these notions also came into historical being as an attempt to negate, challenge and/or escape from humanism's self-confirming "hallucination of history" as German Gelant aptly put it in 1967. In the place of these sometimes competing and sometimes cooperating modernist notions of essences immutable and transcendent, we can now fairly point to another model of meaning having come to the fore, the model of radical perspectivalism and its urging forth of a world of designated meaning surrounding and reigning triumphant over all manifestations of autonymic volition and the condition of embodied self-invention from which it stems. Where identity was once cast as a knot-of-consciousness that was rich in meanings running as a fugue from inside to out, it is now most often understood to an epiphenomenal and exonymic function of naming, packaging and positionality. As Peter Halley has written, "existence is defined only in terms of position. If position is lost, existence vanishes"[7] which is a statement that gains additional importance via its clarifying of the confusion to which Robert Hughes confessed when he cited this post-modern "incantation" written by Tricia Collins and Richard Milazzo:

> If placing a frame around culture, if "framing" the media, properly describes the mechanism of appropriation, then the mere consciousness of the frame bracketing or framing the frame or the framer, and the hybridization of this regression and instrumentalization, both captures the legacy of appropriation and projects its demise in the hyperframe.[8]

Both of these statements reflect the recognition that the heroic artist model of visual culture has been gradually displaced by a newer vision of the artist as a cultural worker, or more to the point, a "cultural functionary" who is in turn managed by others who are in their own turn managed by policy. This is an idea that is deeply indebted to Pharonic sources which privilege the superordinating position of the priestly administrator (as opposed to the divinely inspired artificer of Greco-Roman extraction, that being the artist who could create the illusion of animating dead matter) as being (post) history's primary world-historical actor.

Given this trajectory, it is not surprising to note that that one of the chief hallmarks of this important shift in priorities is to be found in the widespread ascendancy of what Caroline Jones has aptly dubbed "the executive artist," who is "an image manager, or the director of bulldozers and discourses." Such artists produced works which "resonated with a broad visual culture of the corporate logotype, the commodity ad or the industrial mine."[9] In other words, their productions can be viewed as concretized instances of "administrator envy" in their exploitive orchestration of and taking credit for the labor of others, even as their visibility and success can be taken as the results of currying favor with real administrators via a galvanization of their values into forms which gain their coherence by codifying and implicitly valorizing administrative attitudes. To put the same idea in simpler terms, post-modern/post avant-garde art is an institutional art *par excellence*, and is perhaps all the more so in its moments of shrill denigration of what it alleges to be bourgeois values, said shrillness being a diversionary tactic configured to camoflage the bourgeois affiliations (and agenda) of the denigrator. As such, it is circumstantially disengaged from and perhaps even contemptuous of both the sensible world and the values gained through an integration of lived experience conducted in self-conscious dialog with that world's terms. It is first and foremost an art of code which worshipfully fetishizes same as a talisman held up against an increasingly indifferent and hostile future. It knows not what it is or what it wants to be, only what it fears, which is its likely potential for eventual insignificance, the "death of a thousand dismissals" called by another name. And yet, as perversity would have it, the art of code behaves in a way that taunts and invites such dismissals via its dogged insistence on the authority of stereotypes, hoping against hope that it can perpetually have its institutionally captive audience while psychodynamically insulting it too.

If our moment is symptomatically defined by its valorization of the art of code-arrangement, it follows that the artist would be cast as a strategic arranger of pre-existing approximations of experience, engaging in a practice that has in essence been reduced to a scholastic's algebra of tropes and genres which can only come in to symbolic fruition when they fit in to an institutional

regime which is, of course, driven by the primary institutional appetite of privileging loyalty at the expense of ability. This leads to the compunctive fealty of the many instances of contemporary art which assume design (i.e. constitutive arrangement) to be psycho-esthetically superior to artistic performance—here cast as the rhapsode's craft which was so vigorously despised in Plato's *Ion*. The reason for this is that such art cannot come to any social fruition without explicit institutional sponsorship and collaboration, casting institutional administrators and their polemic lackeys as the vested (read silently controlling) partners in a Jesuitical game of turning designated objects into the valuable relics of a "history" that is in major part a self-serving institutional fiction.

This is administrativism, the condition of omni-present and proliferating *gauche caviars* which constitutes the real post-historical truth undergirding the supposed age of pluralism which many claim to be upon us. Contrary to Arthur Danto's elegiac claim that the truth of (post) historical art is that "you can be an abstractionist in the morning, a photorealist in the afternoon, a minimalist in the evening"...because "it does not matter what you do,"[10] I would say that it still matters greatly, but not to the over-idealized Hegelian fairy-tale of a history whose alleged disappearance through self-fruition has been such a cause for philosophical alarm and/or celebration. It matters greatly because the thing which renders art into a nugatory manque of itself and "allows no room for breakthrough" is not an illusory "anything goes" pluralism, but is instead fashion, which ordains what does and does not go via an administered hall of semiotic mirrors which has long-ago co-opted the moral authorities which were once accorded to the seemingly contradictory imperatives of "History" and the cult of elective affinities, and in invidious addition has proven itself to be a more effective technology for the manipulation of large populations than class-bound tradition could have ever dreamt of being. It matters greatly because of the de-administering potential of art to do something that is idiosyncratically contrary to administration-for-the-sake-of administration (revealed as administration-as-fashion) is always latent, and can erupt at any time, which is one reason why art will always remain dangerous.

This recognition of the power of administrativism-through-fashion accounts in part for a widespread shift of emphasis and orientation in both art historical and art critical writing. During the 1990s, the chief subject matter of such writing has been the various institutional sites of the production and circulation of art,[11] most certainly making a salutary contribution to the project of expanding our awareness of art's place in the world, but also putting paid to the truism which states that the fundamental difference between the neo/pseudo avant-garde and its historical avant-garde predecessors boils down to the difference in mores and psychological politics which are characteristic of the formalized culture of the conference room versus those older ones which stemmed from the improvised informality of traditional cafe culture, itself the

incubator *par excellance* of unofficial opinion that lives or dies on its at-hand power of topical persuasion. The latter is best understood as a social site of controlled leveling (of outmoded hierarchies and their attendant "dead" rituals of symbolic self-description) in that it is a liminal space that privileges the insurrective insertions of succinct wit as a way of suspending any superordinating stream of official opinion. Conversely, the conference room is a site *par excellence* for a highly fillagreed fealty to hierarchically mandated official opinion, limiting oppositionality to doomed strategies of protracted filibuster while giving pride of place to passive-aggressive influence-peddling pretending to be the building of consensus. The conference room recasts wit and imagination as an attribute one deploys to maximize one's position in that room's highly differentiated pecking order, in effect placing it in the service of that order. If the obstinately exhibitionistic bully is the emblematic buffoon of the world recast as a cafe, then surely we can with equal fairness cast the compunctively strategic sycophant as being the emblematic protagonist of a conference-room world where authority is exercised in the form of a diffuse and omni-present "power mist," to borrow Douglas Coupland's clever term for a mythical fog which represents "the tendency of hierarchies in office environments to be diffuse and preclude crisp articulation."[12] Where cafe culture can be said to celebrate the demythologized moment that is brought to light by incisive wit, the conference room places its highest premium on the artful deployment of that deathly soporific called euphemism.

This essay is dedicated to the admittedly daunting task of penetrating the defusions and deflections of techno-bureaucratic power mist for the sake of accurately describing and analyzing its presiding, indeed *motivating*, ethos all with an eye toward describing how that ethos has consolidated and self-symbolized itself in contemporary visual art production and exhibition. Whereas the past decade has been accompanied by a profusion of analyses detailing the changing nature of various institutional sites for the production and circulation of symbolic activities, my admittedly more elusive goal reaches further. It is nothing other than an attempt to illuminate the psychological politics and charactological intentionality which continues to give rise to those transformations of practice and emphasis, casting them as the socio-economic epiphenomena of a deeper and deepening pattern of psycho-moral crisis. And let us make no mistake: it is very much a crisis—in fact, it is *the* crisis that undergirds the crisis of credibility which art now faces as it contemplates one of two unacceptable fates, those being an unrealistically short-sighted entrenchment into a scholastically hyper-specialized world of self-imposed irrelevance, or the immanently realistic likelihood of being completely swallowed by the all-too-spectacular world of corporate entertainment. Clearly, any attempt at articulating a third alternative to either of these unacceptable destinies will require a head-on engagement with the psycho-moral problems bred

by the prevailing ethos, even as that ethos is also viewable as stemming from a pervasive—one could almost say, "naturalized"—condition of markedly pro-liferating and profoundly inhumane dysfunction.

"Schizoid Administrativism" is my term for that ethos, and it can also be used to describe the system of symbolic priorities and characteristic economy of attention which stems from it. We see manifestations of that system in many major institutional exhibitions of contemporary art, just as we read similar mani-festations of it in art magazines and academic journals of critical theory. Its chief hallmark is a fetishistic embrace of the esthetics of disassociation and amphigory fantasized and advanced as a talisman of self-evident superiority held against the depredations of an indifferent world, giving tacit impetus to a gatekeeper's culture of ever-more rarefied access (and denial) to a mythical condition of irrationally privileged positionality. The psychomechanics of schiz-oid administrativism are also routinely manifested in the governing structure which allows and encourages the art which fulfills its peculiar appetite for self-idealization to emboss itself into the public eye as an agent of a quasi-official *fait accompli*. Almost always, this is accomplished in spite of the larger polity which seldom finds its own sense of psychodynamic necessity mirrored in the subtly exploitive priorities of that structure.

It is this circumstance of seemingly omni-present disassociation which lies behind my initiating reverie about the future-present revealed as spec-tacle-shrouded necropolis. It offers a picture of the way that we are supposed to live, according to certain institutionally identified lights who view their task as one of delimiting the history of the future before it ever comes to pass, prompting this essay's suggestion that the world of art "doth administer itself too much," to play upon Shakespeare's famously suspicious remark. As such, it goes to the newly relevant post-Cold War question pertaining to the real social and political values which the arts act on behalf of—even as the Archimedian ground upon which questions stand is almost everywhere re-vealed to be sharply tilted in an administrativist direction. (This subtle albeit pervasive tilt always reconfirms that status quo administrativist pseudo-con-sensus will be the default solution to all otherwise unresolvable conflicts over everyday prerogative and the subjective interiority that can be alleged to exer-cise it, all-the-while failing to acknowledge the degree to which administrativism actually acts to perpetuate such conflicts—mostly through the advancement and circulation of a parade of pseudo-issues—so as to create a confirming condition for the necessity of administrativism's superordinate will-to-power.) Thus, even though these remarks are directed at what appears to be a conven-tional system of institutionally privileging certain types of art, I would go so far as to contend that we see the ascendant symptomology of Schizoid Administrativism manifesting itself in all aspects of our brave new social world of omnipresent dot.commodification, and this prompts us to once again re-

think the age-old question of whether it be better for art to reflect reality (even the schizoid administrativist reality of pervasive and all-encompassing unreality) or instead ask it to articulate and idealize an ecstatic dream world which could in some compensatory way render the traumas meted out by quotidian circumstance more bearable. No matter how critical one might allege one's motives to be, the fact is that to confront reality in any way whatsoever is to in some way invest in its *a priori* authority—confrontations with authority are always part of the Oedipal path to becoming authority—while the act of compensating for it tacitly admits that, in the end, it is always reality that finally determines our everyday fate, however much we might seek a convivial respite from it.

<center>II</center>

It was during a visit to Catherine David's "Documenta X" in 1997 that "Schizoid Administrativism" entered my consciousness as a useful descriptive term. While examining Michelangelo Pistolleto's installation in perpetual progress titled *Office of the Black Man* (original version, 1970), I noted that the work claimed to be about the artist's "administration of his own past," which explicitly embraced an alleged "end of productivism," even as the work itself was quite a production number. A bemused multi-lingual crowd gathered around the work's amalgamation of disparate and cryptic relics, all of whom pondering what would come to replace the productivism that Pistelleto's work seemed to want to memorialize. Never to shy away from stating the obvious, I blurted out the word "administrativism" to jovial nods of approval.

Indeed, almost all of *Documenta X* seemed consecrated to the idea of art administrating its own recent past via a kind of algebraic "typosophia," to use Ecke Bonk's clever designation of his own project.[13] From Rem Koolhaas' systematic reduction of the post-modern cityscape to a generic circuitry of information exchange reflecting "a free-fall in the space of the typographic imagination"[14] to the belated re-exhibition of Gerhard Richter's index of index-card sized photographs that were candidates for subsequent painting subjects (*Atlas: 1962-1996*), the notion of the obsessively privileged reduction of artistically crystallized experience to easily managed information and relics was abundant, and this abundance far outpaced any claims that the exhibition might have made with regard to any notion of "politics." This foreground of information was also underscored by the exhibition's weighty companion book (not really an accompanying catalog, but a collection of essays commissioned on the exhibition's occasion as being on a literary and theoretical par with the actual exhibition) as well as its auspicious lecture series. It was also underscored by the exhibition's ubiquitous logo featuring a red sans-serif X superimposed over a lower-case d, which created the pictographic representation of the violent nullification of an underdeveloped phallus. Whether it was in Rich-

ard Hamilton's presentation of *Seven Rooms* (1997), or the multitude of artist-made Web sites that were featured in the exhibition's "internet lounge" pavilion, didacticly disconnected deployments of text, photography and architecture were in proliferate abundance, and this linkage could be said to form the psycho-esthetic cartel working behind the monster "X" that so repeatedly snipped at the little black "d" on the chilly gray signage that adorned the many posters, wall texts and official publications that were such an omnipresent part of the exhibition.

Nostalgic memorializations of the "revolutionary events of 1968," were an explicit part of the decision-making process behind "Documenta X," which recapitulated many of the rhetorical and stylistic attributes of Harold Szeeman's "When Attitudes Become Form" exhibition of 1969,[15] itself a Phillip Morris-sponsored extravaganza which advanced the cause of "radical" post-studio artistic practices under the tellingly injunctive subtitle "Live in Your Head," that is, make the schizoid character your everyday defense mechanism. Almost three decades latter, "Documenta" brought the academy of both the old and the new Conceptualism to codified fruition, valorizing it as the dominant art historical tendency of late 20th-century art. As the long-standing hybrid of the "cool" styles of Pop and Minimalism which took inspiration from Marcel Duchamp's campaign of calculated impostership arrayed against the sanctity of art, "Documenta X's" anthology of both old and new conceptualist orientations were united by one common theme: the programmatic advance of an esthetic of "administrator envy" as the *sin qua non* of advanced esthetic thinking which could be read as an exsanguinated contrast to the feel-good Globalism of Jean Hubert Martin's hyper-pluralistic "Magicieans de la Terre" exhibition of 1989. At its core, "Documenta X" emphasized, and in fact celebrated, the authority of what Hal Foster has called "specific genealogies of art and theory that exist over time,"[16] and their belated and self-serving *miscognizance* of "the fundamental stake in art and academy: the preservation in affirmative, administered culture of spaces for critical debate and alternative vision."[17]

But something else was lurking under the suspended animation of the show's cyrogenic display of "critical debate and alternative vision" reconfigured as a neo-conceptualist valorization of information-for-the sake-of-information. Perhaps this was the show's cold and bitter tone, which came across as one grand sigh about the ending of an over-idealized historical party which came to an apparent grief of pan-capitalist triumph, recognizing that "the history and the political project of documenta belong to a now vanished era of post-war Europe."[18] But beneath that icy tone, one could also detect a kind of manic enthusiasm for the aforementioned "triumph" of the newly configured system of exchange values that the exhibition secretly idealized however much it pretended otherwise. For what had in fact triumphed was not any

tradition of transgression and oppositionality, but only its coded remembrance, itself masking an entirely different reality, which was of course the triumph of the art of code as the central semiotic trope of the institution's right to exercise techno-bureaucratic authority via a manufacturing of the consent of those who are subjected to it. On this score we could make no mistake: the show placed David herself in the central spotlight as the *prima administorie* who was exercising that authority with an alarming aristocratic abandon upon a supporting cast of vassel artists, lecturers and exhibition visitors alike, and this rather odd torch-light parade was very much in keeping with a general trend in the 1990s artworld to celebrate the ascendance of high profile administrative careers with a world-wide construction boom in stunning museum architecture. Given this celebration, as well as the conveniently unremarked-upon paucity of significant art produced during that decade, one can say with surety that it was no mere coincidence that the "Documenta X" logo held such a striking resemblance to that other common character of the post-modern signscape, the famed prohibition symbol of red circle-and-slash. Taking note of the "deep design" of that symbol, Libby Lumpkin writes:

> The Prohibition Symbol takes full advantage of the venerable history of the diagonal's iconography. Its domestic domain, however, is benign and banal in comparison to the grandly tragic or blindly utopian sites visited by the diagonal in the past. It perfunctorily polices politesse and political agenda—"do not enter, park, litter, do drugs, get an abortion, be anti-gay." It represents the rule of law, not the word of God or the order of nature, it's a command, not a commandment. As such, it accommodates the obsolescence of a social morality grounded in absolute value, as delineated in the hierarchies of Christian religion and the rhetoric of Modernism, and perfectly emblemizes the currency of a cultural ethic based on relational values, as articulated in philosophies grounded in linguistics and difference. The no sign functions as a word, not a pictograph; the circle with slash is not a simplified picture but a linguistically coded abstraction.[19]

To which I would add, "a linguistically coded abstraction that serves as administrativism's instrument of implied coercion." Its serviceability lies in its efficient branding of a disciplinary agenda into the consciousness of the viewer who presumably has no choice but to be subjected to it, opening up the pressing art historical question which asks: to what degree do all forms of coded abstraction aspire to function in this coercionary way? Given the widespread influence accorded to Clement Greenberg's doctrinaire imperative to pictorial flatness, which reasonable hindsight allows us to recast as the rhetorical act of erasure (of bourgeois mimesis) so as to clean the art historical

slate for post-modernism's impending proliferation of institutional semiosis, one might want to go so far as to implicate the larger share of the entire institutional artworld of the past 40 years for taking subconscious part in opportunistically facilitating what has been revealed to be a patrician fantasy of social management parading under the banner of radical esthetic revolution. I leave it to the reader to ponder here the question of how the totalization of corporate power in the first decade after the Cold War might lead us to cease ascribing radical motivation to this institutionalized "revolution," or if its supposedly radical motivations can sincerely claim to have helped people live better in any significant way.

Even though the conceptualist and post-conceptualist art presented in "Documenta X" looms large as a summary statement of late 20th-century art, I need to acknowledge that my Schizoid Administrativist thesis needs the substantiation of other examples to flesh out my assertion of its pervasiveness. Also, it is perhaps important to note here that there have been some countervailing tendancies that have emerged in other major exhibitions. For example, in Jan Hout's "Documenta IX" of 1992, and again in the 1997 Munster Sculpture Project curated by Kaspar Koenig and Klaus Bassman, more playful and interactive spirit prevailed in works that engaged social space in multivalent, non-didactic terms that privileged the illusion that social space is not of necessity institutional space. "Documenta IX" and Munster both registered the chilly ethos of the New Globalism in that they both tried to engage the idea of how a legitimately high style could be forwarded from it. In the case of David's "Documenta X," it was scholastic sanctimony advanced as a nostalgic manque of necessary criticality, while at Munster and to a lesser extent "Documenta IX," it was esthetic playfulness elevated to a high style which wore an indifference to high style on its sleeve. In other words, at "Documenta X," having fun constituted a kind of "giving in the enemy," while at Munster and "Documenta IX" it was all that was left after everything else had been taken. This latter attribute was also apparent in some other important exhibitions which tried to anthologize the artistic spirit of the 1990s (i.e. the Los Angeles Museum of Contemporary Art's "Helter Skelter" exhibition of 1991, the Royal Academy of London's "Sensation" exhibition of 1997, the Aldrich Museum's "Pop Surrealism" exhibition of 1998), but the supposed fun that was to be gained from the art presented in these shows was by and large the kind that was liberally doused with a pathos which resentfully recognized that real preogative lied elsewhere, far beyond the rhetorical reach of images and objects which metaphorically collapsed under the weight of their own unsublimated infantilism.

Another article of fairness prompts this remark in the direction of a caveat, that being the recognition (contrary to the pop-surrealist tendency toward playful pathos) that the esthetics of schizoid administrativism can in

fact engender works of art to which the term "high style" can be fairly applied, invoking the pathos of what can be called "the schizoidal sublime" all-the-while begging the question of the larger morality undergirding such ascriptions. One example of this is the work of Bill Viola, which was featured in a large retrospective at the Whitney Museum in the Spring of 1998. Since the middle 1970s, Viola has been well-known for creating video-projection installations which use devices such as extreme slow motion, stacato editing, abrupt shifts in scale and focus and layered screens to create surrealistic dream spaces inside darkend archetechtonic chambers. For example, in *He Weeps for You* (1976), the fish-eye lens of a video camera scrutinizes the end of a length of copper pipe, where a drop of water slowly forms itself before falling onto the surface of an amplified drum positioned on the floor below. The camera feeds to an overhead projector which enlarges the slowly swelling drop to mammoth proportions on a far wall, showing it to subtly reflect every significant object in the room, including the curious viewer who gains an out-of-body glimpse from the tableaux. A drama of anticipation ensues as the drop grows, until it falls upon the drum below, creating a protracted thump that reasonates throughout the room. Here, the sound of resonance is the sound of memory-as-experience, and as such it speaks to a condition of psychic dissassociation where experience is exaggerated as highly nuanced sound and image, that is, "vivid information," while its palpable tactility is simultaneously supressed, thereby insisting on the disembodied character of the perpetually floating memory-moment whose poetic timbre is so persuasively simulated. If contemporary experience does indeed force us to schizoidally "live in our head," then it is best to cast that head as a memory palace full of uncanny and unpredictable surprises, some of which being excruciatingly intimate while others are rich in allusive grandeuer. Taken as single totality, Viola's exhibition was just such a memory palace, and in many ways it represented the best aspects of the art of the 1990s.

Of course, Viola's memory palace needed an institutional office to come into being, and this returns us to that vexing "issue of the 1990s:" institutional motivation and its relationship to the desire for self-optimization which comes to art so as to help it live better. In the case of Viola's work, this was accomplished through saturating institutional spaces with a maximal suggestion of both an uncanny time-past and an ever-anxious time-future, both flowing like mythic dreamwork into the emotionally inaccessible vacuum space of a hypersimulated time-present . Yet, if Viola's work can be said to epitomize the best aspects of the esthetics of the schizoidal sublime, than the need for balance points us toward a few of the many exhibitions that were earmarked by the most ridiculously hypocritical manifestations of administrativism. One of these was a large group exhibition curated by Kynaston McShine for the Museum of Modern Art in the Spring of 1999 titled "The Museum as Muse." The title of this exhibition represents a fair synopsis of its self-confirming premise: an

anthology of works that position themselves in a museum space to announce the historical construction of that space as their inspirational subject and/or topic of alleged critique. Of course, any imperative to critique presented in this particular context fell short of real seriousness owing to the fact that it could never question what it meant to submit to the terms of an institutional sponsorship of institutional critique, and this glaring lapse also applies to other exhibitions which anticipated "Museum as Muse," such as Joseph Kosuth's 1990 "Play of the Unmentionable" at The Brooklyn Museum, or Fred Wilson's many interventions into the display ettiquettes of museum collections of African art and African-American artifacts, interventions which are calculated to reveal the collections' undergirding racist assumptions. As it turns out, only Hans Haacke's *Shapolsky et. al.* (1971) can be said to have taken such a critique far enough to bait its original sponsoring institution, The Guggenheim Museum, into an act of self-protective censorship that cast its hidden hypocrisy in sharp historical relief. Ironically, *Shapolsky* has been re-exhibited many times over since that time (in fact, it was given pride of place at "Documenta X"), and has set a standard of using information-as-politics to catalyze the politics of information that many works have unsucessfully tried to meet.

In at least one significant way, "The Museum as Muse" went further than its predecessors in its desire to use the spectre of something resembling anti-censorship to re-valorize the aura-giving power of the sponsoring institution, itself the longstanding subject of accusations pertaining to the falsification of history while simultaneously flattering wealth and power. This was accomplished in two distinct ways. First, there was the wholly disingenuous attempt to show the museum off as a site for the free exchange of ideas—after all, what could be more free of worldly coercion than an exhibition explicitly critiquing the politics of exhibition? The obvious answer to this question would point out that such an allegation of freedom masks a calculated opportunity cost with regard to other topics which unfettered expression might address itself to, casting new suspicion on the idea of the museum as a site of democratic debate. The "Museum as Muse" also sought to revalorize the museum in another way. By insisting on itself as the subject matter of its own show, the museum placed its own infantilizing paternalism at center stage, *at the expense of the works that it presented.* This is important when we remind ouselves of the original ambitions of some of the work included in this presentation, for example, the work of Marcel Broodthaers or the artists associated with Fluxus, which pointedly mocked the authority of the museum, subtly insisting that works of art are things that should do something for us rather than things that we do something with. In "Museum as Muse," they were clearly re-cast in the latter camp as the fecklessly backhanded pseudo-exceptions which in fact proved the rule of ascendent administrativism, casting the work of art as an inarticulate tantrum whose pain the museum could make a big show of feeling

even as it also willfully misunderstands that pain as well as its own subtly self-serving investment in causing, shaping, and sustaining it.

It is interesting to note how often and to what degree exhibition organizers and presenting institutions have moved into the forefront of artworld news throughout the 1990s, suggesting that they are more-and-more likely to view themselves as the primary art historical actors in a drama that relegates artists and works of art to the status of a supporting cast which provides set-pieces for the negotiation of administrative narratives. Nothing could high-light this trend better than the fanfare which accompanied the re-opening of the P.S. 1 Contemporary Art Center in Long Island City in October of 1997, and the concomitant sighs of resigned disappointment that were heard when it was announced in the Spring of 1998 that P.S. 1 was preparing to merge with the Museum of Modern Art.

It turned out to be a move of profound administrativist realism in that MoMA could claim that its sponsorship of the Center would again place it into the forefront of the world of living art which its detractors have claimed it to have abandoned, while P.S. 1 could gain access to the audience and marketing savvy that it needed to continue operating in a new and somewhat alien funding environment. Judging from the first exhibition presented at the post-merger P.S. 1, titled "Greater New York," it was a marriage made in techno-bureaucratic hell, begetting over 120 artistic offspring in an incoherent installation of works by mostly "new faces" to the New York art scene.

Needless to say, there is a significant behind-the-scenes story to the organization of "Greater New York." One aspect is the timing of the show to ostensibly pre-empt or otherwise compete with the so-called "Millennial Biennial" which would open at the Whitney Museum less than two months later. Here, the guiding assumption is that the Whitney show will again be guilty of being too predictable and conservative in its bi-annual survey of American Art, and "Greater New York" seems keyed to taking advantage of this presumed weakness by organizing a presentation that could truly be called "fresh" or "cutting edge." As it turns out, however, several of the best artists in "Greater New York" (Lisa Yuskavage, Chakaia Booker, Shirin Neshat, E.V. Day et.al.) were also represented in the Whitney exhibition, which (judging from the list of participants) seems haunted by the icy esthetic tenor which was a hallmark of "Documenta X."

One is tempted to wonder whether the pre-MoMA P.S. 1 would ever care to engage the Whitney in this way, although I suspect that if it did, no one would cry foul. But we are not dealing with the Pre-MoMA P.S. 1, so such musings are useless. More useful is an assesment of "Greater New York" that looks behind its apparent plethora of diverse art to engage an underlying thematic. Although the exhibition has its moments of neo-conceptual icyness as well as other moments of Pop Surrealist silliness, it is mostly marked by

sheer pointless abundance as well as an profusion of art that obsessively abbreviates its own highly theatricalized triviality, hoping-against-hope that a hyper-synecdochtal esthetic (synecdoche *en abyme*?) will capture the imagination of the moment, and in any case rightly assuming the arsenal of theory to be vast enough to legitimize even this, or anything else as being worthy of serious consideration. Yet, it is fair to point out that this faith in the "generosity of the theoretician" polemic arsenal might be misguided in its assumption regarding the willingness to play along, for when we see the celebration of synecdoche we must also look toward the larger *epoche* that the former can be said to condense and reflect. And here, we discover that said *epoche* is not any drama of history, desire or other form of worldly necessity, but only administration's self-congratulatory assertion of its right to designate meaningfulness where almost none exists. Thus, we see works of art presented as the curious relics and set-pieces of administrative negotiation, and the narratives of these negotiations taking on their own authorial agendas.

III

Thus far I have given the lion's share of emphasis to the why's and wherefore's of administrativism while offering only a scant remark on the special significance of modifying it with the psychoanalytic term "schizoid." In the most general sense of the term, this significance lies in how it represents the post-Cold War era's uniquely perverse stylization of the master-slave morality that Hegel famously described in his *Phenomenology of Spirit*. This can be initially substantiated by examining the relationship of administrator and administratee through the optic of the psychoanalytic explication of the symbiotic relationship between sadism and masochism, the "on top of it all" coldness of the administrative sadist making a good situational fit to the obediently self-punishing "bottom" of the perennially underrewarded artist-laborer, who would seem to gain perverse pleasure from repeated rituals of humiliation even as he or she learns (or projects) that the path to overthrowing the sadistic oppressor lies in gradually becoming—that is, secretly identifying with and eventually recovering—the abusive prerogative from the sadist. There is in fact much to be gained by explaining the reconfigured power relations of the moment in this way. As Gilles Deleuze has written:

> Masochism is above all formal and dramatic; that means that its
> peculiar pleasure-pain complex is determined by a particular kind
> of formalism, and its experience of guilt is by a particular
> story…when guilt is experienced "masochistically," it is already
> distorted, artificial and ostentatious.[20]

The last three adjectives are, of course, long-standing ascriptions which have

been frequently applied to modern and contemporary art by detractors and advocates alike, suggesting that some form of masochism might undergird much of the will to create in the "alchemical" manner of the modern artist via a quietly vengeful turning of the base material of quotidian humiliation into the specious gold of an omnipotent creative gesture (and an ensuing career as a revered culture-hero) which is a screen-construct for the masochistically earned state of redemption. But there is even more to this analogy, for earlier in the same long essay, Deleuze writes:

> From the idea that the law should not be based on the principle of the Good but on its form alone, the sadist fashions a new method for ascending from the law to a superior principle; this principle, however, is the informal element of a primary nature which aims at the subversion of all laws. In the other modern discovery that the law increases the guilt of the person who submits to it, the masochist in his turn finds new ways of descending from the law to its consequences: he stands guilt on its head by making punishment into a condition that makes possible the forbidden pleasure. In so doing, he overthrows the law as radically as the sadist, though in a different way…The Oedipal content, which always remains concealed, undergoes a dual transformation—as though the mother-father complementarity had been shattered twice and asymmetrically. In the case of sadism, the father is placed above the laws; he becomes a higher principle with the mother as his essential victim. In the case of masochism, the totality of the law is invested upon the mother, who expels the father from the symbolic realm.[21]

This takes us a step further into the complex evolution of the aforementioned alchemy, in that the transformation of which Deleuze writes also functions as a strategy of displacement leading to a justifiably "earned" role-reversal (however temporary) of the sado-masochistic power protocol. It is this kind of ritualized (albeit unconscious) reversal and re-reversal of role that gives characteristic form to the two distinctive "political types" that Harold Lasswell wrote about in 1930, those being the political agitator and the political administrator. The former can be linked to Deleuze's vision of the sadist in "the high value which he places on the emotional response of the public,"[22] while masochistic aspects of the latter is marked by "an overscrupulous performance of duty" representing an "elaborate effort to demonstrate potency" in the face of "persistent feelings of inadequacy…(which) are self-imposed penalties for his hostilities against the environment."[23] Summarizing his typology, Lasswell wrote that "As a class, the administrators differ from the agitators by the displacement of their affects on less remote and abstract objects,"[24] here meaning "real" (or at least clearly differentiated) people rather than the agitator's sub-

conscious appeal to an "undifferentiated world parent." Perhaps the most important point of similarity between Lasswell's types and Deleuze's sado-masochistic actors lies in the vivid presence of frozen hostility and persecutory thinking in relation to their respective objects, and the symbiotic pseudo-antagonism that they ceremonially playact for each other's pathological benefit.

Here, I would like to contend two things: first, and obviously enough, artistic gestures can be profitably read as stylized extensions of the kinds of psychological politics that Lasswell examined with such prescient acuity, because—as the marketing peoples' motivational researchers know all too well—art's goal of crystallizing and catalyzing an ideal alignment of experience, memory and received information are more of a piece with the rhetorician's task of persuasion than they are the scientist's imperative to prove or disprove. My second contention is that the terms for identifying those stylizations and their implications are now in need of update, elaboration and relevant clarification. While not wanting to dismiss any assertions and analyses of the myriad sado-masochistic subtexts for the relationship between artistic production and socio-cultural administration (which is the new techno-bureaucratic term for what was once called patronage), I do think that they reveal only part of a larger and more complicated picture, albeit a usefully important one that is somewhat taboo and certainly under-discussed. A more complete picture must also include the integration of another complimentary elaboration that is even more underdiscussed, although I view it as being much more to the point of contemporary circumstance and practice: the view of art's reflection of and interaction with the social world as being keynoted by a "narcisso-schizoid" relation which in turn engenders what I would contend to be the period style, presiding ethos, and characteristic cultural appetite of techno-bureaucratic capitalism's apparent enthusiasm for its myriad projects of artistic and architectural self-idealization: schizoid administrativism.

It seems quite natural that Lasswell would not resort to a use of the term "schizoid" in his early analysis of the psychopathology of political types. In 1930, the word had yet to be properly coined,[25] and the charactological state that its clinical usage now describes continues to be the amorphous subject of competing views. Like the condition which is termed "borderline" (to which a "schizoid" position is structurally and etiologically related), it seems very much to be a modifier in search of a noun. We might best start by reiterating the common understanding of the term "schizoid" as referring to an incipient or ambulatory form of schizophrenia in much the same way that "borderline" refers to the incipient threshold to the state of full psychotic break, as in "borderline psychotic." But this initial description is of only limited use when we realize that schizophrenia is something of an umbrella term that corrals together several distinctive conditions, ranging from catatonia to paranoid-

schizophrenia, so we can reasonably suppose that the incipient forms signaled by the term "schizoid" are likewise diverse. But this diversity seems to exist and fluctuate between two poles, which I shall term "disintegration" and "affective withdrawal" as a way of describing, respectively, the schizoid's characteristic self-experience and the most characteristic defense mechanism which the schizoid employs to contain and compensate for the absence or functional malformation of disintegrated internal structure which cripples and incapacitates his or her relational abilities. In the case of disintegration (or fragmentation), it is helpful to be reminded of the schizoid's reliance on the relatively primitive defense mechanisms of "splitting" and "compartmentalization," signaling both their incapacity to master the exacting requirements of "normal" neurotic repression as well as their alternative positionality in relation to the seemingly thankless and unending task of equilibrating instinctual need with worldly demand. As Freud noted in his early exploration of the subject:

> a splitting of the ego is (intrasystemic) rather than a splitting between agencies (between ego and id) is to bring out a process that is new in comparison with the model of repression and of the return of the repressed. In fact, one of the specific traits of this process is that it does not result in the formation of a compromise between the two attitudes present but that it maintains them simultaneously instead, with no dialectical relationship being established.[26]

This reliance on splitting and compartmentalization is the aspect of a schizoid state which is shared with the borderline, but the schizoid differs from the borderline in a very significant way which allows the schizoid to function very successfully in a world over-determined by techno-bureaucratic abstractions, whereas the borderline is cast as the quintessentially self-destructive victim of that world, always aspiring to be its unredeemed martyr. The difference lies in how each manages, internalizes and projects their moments of affect, for the borderline can be said to have very fluid boundaries between "thin-skinned" internal compartments, and thus seems at first glance to be emotionally spontaneous in their response to the here-and-now. The schizoid compensates for the lack of internal structure by withdrawing and redirecting the energy that affect depends upon, compulsively flattening and schematizing the experience of the here-and-now into pre-formed sterotypes so as to gain the illusion of efficient manipulability and concomitant strategic advantage at the very real (quasi-sociopathic?) expense of a relational failure. If the borderline can be fairly said to suffer from the kind of impulse-control problems that bespeak a pitched and hyperanimated condition of internal riot (often misunderstood and/or idealized to be "passion"), then we might fairly say that the

schizoid freezes his or her internal riot into a seemingly controllable condition of suspended animation. As Harry Guntrip put it in 1969:

> The schizoid condition consists in the first place in an attempt to cancel external object relations, and live in a detached and withdrawn way...The attitude to the outer world is the same: non-involvement and observation at a distance without any feeling...When a schizoid state supervenes, the conscious ego appears to be in a state of suspended animation in between two worlds, internal and external, and having no real relationship with either of them. It has decreed an emotional and impulsive standstill, on the basis of keeping out of affective range and being unmoved.[27]

It should be noted that the schizoid's condition of riot is no less resolved into a seemingly healthy pattern of coherent integration. It is only maintained in a position of protracted abeyance so as to minimize both internal and external threats to functionality and survival that invite such worldly misery upon the borderline, at least until uncontrollable circumstances trigger the condition of intrapsychic fracturing and collapse which is conventionally understood to be a breakdown.

I want to go a bit deeper into the specifics of the psychoanalytic theorization of these charactological conditions, but before I do, I would like to shed some light on what I think is another useful generalization, that being the dialectical and symbiotic construction of both the borderline and the schizoid to another typical charactological figure, the pathological narcissist who is their close structural relative. I do not think that I oversimplify things too much when I state that what distinguishes the schizoid from the narcissist are their core obsessional terrors (respectively, with malefic and/or imprisoning engulfment in the case of the schizoid and abandonment in the case of the narcissist), which is to say that the reason that narcissists (in the manner of Lasswell's "political agitator") can be said to overdress themselves and their cultural productions into self-objectifying reaction-formations (subconsciously modeled on the idealized screen memory of the phallus) configured to preempt or "ward-in" the terrible abandonment which they subconsciously feel themselves to deserve. This persistent feeling owes much to a traumatization of infantile self-esteem as well as the projection of guilt that they feel over the fact that they have decathected their own libido from the objects of the world—in effect abandoning those objects—thus making their own fear of abandonment all the more desperate. This compensatory overdressing is at the core of the narcissist's eroticized self-objectification, that being his or her treatment "of his own body in the same way in which the body of a sexual object is treated."[28] As others have no doubt noted, Freud returned to the thorny subject of self-

objectification as a defiance of the spectre of castration when he outined his theory of fetishism as the "objects chosen as substitutes for the absent female phallus,"[29] drawing the narcissist and the fetishist together in terms of their similiar forms of magical thinking—one warding-in (potential abandonment) and one warding-off (the spectre of castration). One can also follow a lead suggested by Bela Grunberger by substituting the more diagnositically precise ascription "self possession" to the narcissist as a way of highlighting another aspect of the narcissistic self-system, that being the manner in which the pathologically false narcissistic personality can be said to hold-in, contain and hide the "piece of feces" that he or she secretly feels the true self to be. As Grunberger has written,

> In effect, the narcissistic factor is highly dialectic, for…it cannot exist in a pure state, but must be associated with other factors…in a constellation of agencies within the total personality…narcissistic desire goes back to a quasi-absolute early narcissistic state…but one already traumatized, for it has been frustrated and is therefore attended by guilt.[30]

In contrast, the schizoid doesn't fear abandonment nearly so much as he or she fears being psychically contained, trapped and engulfed by some inescapable and omni-present manifestation of generalized malice, which he or she subconsciously hopes to freeze out; first by deploying the defense mechanism of playing emotional possum and secondly by erecting an intricately self-protective web of semioticized pseudo-reality which might contain, pre-empt or deflect said malice. In essence, these are the two distinct phases of a single defense mechanism called intellectualization, and they both earmark the schizoid's peculiar manner of dealing with the world. The emotionally shut-down condition of frozen affect is the key for differentiating the schizoid from the masochist, for the threatening sadist is not fascinated by actual cruelty so much as he or she is fascinated by the masochist's "dramatic response" to the sadist's theatricalized presentiment of threat, thus the sadist can be counted on to quickly lose interest in any interaction with the unresponsive and undramatic schizoid. The web of pseudo-reality is in essence a homeopathic deployment of sadistic projection designed to protect schizoidal positionality.

Of course, the important relational problem is that it is everyone, not just the malicious, who are ensnared in the schizoid's highly differentiated web of exsanguinating semiosis, and it is this same everyone who experiences that ensnaring web for what it is, a subtly sadistic apparatus for meting out small increments of absurd humiliation so that all who survive it will be properly humbled (or distracted) out of any potentially overwhelming posture of direct confrontational threat. Of course, no one survives such a web for any length of

time without frustration and eventual damage, and this brings us back to the borderline, whose state of pronounced internal conflict can be said to simultaneously suffer the narcissist's fear of abandonment and the schizoid's fear of engulfment at the same absurdly contradictory moment. This contradiction and the condition of misery that is coupled with it prompts one to describe the borderline in the terms of a Kierkegaardian parable about the unhappiest of all men: the man who is weighted down by sorrow over the (inevitably abandoning) past even as he is also full of anxious dread of the (uncontrollable and potentially engulfing) future.

Following other writers, I dwell here on the relational dynamic between the narcissist, the schizoid and the borderline because it seems to display the formalism of pleasure and pain that is at the core of Deleuze's exposition of sado-masochistic symbiosis in a fresh raking light. In fact, I am quite convinced (as are many other observers) that one needs to understand the paradoxical subtleties of all three of these internal-object configurations before one can hope to fully understand any one of them, as they almost seem to breed and exaggerate each other in an ongoing symbiosis. Important similarities are certainly evident, for example, both the narcissist and the schizoid are diagnostically branded by their "withdrawal of libido" from the objects of the world, and their marked inclination to megalomania has been noted at the very beginning of their appearance as subjects of psychoanalytic study. But important differences reside amid and even within these similarities. For example, the tendency to affective withdrawal in the narcissist and the schizoid takes on a distinctly different cast; in the former, it is redirected onto and into either the objectified and eroticized body or into the world-aggressive ego, both of which take on an excess of object-attributes in the disassociated world of narcissistic consciousness. This consciousness exists paradoxically as a skewed attempt to convince that world that the narcissist does not need it when, in fact, the narcissist lives or dies on the visible displays of confirmation and adulation that only the world can provide—or withhold. On the other hand, the schizoid's withdrawal of libido re-cathects it not on to the self imagined as either a body-object or an ego-actor, but onto the self fancied as the occupier of a strategically advantageous, that is "protected," position vis-a-vis the frightening unpredictability of presumably hostile other-selves whose potential for malicious upsurge needs to be neutralized and "managed-away" at the earliest opportunity—hence the schizoid's exaggerated enthusiasm for things such as "advance" or "inside information," "accountability," "specific criteria" or "(self-protective and self-aggrandizing) salvation through policy" all of which are reliant of the efficacies of code. The schizoid accomplishes this by first flattening the figures in his or her experience into abstractions so that they can more efficiently be redeployed as disembodied "information pictures" in a confining grid of conceptual relations which is always centered around the schizoid's

imaginary control position, which is often imagined to be an invisible "gray eminence" to others who are assumed to be spellbound by the narcissist's flamboyant exhibitionism. To borrow Alexander Lowen's succinct description:

> The schizoid character functions in reality as a matter of survival but without the inner conviction that its values are real. He lacks the control over his reactions which the neurotic has, neurotic though that control may be. He is more at the mercy of external forces than the neurotic. He responds to affection immediately and directly but just as immediately will he freeze in a situation which he feels is negative.[31]

The megalomania that Freud associated with narcissism and schizoidal "paraphrenia,"[32] also becomes clear when we contrast their differing nuances. Narcissistic megalomania is motivated by narcissistic rage in either a latent or dramatically manifest form, that being the rage and sadness associated with abandonment's potential reenactment of the overwhelming tragedy of abject helplessness amid an indifferent relational environment. When the magic of narcissistic self-objectification fails to "ward-in" such horrifying potential, the self-possessed core of "secret" or "shameful" identification with hidden feces can explode into a condition of anal-sadistic rage which often animates acts of self-destruction or brutal authoritarianism when they are not pathetically forwarded as last-ditch efforts to regain attention. In contrast, the schizoid exercises megalomanical control in the manner of a game of chess, carefully jockeying for strategic position in obsessive-compulsive increments until the situational gameboard exists in a state of apparent control. The narcissist lives by subconscious choice as a vassal on this disassociated gameboard, sometimes as a pawn and sometimes as its featured knight, but seldom is the narcissist aware of who makes the moves and why they are made, or who is behind that decision and who or what is behind that. What the narcissist knows and is deeply invested in is the "flamboyance effect" of the particular move, not its role in an overarching strategy, the existence of which he or she in fact eschews and denies as a conspiracy to undermine the state of eminent narcissistic being with a requirement that the narcissist engage in masochistic "doing." This is the narcisso-schizoid relation, where the schizoid uses momentary attention (or the implied threat to withdraw attention) as a technology of remote manipulation allowing him or her to plant the schizoid world picture into narcissistic hands, and have the narcissist fashion its particulars as if it were his or her own creation, occasionally redolent of polite irony but always subject to schizoidal orchestration and responsive to schizoidal applause.

Of course, life is not a game of chess, so the control that the schizoid exerts from his or her position of psychic retreat is in many cases a partial or

complete illusion, depending on how connected or unconnected the schizoid is to reality. But here I must hasten to add what should appear to be an obvious comment about the "life" and "reality" described herein: it isn't real, and is in fact an insane pseudo-reality schizoidally constructed on the exsanguinated models of a Kafka novel or a Gothic romance. In a forthright and candid discussion about the interrelationship of psychoanalysis and space, Michael Eigen articulates an image of socio-psychological interactivity that brilliantly captures and aligns the schizoid personality as it lives (or fears to live) both within the self as well as the "real" world beyond it:

> I've experienced many patients overly obsessed with space, who have no playful space whatsoever. What they have is not so much a playground as a coliseum, where there's a battle for survival going on: a territorial battle over who is going to survive in space. These patients inhabit a corrupted space, a violent TV-like space, where the emphasis is on who's blowing away whom: where the violence makes for one explosion after another. So the session itself becomes a kind of explosive or violent space. It becomes an annihilating space, a space that eats up, where the obsession with space again blows away the possibility for time to develop. It's a void space, in a way, or a big-bang space, or a black hole space that seems to foreclose the possibility of letting something unfold. Just as something's unfolding, a violent enactment blows it away, so that the experience doesn't get a chance, in and of itself, to come to a conclusion. You never get a chance to find out what the experience could be because the sort of space it occupies nullifies it...Clinically, the problem is one where negative space eats away at the possibility of letting an experience be. It's a very violent, Pac-Man, black-hole kind of space that explodes the possibility of giving people a time to complete any particular trajectory of experience...But the problem is even more pervasive, because it precludes the possibility of completing a perception...Its a matter of stopping actual innate capacities from having a chance to operate.[32]

What is remarkable about this passage is how it references a kind of perverse space that is simultaneously "in the psyche" and "in the world," but is not necessarily of either, prompting us to remember Mark Edmunds' more general observation of the spacial implications of the psychoanalytic project: "For Freud...the psyche is centrally the haunted house of terror Gothic. Freud's remarkable achievement is to have taken the props and passions of terror Gothic—hero-villian, heroine, terrible place, haunting—and to have located them inside the self."[33] Here we are led to the paradox of finding our way out of a dilemma by finding our way into it so that—through the power of analysis—

we can take regulatory ownership of an irrationality that has taken regulatory ownership of us

Eigen's recitation of the perpetually "blown away" subjective space of his schizoidal analysands is an interesting obversion of the picture of the necropolitan cityscape that initiates this essay. They are, of course, related like the opposite sides of a coin, one as the seething caldron of hyper-animated paranoid projection and one as the site of social evacuation (read: psychological withdrawl), each baiting the other's own sense of psychic necessity. The question is, how can any artistic gesture hope to mediate and mend this socio-architectonic split, allowing for the kind of psychic inhabitation that can sustain some kind of long-term growth. Eigen underscores this point by stating:

> In a way, the whole Freudian enterprise implicitly has to do with getting the mind into the body. Freud's whole oral, anal, phallic thing is about the ways the mind is incarnating…it's about phases of incarnation, or a development of incarnation.[34]

In my view, the narcisso-schizoidal art world is an Ontranto's house that is in dramatic need for an occasion of symbolic re-invention that would be similar in terms of process to Eigen's gradually self-incarnating analysand, and, needless to say, it is poorly positioned to receive and facilitate such an occasion. This is because of a long-standing institutional overinvestment in the pathological dialectic of schizoidal control and narcissistic pseudo-revolution (always in the name of that lord-and-master called fashion), which has become the cliche-ridden scene of a seemingly endless and irrelevant repetition-compulsion that reduces revolutionary pretense to an act of dead ritual. The real question is, does this poor position preclude the taking of necessary action on behalf of recovery and long-term survival—however painful that action might seem to be, or will the next moment play itself out in the manner of a Gothic romance and wait in a seemingly eternal state of denial for catastrophe to save it from confronting and re-inhabiting its all-pervasive morbidity?

Notes

1   Po Bronson, *Bombardiers* (New York: Penguin Books, 1995), 66.
2   Peter Halley, "Essence and Model" in *Peter Halley: Collected Essays 1981-1987* (Zurich: Gallery Bruno Bischofberger, 1988), 162.
3   Theodor Adorno, "The Palace of Janus," in *Minima Moralia* transl. E.F.N. Jephcott (London: Verso Books, 1984), 146-147.
4   Louis Cheskin, quoted in Vance Packard, *The Hidden Persuaders* (New York: Pocket Books, 1957), 5.
5   Ibid., p. 3.

6   My use of the term "techno-bureaucratic capitalism" is to be taken as a
     synonym for Arthur Kroker and Michael A. Weinstein's use of the word "pan-
     capitalism," in their book *Data Trash: The Theory of the Virtual Class*, (New
     York: St. Martin's Press, 1994) and it signals a condensation of the astute
     political analysis offered therein. As Kroker and Weinstein have noted: "The
     fascism proper that was never supposed to happen again returns with a
     vengeance, creating the bi-modern situation of hyper-technology and
     primitivism…Within the context of the double-mediation, fascism is determined
     as the reaction-formation against the logic of virtuality—the life of waiting to be
     replaced under the sign of the wish to be replaced." (66) This is the ethos of
     schizoid administrativism in a grim but prescient nutshell, which becomes even
     more clear when we remember with Kroker and Weinstein that: "Virtual
     satisfactions are cheaper. This is how the hatred of existence works…Under the
     sign of possessive individualism possessed individuals work the economic
     destruction of the future in the name of just deserts, security and self-fulfill-
     ment." (67)
7   Peter Halley, "A Response to Barnett Newman's 'The Sublime is Now'"(1986)
     in *Collected Essays*, 165.
8   Quoted in Robert Hughes, *American Visions: The Epic Story of Art in America*
     (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1997), 603.
9   Caroline Jones, *The Machine in the Studio* (Chicago: University of Chicago
     Press, 1996), 2.
10   Arthur Danto, *The Philosophical Disenfranchisement of Art* (New York:
     Columbia University Press, 1986), 114-115.
11   Donald Preziosi's *Rethinking Art History* (New Haven: Yale University Press,
     1989), Caroline Jones, *Machine in the Studio*, (Chicago: University of Chicago
     Press, 1997) and Howard Singerman *Art Subjects* (Berkeley: University of
     California Press, 1999) are three of the very best examples of a genre of highly
     sophisticated analyses examining the determining contours of various sites of
     artistic production and distribution, respectively focusing on "the institutions of
     art history and the museum," "the late 20th century transformation of the
     artist's studio" and "the changing nature of how artists are educated." Common
     to all of these books is an acknowledged debt to Michel Foucault's "archeologi-
     cal method," as well as a picture of inexorable increase in institutional formalism
     as a historical given—implying that the march of history is of necessity a march
     away from the morpho-symbolic pragmatics of art.
12   Douglas Coupland, *Generation X: Tales for an Accelerated Culture* (New York:
     St. Martin's Press, 1991), 25.
13   For an explanation of Ecke Bonk's seemingly obsessive notion of "typosophia,"
     a "conjugation of typography and philosophy," or "the typographical and
     taxonomic recasting of knowledge," (or, via a telling euphonic slippage, "the love
     of typography and taxonomy"), see Catherine David et al, *Documenta X: The
     Short Guide* (Kassel: Museum Fredericianum, 1997), 90.
14   Ibid., 126.
15   For a succinct articulation of the "attitudes" undergirding the allegedly revolu-
     tionary forms presented in Szeeman's seminal 1969 exhibition, see Scott

Burton's untitled essay in Harold Szeeman, *When Attitudes Become Form: Works/ Concepts/ Processes/ Situations* (Bern, Switzerland: Kunsthalle, 1969), 6-7. Burton initiates his elucidation of the work of the 24 artists included in this seminal exhibition with an epigraph taken from Samual Beckett's *Molloy* which states that "saying is inventing," and then goes on to point out "though non-rigid art may at times refer to the weight and degrees of energy of the human body, it is not 'humanist' because the viewer so often feels excluded, deprived of some states or parts of the work." (5). On the same page, he also writes "one of the few general characteristics of the artists in this show is how they relate their work to location. Generally, the choice is between a totally fixed position or a totally free relation of work to site." I offer these statements and the hubris with which they were uttered as evidence for and symptom of my "nacisso-schizoid" thesis, particularly my notion that the schizoid character is indicated by a counter-cathectic investment in the "magical" power of code (designation) as well as the superordinating power of "position" to deprive the body of "its weight and degrees of energy."

16 Hal Foster, *The Return of the Real* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1997), x.
17 Ibid., xvii.
18 David et al, *Documenta X*, 7.
19 Libby Lumpkin, "The Prohibition Symbol," in *Deep Design: Nine Little Art Histories* (Los Angeles: Art Issues Press, 1999), 37.
20 Gilles Deleuze, *Coldness and Cruelty* (New York: Zone Books, 1989), 109.
21 Ibid., 89-90.
22 Harold D. Lasswell, *Psychopathology and Politics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press/ Midway Reprints, 1930). Lasswell's book is often cited in the world of political science, but seems to be obscure in contemporary art critical and psychoanalytic circles. His early effort to reveal how "Political Man (displaces) private motives...on to public objects (subjecting the former to) rationalization in terms of public interest"(quoted in Fred I Greenstein, "Introduction to Harold D. Lasswell" in *Psychopathology and Politics*," viii) remains a noble one in its rigorous attempt to use the powers of psychoanalytic description upon symbolic figures in the public realm. Lasswell was always mindful of the fact that "political science without biography is a form of taxidermy" which would presumably make him enthusiastically sensitive to the idea of schizoid administrativism understood as both a political and psycho-esthetic pathology. (Greenstein, viii).
23 Ibid., 78.
24 Ibid., 150.
25 The source of the term "schizoid" is difficult to pin down in psychoanalytic literature, as the phenomena that it describes seems to slowly differentiate from that which is designated by older terms such as "paraphrenic," or "hebephrenoid personalities," which slowly fell out of clinical usage in the early 1930s. Early on, Helene Deutch touched on many of the particulars of what she called the "as-if" personality in her 1937 paper titled "The Absence of Grief" in Rita V. Frankiel, ed. *Essential Papers on Object Loss* (New York: New York University Press, 1994), 223-231. On page 224, she describes a "mechanism, whose nature

we are unable to define more clearly, may be a derivative of the early infantile anxiety situation which we know as the small child's reaction to separation from the protecting and loving person...If grief should threaten the integrity of the ego, or in other words, if the ego is too weak to undertake the elaborate function of mourning, two courses are possible: first, that of infantile regression expressed as anxiety, and second, the mobilization of defense forces intended to protect ego from anxiety and other psychic dangers. The most extreme expression of this defense mechanism is the omission of affect." (Deutch actually uses the term "schizoid" on page 229). For practical purposes, the earliest theoretically complete articulation of the structure and dynamics of a "schizoid personality" or "schizoid position" is to be found in R.D. Fairbain "Schizoid Factors in the Personality" (1940) in *An Object Relations Theory of the Personality* (New York: Basic Books, 1952), 23-47, and Melanie Klein, "Some Notes on Schizoid Mechanisms" (1946) in Juliet Mitchell, ed., *The Selected Melanie Klein* (New York: MacMillan Press, 1986), 176-200. My description of various schizoid aspects and attributes is gleaned, distilled, and idiosyncratically elaborated upon from these sources, as well as from Michael Eigen, *Psychic Deadness* (Northvale, New Jersey: Jason Aronsen, 1996). See also Harry Guntrip, *Schizoid Phenomena, Object Relations and the Self* (Madison, Connecticut: International Universities Press, 1969).

26 Sigmund Freud, "Splitting of the Ego in the Process of Defence" (1938) quoted and summarized in J.Laplanche and J.B. Pontalis, *The Language of Psychoanalysis* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1973), 429.

27 Guntrip, 18-19.

28 Sigmund Freud, "On Narcissism: An Introduction" (1914) in Andrew P. Morrison, ed., *Essential Papers on Narcissism* (New York: New York University Press, 1986), 17-43. In an early recognition of the dialectical interplay between narcissism and schizoidal paraphrenia, Freud writes: "Certain special difficulties seem to me to lie in the way of the direct study of narcissism. Our chief means of access to it will probably remain the analysis of the paraphrenias." (25).

29 Sigmund Freud, "On Fetshism" (1921) in Rita V. Frankiel, ed., *Essential Papers on Object Loss* (New York University Press, 1994), p.65.

30 Bela Grunberger, "Introduction" to *Narcissism: Psychoanalytic Essays*, transl. Joyce S. Diamanti, (Madison, CT: International Universities Press, 1969), 33.

31 Alexander Lowen, *The Physical Dynamics of Character Structure* (1958), reprinted as *The Language of the Body* (New York: Collier Books, 1971), 371.

32 Freud, "On Narcissism" op. cit., 51.

36 Quoted in Anthony Molino, "An Interview with Michael Eigen" (1994) in *Freely Associated: Encounters in Psychoanalysis* (London: Free Association Books, 1997), 115-116.

37 Quoted in Richard Davenport-Hines, *Gothic: Four Hundred Years of Excess, Horror, Evil and Ruin* (New York: North Point Press,1998), 325.

38 Molino, "Interview with Michael Eigen," 116.

Gerda Meyer-Bernstein, Witness To Inhumanity

Donald Kuspit

"Gerda Meyer-Bernstein's installations are among the most materially aggressive of all Holocaust-related works," Matthew Baigell writes.[1] But it is not only their stark literalism—Meyer-Bernstein's use of found materials, existing in real space, generate a you-are-there intensity, so that one feels implicated in the events the materials index as well as their surviving witness—that gives her installations their emotional power and presence, it is also their fragmentary, shattered character. Meyer-Bernstein does not simply amass history-specific materials—suitcases marked with the names of Holocaust victims (Block 11, 1989), battered old doors lined up like stiff corpses, paradoxically representing "Chai," the Hebrew letter for life (*Exit Only*), newspaper clippings documenting the interminable conflict in Israel (*The Agreement*), long rows of mannequins, the victims of rape, that ultimate weapon of humiliation of women, as their position face down suggests (*The 8th Deadly Sin*), photographs of the victims of the political struggles in Central America (*Army of the Disappeared, 1987*)—but she presents them in a way that verges on incoherence, suggesting that she cannot quite make rational sense of the disintegrative events the materials signify, both as their trace and emblem.

However much she arranges her very raw materials in a semblance of transcendent order, her installations have a jumbled together, chaotic look that implies unconscious incomprehension, even disbelief, in the human suffering and violence they imply. Sometimes she frames her death-infected materials—the frame itself is another battered material and morbid relic—and sometimes she simply lays them out in a straightforward, linear way, as though neatness could compensate for the misery they embody. It is as if human suffering could be given a structure that made sense of it—as if abstract geometry could countermand and even overcome the chaos that is the final product of the disintegrative violence that is the instrument of man's inhumanity to man—as if impersonal reason could make sense of unconscious irrationality, reintegrating what it disintegrates. For all her formal integrative effort, there is invariably the feeling of overwhelming destruction in Meyer-Bernstein's installations—of ruins that can never be repaired, of fragments of human life that can never be put back together again. Harmonious wholeness is a technical illusion in Meyer-Bernstein's installations, not a securely real-

ized aesthetic fact. Thus her installations howl with a sense of the senseless-ness of it all. It has been said that silent witnessing is the best testament to absolute cruelty, but Meyer-Bernstein suggests that displaying the artifacts of holocaustal cruelty makes for a more reliable testament. Undeniably real and public, the denial implicit in detachment is impossible.

Meyer-Bernstein witnessed Kristallnacht as a child, and she never forgot it, nor recovered from it. (The event occurred on November 9, 1938, when she was eight. Her family fled Nazi Germany one year later, moving to Chicago.) The objects in her installations are so many gestures of substitu-tive memory, recapitulating the catastrophic "night of broken glass," when the windows of Jewish stores were smashed, preparing the way for the smash-ing of Jewish lives. Sometimes this substitutive process is all but self-evident, as in Phoenix, 1994, an installation dealing, in her own words, with "the com-plex relationship between African Americans and Jewish Americans as we drift farther and farther apart...The floor of the room is covered with layers of shattered glass, some of it painted black and some white, to mirror and reflect the shattering of our relations, the utter senselessness of Blacks and Whites destroying each other." More often, it is less obvious, although, in *Homage to Raoul Wallenberg* (two versions), 1972 and to a lesser extent *J'Accuse*, the photographs are shaped like shards of glass, however stylized. The point is that Kristallnacht shattered Meyer-Bernstein's world and childhood inno-cence, traumatically marking the rest of her life. All her works, whatever their political point, are her attempt to come to terms with the event, to work through the painful emotions it aroused in her—to master the hatred it unleashed in her as well as face the hatred that victimized her simply because she is Jewish. She was guilty of a crime of identity she was too young to understand, and could not expiate, for to do so she would have to deny her right to existence.

I am saying that Meyer-Bernstein's installation art is as much about her own psyche—fixated on a life-threatening event, which forced her into premature self-consciousness—as it is about the inhumanity of society, which she was also forced to become conscious of too early for her own emotional good. In 1987 Meyer-Bernstein declared "I am committed to fight for the elimination of these extreme horrors [of war and destruction], be they Hiroshima, Nagasaki, Cambodia, Vietnam, South Africa, Central America or Bangladesh."[2] But the remote sociopolitical horrors she names are symbols of the extreme personal horror that Meyer-Bernstein experienced in Nazi Germany. "In my native Germany, I witnessed severe violence and social upheaval and was permanently marked by its impact." I am suggesting that she is still trying to recover from that impact. Paradoxically, her installations displace the annihi-lative anxiety the extreme horror of Kristallnacht aroused in her onto less personal world-historical horrors, partly in an effort to deny it, or at least to

diffuse its impact, partly in an effort to comprehend the old horror through the lens of the new ones. Every one of these horrors—she became aware of them as an an adult, so that they were easier to conceptualize—evoked the emotions aroused by the world-historical horror she was personally involved in, to the extent that it changed the course of her life.

The aggression that Baigell noted in Meyer-Bernstein's installations is a response to the threat of personal annihilation, even as the installations show that she has in fact been annihilated, at least in surrogate form. In other words, her installations are about her own experience of being a victim, and the sense of self-loss—of being nothing, worthless—it induced in her, as well as her aggressive response to the threat of extermination. But such aggression is also, paradoxically, self-defeating. Signs of self abound everywhere in Meyer-Bernstein's installations—most conspicuously in the photographs of people—but there is no living self anywhere in sight. The ghosts that haunt her installations—they are her affective community—are symbols of her own traumatized childhood self.

This is not to deny the social truth that Meyer-Bernstein's installations hammer home: there is always some group ready to deny the right of another group to exist, and prepared to act on this conviction by destroying the other group. Nazis ruthlessly destroyed Jews, Arabs and Jews continue to fight to the death, men emotionally destroy women by raping them, the Klan lynched blacks and other White Supremacists wish non-whites away and are prepared to kill them to make their wish come true (*The Hooded March*), and so on. Now and then Meyer-Bernstein makes an installation that tries to open a window on hope, to refer to Windows of Hope, but what one sees through the window is more horror, more images and messages that testify to violence, oppression, suffering—the existential tragedy of history. And there is no glass in the window frame, protecting one from the horrors, which make themselves felt inside one's life. The pattern was set with the homages to Raoul Wallenberg; the few good deeds are all but smothered under a deluge of destructive ones. There is no goodness and mercy—not even their realistic possibility—in Meyer-Bernstein's bleak Weltanschauung, only a situation of perpetual requiem, to refer to the title of one of her most powerful works. The triangle of this 1983 installation is essentially a cemetery covered with barbed wire, with the graves which mark the perimeter of the triangle signaled by German and American helmets, alternating with candles, giving the whole a shrine-like effect. Indeed, all of Meyer-Bernstein's installations are in effect shrines or altarpieces for a memorial church not yet built, for there is not enough compassion in any religion to lighten the burden of her memories, let alone to offer lasting salvation from suffering, which seems more durable. It certainly recurs endlessly.

There is, then, no consolation in Meyer-Bernstein's installations—she would probably think it sentimental and weak to even think of the need to be emotionally comforted. But without the suggestion of the caring that is an alternative to and a means of recovering from suffering, it can only be redeemed as protest, which is the way, in the end, we must take Meyer-Bernstein's art. Not simply social protest—protest against political conditions—but protest against suffering itself, endless, insistent suffering, clogging the psyche so that it can no longer process reality, no longer escape its bad feelings about itself and the world. Indeed, in the end what matters is not the social reality that Meyer-Bernstein's installations represent, but rather the sense of overwhelming, indigestible suffering that pervades them. It no longer seems to matter what society is at fault for what crime against humanity; the facts of destruction come to symbolize the truth of suffering in Meyer-Bernstein's installations. They are constructions of the self-destruction that is suffering, all the more so because they have given up on the reconstruction of life. They are too death-obsessed to even predicate life, which is why they leave us with a sense of irremediable suffering—a sense of personal doom.

Like Christian Boltanski's intimate works, Meyer-Bernstein's installations convey a claustrophobic sense of suffering, which becomes a form of mourning for the self that finds life all but unendurable, unlivable—the self that never really understood what it means to live life, or how to do so, for it had been made aware of death before it was adult enough to accept its inevitability, whether as a fact of nature or society. Meyer-Bernstein's installations, then, are a protest against the suffering—the sense of irreducible wretchedness—induced by the premature knowledge of incomprehensible death. For me, the humanistic outrage her installations convey is secondary to their fragmentary character, which bespeaks the fragmentation of the self unable to handle the reality of death, thrust upon it by the uncaring rotten world.

Notes

1   Matthew Baigell, *Jewish-American Artists and the Holocaust* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1997), 81.
2   Gerda Meyer-Bernstein, "Political Visions," Gerda Meyer-Bernstein, *Installationen und Objekte* (Berlin, 1987), n. p.

Rudolf Baranik: An Overview

Donald Kuspit

I have to tell you that it is hard for me to separate Rudolf Baranik the person and Rudolf Baranik the artist. I am going to attempt to do so in this lecture, that is, I am going to try to look at Baranik's work from an art historical point of view, but I have to say, because of my long relationship with Baranik, his person, in various manifestations, keeps presenting itself to me in highly charged images, which undoubtedly influence my sense of his art. The affective charge is not entirely my own contribution; I remember Baranik's intense emotionality, which is one of the things that made him so different and daring and even endearing in the New York art scene, where coolness is regarded as a survival strategy instead of a human failure. Baranik was a highly emotional person and an intellectual, but to his credit he never intellectualized, that is, defended himself from his own feelings by theorizing. Emotional explicitness is indeed one of the salient traits of his paintings, from the famous *Napalm Elegies* to the later, more conspicuously personal paintings.

In my opinion, it is in these paintings that he truly came into his own—truly became a major master—in part because he felt no obligation to convey a social message or make a social statement, that is, to bear witness to some of the dreadful aspects of our society. Liberated from the need for social consciousness, he was free to be unashamedly self-conscious, that is, to be witness to himself—to articulate his own depths.

Of course, the question is the aesthetic means he used to do so, and what place that gives him in the aesthetic history of 20th-century art. Baranik was first and foremost an abstract painter, whatever figurative vestiges appeared in his art or were evoked by it, and it is in the history of American abstract painting that he will take his important place. Since Abstract Expressionism that history has been, as Harold Rosenberg has convincingly argued, the history of a certain sense of self—a history, as he put it, of an evolving sense of autonomous identity, spinning itself free from social entanglements to articulate a primordial psychodynamics that at the same time is, ironically, the source of a sophisticated sense of self—a conviction in the right of the individual to exist on his own emotional terms. What remains of consequence in the study of art, once one has traced the stylistic and iconographic lineages of an artist, is what he or she contributes to our understanding of the self, and,

more broadly, how it reinforces our sense of existence, which includes death as well as life. Heinrich Wölfflin said that the whole issue of art was not style, but the psychology of style—that was the thing that had to be deciphered, as the clue to the artist's identity and humanity, as well as the thing that was of core value and interest to the viewer.

This paper, then, is an exercise in the psychology of Baranik's abstract style, or, if one wishes, the psychology of his formalism. As is well known, Baranik called himself a "socialist formalist," but, to me at least, the "socialist" part is no more than the shell around the formalist part, which is the core of his art—provided we understand that formalism is not simply a clever manipulation of line, color, and shape, but, as has been argued by John Deikman, the transposition or translation of psychic action into visually concrete terms. There is empty formalism and what I like to call emotionally pregnant formalism. That is, there is formalism in which what Clement Greenberg called the formal facts of a work remain mechanically self-same and inert however ingeniously dynamic they may technically be, and there is the more difficult formalism—it is harder to achieve and grasp—"through which," in Deikman's words, "psychic actions such as conflict, repression, and problem-solving are perceived through relatively unstructured experiences of light, color, movement." Baranik's formalism is of this latter kind, in which the viewer unconsciously and spontaneously reads light, color, movement—the active ingredients of form—as psychic actions, just as the truly self-engaged or internally aware artist unconsciously struggles to make what Mondrian called the external "abstract real" elements of his art the emblematic instruments of his psychic actions, so that they bespeak his sense of self, or, more generally, his inner life, which necessarily involves what is archetypal in human life in general. It is the rare artist who can instantly evoke the emotionally archetypal, and Baranik is that rare artist.

Before I continue I want to call attention to the fact that Baranik was a Jew, and one with an unhappy past. He was, through luck or chance, a survivor of the holocaust, and had, I think, survivor's guilt. As his wife May Stevens has already told you, in 1938, at the age of 18, Baranik left his native Lithuania for Chicago, where a rich uncle was to put him through college. Two years later Nazi Germany conquered Lithuania, and, betrayed by a neighbor— Lithuania was notorious for being pro-Nazi and anti-semitic—both his parents and his ten year old sister were assassinated by the Nazis. I have recently read Rich Cohen's *The Avengers*, the story of young Jews who led the uprising in the Vilna ghetto, which inspired the uprising in the Warsaw ghetto. I have no doubt that had Baranik stayed in Lithuania he would have been one of them. What I mean to signal is that Baranik's Jewishness—his sense of being a Jewish victim and survivor—is inseparable from his art. In my opinion his

social activism—his social conscience—is a response to his particular history as a Jew—an effort to fight back after the battle has in a sense been lost, just as Sartre's postwar emphasis on the existential significance of action was a belated intellectualization of France's failed defensive action in World War II. The issue of political and existential activism is that they are a resistance after the life-shaping battle has been lost, in the hope that future lives will not suffer the same fate.

In my opinion socialism, whatever it means politically, is humanly naive, in that it assumes that harmony between human beings is not only possible but will prevail, which altogether belies human nature. Human beings are not simply sociocultural constructions, but psychobiologically determined, or if they are sociocultural constructions, it is the intimacies of familial relationships that human beings experience when they are immature that is determinative. As Stevens said, Baranik always felt that "his life was divided by an unbridgable gap"—the gap separating the death of his immediate family and his subsequent life as an artist in America. In my opinion his socialism was an unconscious fantasy of family harmony—in a world that, as his self-conflicted paintings show, he knows will never be like a harmonious family. As we all know, family harmony is as much a myth as childhood innocence. On a broader social rather than intimate personal level, Jews have, as Max Horkheimer wrote, the "basic common experience...that no degree of conformism was enough to make one's position as a member of society secure," which is an "experience of the tenacity of social alienation." Baranik understood personally and socially what it meant to be alienated and insecure, which is why he never tried to be a conformist—to assimilate as either Jew or artist. Feminism has declared that "the personal is the political," which is something that the Jew intuitively understands from the beginning. Thus to the extent that Baranik's art is personal it conveys a certain awareness of the inextricability of the social and the existential in Jewish selfhood. But the point that I want to make is that he starts from the personal and arrives at the political, rather than superimposes the political on the personal. The injured head in the *Napalm Elegy* landscapes arises from the murky personal blackness—it is in fact I think a psychic self-portrait—rather than being imposed on the blackness like a tragic deus ex machina, bringing a little moonlight—ironic light, for the moon does not generate any light of its own—into a space of death and desertion.

Baranik's activity can be divided into three parts: his social and political activism, which involves an identification with the suffering underdog as well as a search for solidarity within the artworld, conceived as a community rather than a society, that is, in Ferdinand Tönnies's articulation of that distinction, a space where people are organically related rather than a mere co-existence of competitive individuals; his abstract paintings; and his language works. These fall into two categories: the print-like entries in the *Dictionary of the*

24th Century and the handwritten, more obscure, indeed, altogether illegible and indecipherable wordlike marks or gestures that appear in various works. (Several of them accompany the poems in my book titled *Self-Refraction* (1982), which Baranik made possible through Pratt Institute, where he worked.)

In my opinion such incomprehensible "wordiness" is an ironical play on texture—the ambiguity of personal texture and impersonal text, texture often being understood as signature in abstract expressionist painting. The language works are conceptual, although, especially in the latter category, which seems to suggest the inadequacy of language and thus the ineffable, there is the tension between black and light that is a constant of Baranik's abstract paintings. The *Dictionary Definitions* can be regarded as an apocalyptic—certainly pessimistic—extension of his social activism, for they offer an ironical understanding of the 20th century, which is assumed to have destroyed itself, perhaps in a nuclear holocaust. If Baranik's leftism was a conscious effort to change the world for the better—to make it more democratic (he was explicitly egalitarian) and humane—his *Dictionary Definitions*, written by the animal survivors of the holocaust (he does not seem to have been aware of the threat of environmental holocaust which is now underway, and likely to destroy all animal life except for insect and bacterial life), is an unconscious expression of his futility. In other words, there is a conflict between Baranik's positive social activism, and the negativism of his art—whether conceptual or pure painting—with, in my opinion, the latter dominating. His social activism was a response to social reality, his art a response to internal reality, and internal reality in the end was more important than external reality to him, however unconsciously.

I think Baranik's sense of futility became ingrained after the death of his immediate family when he was a youth, and it was later confirmed by the self-destruction of his son. I think this led him to produce his most magnificent works because it evoked the lost, destroyed part of his own self, leading to a compensatory efflorescence of creativity in an attempt at self-healing. The result is one of the great late styles of 20th-century art, an all the more striking achievement when there is a question whether an avant-garde artist can have a late style—certainly Rothko's late style, with whom Baranik's is directly comparable, and which it trumps, raises the question. The avant-garde artist is supposed to have his breakthrough in his youth—Ortega y Gasset pointed out that rebellious avant-garde art and rebellious youth are synonymous, both being energetic revolts against the tired old world—but Baranik shows us that it is possible to be truly avant-garde in old age.

In an aging society, such as ours, and advanced post-industrial societies in general, Baranik is a beacon of the accomplishment age is capable of. In fact, I believe that one's understanding of art depends on one's mental age and life experience—that there is a good deal of art that is made for the emo-

tionally and cognitively immature and inexperienced—and that only people who have been seasoned by experience and are tragically mature can understand Baranik's late works.

I am always astonished that in all the discussion of the bleak, elegaic, depressing character of Baranik's paintings—their radical blackness, which no amount of luminosity alleviates—there is no discussion of the quandary blackness posed for modern artists. There is no question that Baranik's paintings are closer to melancholia than mourning, to refer to Freud's distinction between them. For Freud a melancholy response to the death of a loved one has to do with the fact that the survivor is unconsciously angry at the dead person for abandoning the survivor, and feels guilty—self-punitive—as though the survivor had caused the death, and also guilty about being conscious of the dead person's shortcomings vis-a-vis the survivor. The aggressive anger and self-critical or even self-destructive guilt keeps the survivor attached to and identified with the dead person. In contrast, normal mourning, accepting the fait accompli of reality, eventually relinquishes attachment to the dead person, and replaces the relationship with him or her with another relationship.

But the art historical issue is what Baranik's paintings contribute to the modern struggle with blackness. Matisse at the beginning of the last century and Soulages at the end of the last century thought of black as just another color, to be orchestrated in a symphony of other colors, as Matisse put it. For Matisse, "black is a color." It is "absurd to make a distinction between black and color": in choosing black one is "not rejecting the other colors." But the insistence on the lack of difference between black and color implies the opposite—that there is a difference, which must be overcome. It is in fact hard to integrate black and color—to treat black as just another color—because black tends to stand out of the color composition, implicitly negating the colors that surround it. Thus Soulages, while declaring that "there was nothing negative in [his] choice" of black—although his choice must have involved unconscious melancholy, as his remark that his first paintings were of "trees in winter, without their leaves," suggests—at the same time says that black is "a very violent color...a very intense color, more intense than yellow, capable of giving rise to violent reactions and contrasts." Thus black is different—very different—from other colors, so much so that it is unconsciously experienced not as color but as anti-color. If the spectrum of color can be associated with life and its emotional vicissitudes, then black can be associated with death, as it conventionally is, e.g., in the phrases black humor and black mood and of course black death. All suggest that death wishes, the death instinct or, more simply, awareness of death, conscious and unconscious, are a constant that infects life at its core.

The violence of black is not only the result of its jarring effect in a color composition—its underlying irreconcilability with other colors, however

much reconciliation is technically achieved—but of its anti-life meaning. This goes in opposite directions, which subliminally meet. Black serves emotional realism, whether that involves a realistic response to death, or to the feeling of self-loss. Thus, discussing color symbolism, Kandinsky describes black as

> a totally dead silence...a silence with no possibilities...Black is something burnt out, like the ashes of a funeral pyre, something motionless like a corpse. The silence of black is the silence of death. Outwardly black is the color with the least harmony of all, a kind of neutral background against which the minutest shades of other colors stand clearly forward.

In contrast, Reinhardt, in an essay titled "Black as Symbol and Concept," writes "black is negation," and describes his black paintings as a "chain of negations." But negation for him is not death. Instead, black is the "ideogram for what is beyond utterance." Reinhardt associates black with the "Buddhist 'theology of negation'," which means that it is "trans-subjective." The negation of black is the epitome of what Reinhardt called art-as-art—the ultimate nonrepresentational purity—art as pure negation, pure absence, pure selflessness. For Reinhardt, "the one object of fifty years of abstract art is to present art-as-art and as nothing else, to make it into the one thing it is only, separating and defining it more and more, making it purer and emptier." Such purity and emptiness implicitly acknowledge the impurity and sense of existential fullness that comes from having a self, or more simply being a subject. I suggest that Reinhardt's transcendence of positive presence toward the purity of non-presence is, emotionally speaking, an implicit acknowledgement of the loss of his sense of self, an acknowledgement, in the words of Joyce McDougall, that he has no "right to an independent life, or even to existence itself." He makes the best of his unconscious feeling of self-loss by transforming it into a conscious feeling of self-transcendence. The black paintings bespeak both loss and transcendence: Reinhardt's blackness ingeniously synthesizes them.

Now I want to suggest that Baranik's achievement is to fuse Kandinsky's sense of the fatality and mortality conveyed by blackness with Reinhardt's sense of it as the embodiment of both loss and transcendence of the self. I think that These Are The Pearls That Were His Eyes (1988), Moonlight (1996), and The Evening After (1997)—the latter despite the ironical glasses in the black desert—bring death home with a visceral clarity (we seem to be looking at viscera in the first of these paintings) even as they turn self-loss into transcendence. The glasses are so many angelic selves—they are a double aura—in the infernal heaven of transcendence. That is, for Baranik transcendence, however unconsciously, is like the crematorium in which dead bodies

are turned to ash, and the glasses are remnants and symbols of the destroyed, lost, blind self, that is, the self with no insight into its own existence. There is a pile of glasses in one of the concentration camps; I think Baranik was alluding to them, even as he scattered them in the ashen landscape that is all that is left of the massacred victims of inhuman tyranny.

Baranik's triumph is to turn his traumatic awareness of historical inhumanity, evident already in the *Napalm Elegies*, into a critical consciousness of transcendence. That is, he turned traumatic actuality—and traumatic social actuality was not only the objective correlative of personal trauma, but rather they were one and the same—into the possibility of transcendence, by which I think he meant the ironical purity of abstract art. It is the transformative realization of their commonality that Rothko struggled but failed to realize in his late works, and that Reinhardt never did realize, so obsessed was he with only one side of the equation. The importance of Baranik's late painting is that they are the true climax of fifty years of Western abstract painting.

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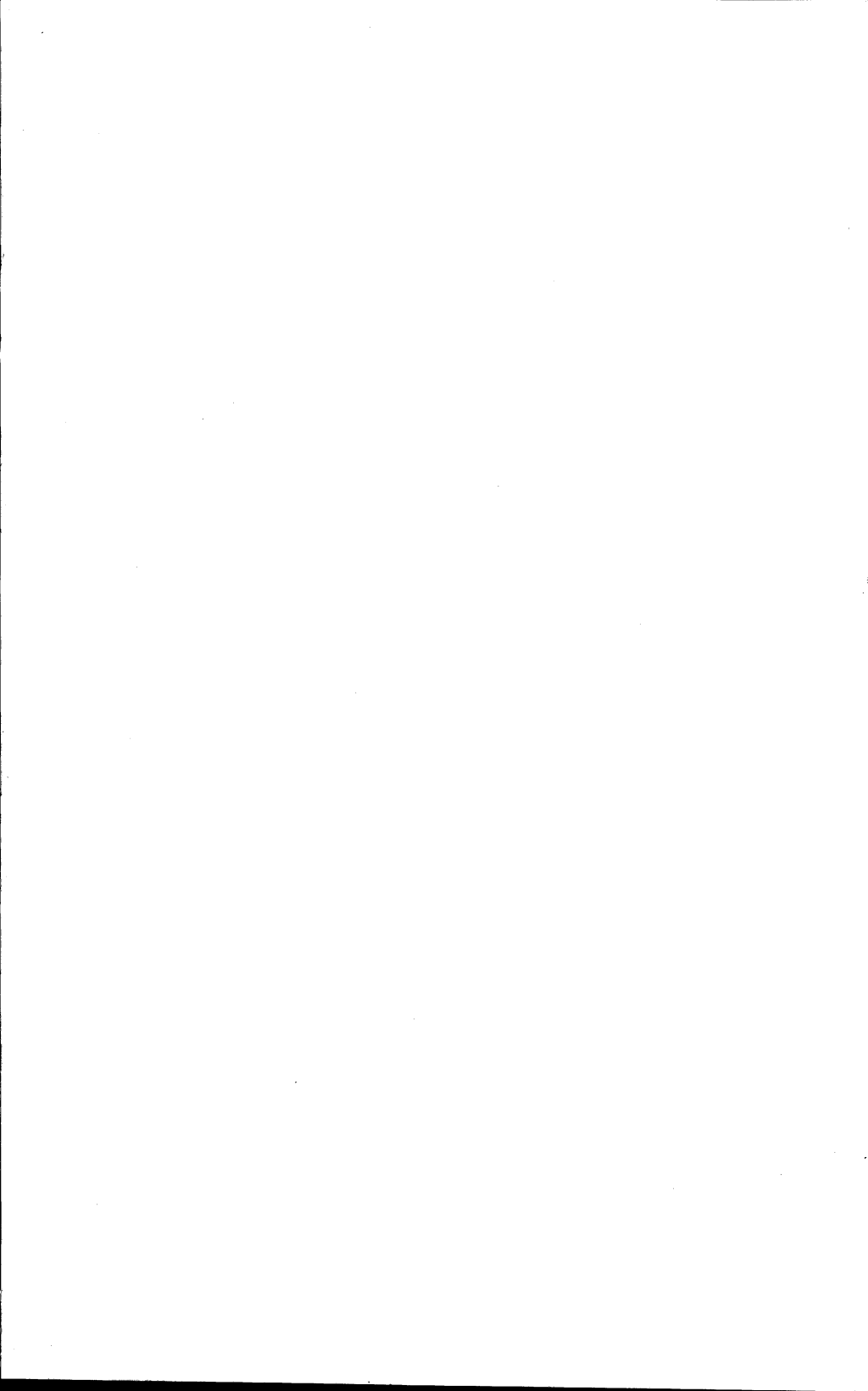
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